
MAINTAINING COMPETITIVENESS IN THE GLOBAL MARKET FOR SKILLED MIGRANTS

An examination of skilled migration narratives in Canada, Australia, the USA, and India,
and global use of technology to manage and select economic immigrants

by

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ABSTRACT

Competition for skilled migrants between nations is not new, but is increasingly fierce. It presented an especially significant challenge for traditional immigration recipient countries (including Canada, Australia, and the USA) in the decade preceding the Global Financial Crisis, given the entry of many other OECD member nations to the global skilled migration market, and free movement of persons within the EU. A mission for states, therefore, in an era of relative hypermobility, was to find ways to attract and retain skilled labour in a highly competitive, lucrative and fluid international marketplace.

This thesis engages with an overarching research question of how states can maintain competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants, by first considering the issue theoretically, and then empirically from the perspective of the aforementioned receiving states, a sending state, and migration apparatus and systems. It concludes by reflecting upon contemporary developments and conceptual matters, with a view to remarking on the future of global competition for skilled migrants, and international immigration generally.

Original data underpins the empiric papers of the thesis, collected in key cities of recipient countries (Vancouver, Ottawa, Washington DC, Toronto, Adelaide and Canberra) as well as from a significant labour sending state, India (in New Delhi and Chandigarh). In each of these cities, comparable primarily qualitative data was gathered from interviews with key migration stakeholders, including: immigration processing staff and migration policy-makers in government; employees of private migration agency firms and professional accreditation bodies; and politicians and academics involved in research on skilled migration and global labour competition. Primary data was also acquired from a global survey conducted in partnership with the world's largest specialist immigration law firm, examining the extent to which countries utilise technology in the management and selection of economic migrants.

The thesis proposes a new general model for economic migration policy, and contends that countries can most effectively compete in the global market for skilled migrants by looking beyond servicing their immediate domestic labour-market demands, facilitating transitions from temporary to permanent residence, centralising immigration administrative mechanisms, and removing barriers to social and economic integration. It concludes by reflecting upon the degree to which states might continue to compete for the 'best and brightest', and situates the relevance of the work presented, within Geography, and migration scholarship more broadly.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFR	Automatic Facial Recognition	IRCC	Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada
AI	Artificial Intelligence		
CIC	Citizenship & Immigration Canada (now IRCC)	IRPA	<i>Immigration and Refugee Protection Act 2002 (Canada)</i>
COVID	Coronavirus Pandemic of 2019	LPTA	Labour Provisions in Trade Agreements
DHA	Department of Home Affairs Australia	OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development
DIAC	Department of Immigration & Citizenship Australia (now DHA)	PR	Permanent Residency
FTA	Free Trade Agreement	PTA	Preferential Trade Agreement
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services Treaty 1995	TIR	Traditional Immigration Recipient Nations
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council Nations	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
GFC	Global Financial Crisis 2007-2008	USCIS	Citizenship & Immigration Services Department of Homeland Security USA
HRSDC	Human Resources and Social Development Canada	VADER	Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner
ILO	International Labour Organization		

PREFACE

When I began my DPhil program in 2004, I had little understanding of what a doctoral thesis should look like or encompass. I also had the fortune (or perhaps misfortune) of previously producing an undergraduate thesis which changed elements of Australian government policy – and consequently, attendant delusions of grandeur for my doctoral dissertation. My area of interest was genuinely novel at the time; only a handful of universities and the OECD were actively beginning to look at highly skilled migration, relative to expansive bodies of work examining forced and irregular migration, and refugee and asylum issues. Indeed even at Oxford, the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) was brand new (being founded in 2003), and the International Migration Institute (IMI) still non-existent (arriving later in 2006), with only the Refugee Studies Centre being well-established (since 1982). Into this landscape I arrived, to be located within the School of Geography and the Environment.

The freedom of academic space within the field (given the relative paucity of published work in the area at the time) contributed to my initial plan to pursue an ‘ambitious’ agenda; I initially intended to undertake an overarching macro analysis of highly skilled labour migration flows, between and towards all thirty OECD member nations. I reasoned that it would be theoretically possible (despite the caution of naysayers from within the OECD itself) as well as exciting to try to forecast future trends, and use them as the basis for discussions regarding competitiveness. Those plans were quickly put to rest, however, upon realising that evaluating migration data from country to county was less a case of comparing apples and oranges, and more fruit and tractors. Consequently, I shifted to a method concentrated on fewer, traditional immigration jurisdictions, and focused on policy and qualitative data – arguably a more suitable approach to the subject matter in any case.

In early 2008 I returned to Australia, to write up a contemporaneous assessment of the policy dynamics surrounding skilled migration. Unfortunately, the intervention of myasthenia gravis, misadventure, and life, scuppered my plans – meaning that it wasn’t until 2015 that I was able to return to my now long dormant research. In the intervening years, much work had been produced and published to fill some of the gaps previously identified by my original research proposal. Needless to say, resurrecting and positioning mine, was a challenge.

Fortunately, faith, friends, and persistence helped me find a way. As did Paul Rosenblatt:

Do your research because you want to. Do it because it is meaningful to you. Do it because it reflects your competence and creativity. Make it yours...

Perhaps you can strengthen the persuasiveness of your project by changing how you frame the research...

Think of restarting a stalled project as an act of discovery, recovery, and rehabilitation of treasures. Imagine salvaging a medieval ship... To learn wonderful things from it, we must rescue and restore it carefully and be alert to what it offers...

And don't just go through the motions; do it well.

[Rosenblatt, P.C. (2016) *Restarting Stalled Research*]

Finally, serendipity has also played a part. Indeed, amidst global political polarisation, a pandemic, ideological shifts to the right and resistance to globalisation and neo-liberalism generally, there is now more than ever a need for research to support policies leading towards a holistic and sustainable approach to attracting immigrants and facilitating nation-building. Why? Because, even in turbulent times for global migration, developed countries will continue to *need* immigrants to fulfil their labour market requirements – and, compete directly and indirectly with one another for the ‘right’ migrant – not necessarily for the ‘best and brightest’, but for people who can eventually become self-reliant, and make an economic and social contribution. Accordingly, this thesis will now be situated alongside a body of work, and seek to make a contribution of its own within what has become an exciting multidisciplinary, area of concern.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has borne witness to dramatic changes in the nature and scope of economic migration flows. Over the past two decades especially, “issues relating to international migration, and more particularly to the international mobility of highly-skilled workers, are receiving increasing attention from policy-makers” (Dumont & Lemaitre 2004; Czaika 2018).¹ Correspondingly, as many commentators have noted, “the competition between states to attract skilled migrants has never been greater” (Crock & Saul 2002). Such competition is no longer confined to the exclusive policy domain of the so-called ‘traditional’ or ‘melting-pot’ immigrant nations; rather, “countries not traditionally viewed as migration nations are now joining the race to lure [skilled migrants] to their shores” (Ruddock 2002).

Contrary to much prevailing logic however, heightened interest in the area has little to do with historic concerns about ‘brain drain’. Indeed within the OECD area, a growing list of member states “are net beneficiaries of highly skilled migration from other OECD countries” (Dumont & Lemaitre 2004). Rather, recent policy focus on skilled migration is broadly attributable to the idea of its perceived economic benefits; that is:

Skilled migrants earn more, pay higher taxes, and require fewer social services than less-skilled immigrants. Put differently, skilled immigration increases the after-tax income of natives, while the tax burden imposed by the immigration of less-skilled workers probably reduces the net wealth of native taxpayers. From a fiscal perspective, therefore, there is little doubt that skilled immigration is a good investment, particularly when compared to the immigration of less-skilled workers (Borjas 1999).

Perspectives on the domestic economic impact of migration are nevertheless contested. A more cautious, contemporaneous assessment suggests that:

The impact of migration on wages and employment depend on initial conditions in the labour market, and the number and skill levels of migrant workers admitted... the impact on employment is ambiguous. Migration has had a negative impact on unskilled wages but may actually raise the real wages of the more skilled because of the increased supply of products from the low-wage sector” (ILO 2004).

¹ Dumont & Lemaitre, from the OECD, drew early attention to a heightened focus *specifically on highly-skilled migration*, at a time before this was commonplace; Czaika’s edited volume meanwhile, evidences a maturation point of scholarship in the area, featuring contributions from twenty-two leading figures in the field. This is noted to qualify the decision to focus on *formative* literatures in this Chapter 1 – the preponderance of more recent scholarship on highly-skilled migration is addressed in Chapter 2 onwards.

Whatever the truth of the matter, migration policy amongst many OECD countries has been increasingly geared towards attracting skilled migrants in recent years – to the extent that permanent non-humanitarian migration intakes now constitute the majority of total inflows in the majority of OECD jurisdictions. Quantifying global migration currents has however, always been a much more vexed question. As Zlotnick succinctly explains:

The task of providing an overview of levels of and trends in international migration is complicated by two well-known facts: (1) many countries either lack a system for the continuous registration of international migration or, if they have such a system, do not process and publish the data emanating from it; and (2) among those countries that do produce statistics on international migration, the meaning and scope of those statistics vary considerably (Zlotnick 1998).²

Nevertheless, what is undeniable is that “international migration of highly skilled workers is on the rise” (OECD 2002), and has long been seen to be “increasing at a faster rate than [that] of less skilled migrant workers” (Koser & Salt 1997). Moreover, within a feverish climate of “rising global demand for skills, alongside advances in globalisation and phenomenal growth in information and communications technologies” (ILO 2004), these trends are unlikely to wholly abate any time soon – even accounting for the COVID pandemic and disruptions to global hypermobility.

Accordingly, this thesis addresses its overall research question of how states can maintain competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants, as a live and ongoing issue, as yet lacking full resolution, and certainly worthy of further examination. It does so, by analysing the issue theoretically, then empirically from the perspective of receiving states, sending states, and migration apparatus and systems. The central argument of the thesis in sum is that international immigration in the post-pandemic era should be reconceived of as a long-game endeavour, given the stylised fact that it cannot satisfy time-sensitive domestic labour market demand, but may, nevertheless, be able to satisfy long-term labour, and demographic demand of individual states. We begin analysis towards this position, by situating the overall research question within the realm of policy, and considering the issue of ‘migration management’ and other recurrent themes pertinent to examination of skilled migration.

² Castles furthers this point, noting: “Even the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has taken some 30 years to work towards comparability in the data published each year in its annual Migration Outlook reports (formerly known as the SOPEMI reports). Many users of this data would argue that comparability, although improved, is still far from perfect. Migration researchers therefore need to be very cautious in aggregating national data into regression models” (Castles 2012).

1. MANAGING MIGRATION & RECURRENT THEMES

It must be acknowledged from the outset that the actual capacity for policy makers to influence skilled migration flows is questionable, given that “migration is basically a transnational experience, while migration policies are strictly a national endeavour” (Iredale 1999). Indeed, “some of the best designed procedures to manage migration can go awry because it is very difficult to anticipate the responses of the main players in the labour market” (ILO 2004). Partly this is the consequence of ‘econometric hijacking’ of migration policy, whereby:

In many respects it seems to be the econometricians who have set the frames of reference through which our policy makers view immigration control... [despite the fact that] human beings have an extraordinary ability to perform, or fail to perform, in defiance of the most sophisticated forms of economic modelling (Crock 2002).

Equally though, “migration policies may fail because they are based on short-term and narrow views of the migratory process” (Castles 2004). Nevertheless, nation-states continue to seek to influence migration outcomes through targeted control policy responses, which in respect of skilled migratory movements, arose initially in the UK in the mid-1960’s, “stimulated by fears that the British economy was suffering a scientific ‘brain drain’, largely to the US” (Koser & Salt 1997).

During the following decade such concerns became more widespread – particularly amongst academics and policy-makers concerned with the implications of elite emigration of educated citizens from developing, to developed nations. These themes are articulated varyingly through concepts of brain ‘drain’, ‘gain’, ‘exchange’ and ‘waste’ (Staubhaar 2000); subsequent investigations have also sought to understand the dynamics of intra-OECD flows, which generally exhibit “more a pattern of ‘brain circulation’ than one of ‘brain drain’” (OECD 2002). Such studies remain important in a globalising world within which time-space convergence eases the rapid movement of people, notwithstanding evidence which also suggests that “international migration does not tend to take a very high proportion of the best educated (tertiary) population from [developing] labor-exporting countries” (Adams 2003).

These legitimate normative considerations, regarding the merits and morality of labour cherry-picking, are not however the primary focus of this thesis. Rather, in the context of maintaining competitiveness other themes and issues come to the fore in terms of managing migration vis-à-vis: the role of the state, preferences for temporary or permanent schemes, methods of migrant assessment, and the various pull factors and incentives utilised by states

to affect choice of destination. These are discussed in what follows, in an effort to highlight some of the recurrent areas of concern for this thesis, and contextualise research on international competition for skilled migrant labour.

1.1 The Role of the State in Migration

Nation-states traverse a fine line between wanting to appear attractive to potential skilled immigrants whilst simultaneously exercising ‘cultures of control’ over entry to their shores. Countries are perfectly within their rights to act in this manner, bearing in mind that:

It is an accepted maxim of international law, that every sovereign nation has the power, as inherent in sovereignty, and essential to self-preservation, to forbid the entrance of foreigners within its dominions, or to admit them only in such cases and upon such conditions as it may see fit to prescribe (Schindlmayr 2003).

Nonetheless, such cultures of control undoubtedly produce both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, selectivity is generally thought to produce better labour market outcomes; on the other though, it can (at its worst) convey a counterproductive image of national xenophobia. The failure of Germany’s *Green Card Regulation* is perhaps best illustrative of the latter result in recent history, where Indian IT professionals commonly reported an “aware[ness] from media reports and other sources of the level of racism in German society that is directed at many immigrants” (Iredale 2001), as a reason for not seeking entry. Likewise “the heated polemics of Britain’s tabloid press against immigration” (Castles 2004) have at times affected the UK’s capacity to fulfill its labour needs; the *Immigration and Asylum Act* 2002 failed to set up a legal entry system for low-skilled workers needed in the NHS and catering sectors, and the point remains valid in the context of recent efforts to import ‘key workers’ as well as the highly skilled. Thus, a state’s ability to satisfy its migration desires are undoubtedly tied to perceptions of its policies – both by potential migrants and the domestic populace. Consequently, it becomes ever apparent that in formulating migration policy, states must negotiate “a delicate balance between promoting economic growth, gaining ‘brains’, protecting jobs for locals, keeping down welfare and other budgets and maintaining social and political stability” (Iredale 1999).

The weight attributed to each of the aforementioned factors varies from state to state. Clearly though, moves towards prioritising skilled immigration globally suggest that the acquisition of human capital to maintain and improve economic productivity is a pre-eminent concern throughout much of the OECD. This unashamedly pragmatic focus marks a sharp departure from days when states encouraged immigration for broad social as well as

economic ends; the official retreat of ‘state-sponsored multiculturalism’³ in traditional immigration nations for example, makes clear that “the active ‘achievement’ of diversity has been abandoned [as an end in itself]” (Mitchell 2004). In its place, states increasingly view their prime objective as being to regulate migration within a narrow conception of the ‘national interest’ – an end increasingly becoming synonymous with increasing economic productivity (Faulkner 2002).

This being the case, the state has a significant role to play in facilitating successful migrant transitions into labour markets. Ironically however, in some jurisdictions, this is one of the key problems affecting migrants, particularly with regard to accreditation of qualifications. Indeed as one commentator notes:

Occupational groups continue to have a large degree of control over access to occupations, often with government complicity. An analysis of the historical development of professional and other occupational groups shows that there are a number of reasons for wanting to control entry. They relate to the restrictive nature of the occupational group, wanting to keep the occupations for selected individuals and/or protecting the incomes of existing practitioners (Iredale 2000).

Consequently, some migrant lobby groups have suggested that perhaps “government should remove the responsibility of recognition and accreditation of overseas skills and qualifications from recalcitrant, self-regulating professions, for the national good” (JSCOM 2003). Conversely though, often such assessments ‘officially’ conducted by the state are actually outsourced to private agencies – which equally disadvantages migrants seeking skills-accreditation by “removing both the assessment process and the administrative and judicial appeals attendant upon adverse rulings” (Crock 2002). These are issues which countries such as Australia and Canada have grappled with extensively, particularly in relation to certification of medical and health care professionals (Hawthorne 1997).

Thus the role of the state, insofar as the extent to which it should facilitate migration, can be uncertain. What is increasingly clear though is that states not only borrow from, but monitor their competitor’s migration-related policies in an effort to increase their competitive advantage. Senior policy makers within Australia’s Immigration Department for example, have openly acknowledged this, noting that they:

³ In 1996 Australia abolished its Office for Multicultural Affairs in an effort to move towards a more assimilationist strategy of integration – a sharp departure from past Australian Government efforts to celebrate the country as “the most multicultural nation in the world” (Blainey 1995). This official retreat from a pro-multicultural policy was partly attributable to the feeling that migration and multiculturalism were seen as entwined in the public imagination, with the latter burdening the former: Unnamed. (1998) ‘Hard Landing: Australia increasingly demands that migrants have job skills, but many find no chance to use them’, *Time International*, 150(27): 40-41.

Monitor closely what New Zealand does, what the United States does, what Canada does...and increasingly now... countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Singapore because they are entering into the skilled migration market (JSCOM 2002).

Nevertheless, much remains outside the purview of the state in regulating migration – not least because of the rapid growth in private migration agency. This burgeoning industry has increasingly challenged the state's capacity to control migration, being that “facilitating migration is a major and largely legal international business” (Salt & Clarke 2000), and “agents have an interest in the continuation of migration and may go on organising it even when governments try to restrict movements” (Castles 2004).

1.2 Permanent vs Temporary Migration Mechanisms

Comparison of international policy positions also highlights the fact that one of the key controls states exercise in seeking to influence their migration ends is the type on offer. For instance, until fairly recently, only Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK actively marketed themselves for immediate permanent migration in the skilled arena; by contrast Germany, Japan and the USA (almost) exclusively promoted temporary working visas – notwithstanding the lengthy duration of some of these arrangements. In the case of a nation such as Japan, these preferences are heavily influenced by a recognition of the fact that “immigration alters a country's sense of national identity” (ILO 2004), and “has a profound effect on host societies beyond quantifiable economic consequences” (ibid). More generally though, temporary visa arrangements have been popular for their short-term attributes; they are virtually always processed more expeditiously than permanent visas and consequently are preferred by employers seeking to promptly fill time-sensitive vacancies. Likewise, for potential migrants, they offer shorter delays in administration thereby easing the inevitable trauma associated with migration and relocation itself. Perhaps most significantly however, temporary work visas offer both the state and the potential immigrant an option to ‘test the water’ before committing to an ongoing relationship. Accordingly, state policy responses to the challenge of competing in the market for skilled migrants have tended towards promoting and facilitating temporary migration mechanisms.

Simultaneously though, many states are exhibiting an heightened awareness of the importance of allowing for transitions to permanent residency, bearing in mind that the “practice of permitting permanent settlement by skilled migrants...[is] a potentially powerful selling point in the international skills market” (JSCOM 2004). The UK and Ireland are amongst nations

who have more recently acknowledged this, by making explicit in their programs the link between obtaining temporary migration and acquiring permanent residency. Likewise, countries with immigration histories as diverse as Germany and Australia encourage pathways to permanent settlement for visiting international students upon completion of their tertiary studies, given that “students today show an increasing recognition of the global workplace” (Mahroum 2000). Thus, irrespective of the flexibility afforded by temporary schemes, it must be remembered that retention – and not just short-term attraction – of labour remains a concern at the forefront of state considerations in competing for skilled individuals.

This focus on encouraging permanent settlement of skilled migrants is also tied to an ‘investment logic’, being that permanent migration encourages concomitant capital inflow. In an era of fierce global labour and FDI competition, nation-states are all too aware that “[skilled] migrants not only depart with their education... [but] also...with significant amounts of capital” (ILO 2004). Contemporary skilled immigration policy in a number of jurisdictions recognises this: The USA, New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the UK all operate immigrant investor programs under which potential migrants can secure fast-tracked permanent residency by investing large sums; similarly, in some points-tested programs, additional points are available for migrants willing to invest in government bonds and securities. Therefore, encouragement of permanent migration may also be viewed as part of a national investment strategy, being that it imports both human and economic capital.

A further question which arises then, is whether permanent immigration policies exacerbate problems of uneven capital development within national borders, being that nation-states cannot indefinitely tie individuals or their investments to specific locations. Although some countries such as Australia and Canada seek to influence geographic distribution of people and capital via region-specific migration programs, “complete freedom of movement within a federation’s territory is a central feature of federalist countries” (Traub 2002), in the ordinary course of events and outside of use of emergency powers. Hence whilst permanent migration schemes do encourage concurrent capital importation, they can do little to prevent agglomeration of people and their assets into already overpopulated areas; at best, states may only be able to offer incentives to initially attract skilled labour and capital into the areas in which they are most needed.

1.3 Methods of Assessment

Optimising methods to select individuals eligible for skilled migration is a further pre-occupation of policy makers and academics, being that they vary considerably between jurisdictions whilst their underlying objectives remain similar. Thus, whilst it is commonly thought that “a key goal of the economic migrant selection system should be to ensure that those who are admitted into a country...have a proper mix of skills and other attributes that maximise the probability of long-term success in the labour force” (Yale-Loehr & Hoashi-Erhardt 2002), how this is best accomplished is uncertain.

Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have for many years relied upon objective ‘points tests’ to make their assessments. These systems are favoured for the consistency they are said to provide in the selection of migrants (being that they minimise discretionary adjudications by administrators), and because they are regarded as elastic tools which can be manipulated to respond to short-term fluctuations in skills demand and supply. For these and other reasons, points systems are increasingly being investigated, emulated and in some cases implemented by other OECD nations for skilled migrant selection. That said, points tests do have limitations. As Yale-Loehr posits, whilst points tests do evaluate “measurable qualities that may help predict long-term success in the labour market... a persons’ potential for economic contribution...is also governed by less tangible factors such as imagination, creativity, adaptability, motivation, and resourcefulness” (ibid). More often than not though, methods of assessment tend “to privilege applicants who come ‘fully formed’ in the image of those who will meld most easily into the fabric of the...working and tax-paying community” (Crock 2002).

The weight attributed to the factors which are commonly gauged to assess the ‘fully formed’ migrant also vary between jurisdictions. Language requirements, spousal qualifications and age are amongst some of the variables; for example, in relation to the latter, some countries utilise absolute age caps, whereas others instead only penalise an applicants’ candidacy over a certain threshold. Likewise, in some jurisdictions, significant emphasis is placed upon whether an applicant has secured employment whereas in others, a person’s *potential* employability is most significant. This disparity fundamentally reflects the difference in the underlying philosophy of demand-oriented versus supply-side migration policy. The former has been the dominant modality in recent years within the OECD; only Canada (and to a lesser extent New Zealand) favoured a supply-side ‘human capital’ approach for any sustained

period, designed to secure skilled immigrants who could effectively compete and succeed in a knowledge-based economy, with emphasis on flexible skills rather than intended occupation.

In those demand-focussed jurisdictions which do require secured employment as a precursor to migration however, further issues arise in relation to the credibility of labour market testing. Commonly, migration destinations which require that potential migrants have job offers arranged prior to immigrating, rely upon the notion of there being no available local person to fill the job in the domestic labour market. The problem with this premise is twofold: on the one hand systems have been subject to abuse by unscrupulous employers, and on the other, existing mechanisms to identify where real (current) skill shortages exist can be inadequate. In the Australian and Canadian contexts for example, previous occupation lists determining skills in demand have received much criticism for being based on out-of-date data which has caused shortfalls in some areas, and gluts in others (the most notable being the ICT sector). Consequently, in the opinion of some, “statistical analyses used as a basis for setting visa classes are backward, rather than forward looking” (ibid).

A final ‘methods of assessment’ concern relates to the problem of where successful entrants *actually* work in national economies once admitted. Currently, in several jurisdictions many skilled migrants do not ultimately gain employment in the ‘skilled’ area for which they were initially granted entry. The reasons for this are manifold, ranging from problems with local skills accreditation to deliberate choices on the part of some migrants to seek work in new areas. Of course, some skilled migrants do use their initial skill sets in securing their initial employment. However, many do not, which complicates measurement of policy success – particularly given systematic post-arrival follow-ups of migrants are seldom undertaken. Whilst some countries have conducted useful longitudinal studies, again, a specific focus on ‘outcomes for skilled migrants’ has generally been sidelined as a secondary concern. Accordingly, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which labour market needs are met by skilled migrant specific programs – a fact which has led some to question the utility of using skill-matching as a fundamental of migrant selection. Conversely however, one could argue that such ‘floating labour’ ultimately serves the national interest by supplying generic human capital. Thus, what might otherwise be regarded as residual ‘brain waste’ may in fact be seen as flexible labour servicing the demands of unskilled sectors of the economy.⁴

⁴ Senator Tsebin Tchen concurred with this view in the Australian Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Migration *Review of skilled labour migration programs 2004*, stating that: “Does it matter so much to the nation’s growth that we bring skilled people...to Australia and put them in jobs that do not require the

1.4 Pull Factors & Incentives

The various pull factors and incentives utilised by states to affect choice of destination are a final broad area of research concern in relation to international competition for skilled migrant labour. Todisco for example, has “suggested that the balance of push and pull factors may be reversed from that found in other forms of migration, and that the choice of one country over another may be more deliberate [for skilled migrants]” (Koser & Salt 1997). As such, it is reasonable to assume that:

Governments may play a positive or negative role in influencing incentives for highly skilled workers to stay or move abroad. They may play a positive role by providing incentives for foreign skills to flow in or remain in the country, for instance by easing immigration and work permit restrictions, providing tax incentives, and promoting the country as an attractive working and living environment” (Mahroum 2001).

On the matter of fiscal incentives, a range of factors may serve as attractions for potential migrants, including higher wages, taxation rates and the overall investment environment in a country. OECD research itself has previously identified that “skilled migrants tend to follow international investment flows, and reflect the internationalization of firms in the ongoing process of globalization in the global economy” (Iredale 2000). Similarly in relation to taxation, “discounts are provided by several EU member states to lure foreign skilled workers to local labour markets, including Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden and the UK” (Mahroum 2001). Moreover, “in addition to immigration policy measures, some OECD countries have introduced specific fiscal incentives to attract highly skilled migrants... [including] virtual income-tax-free status for up to 5 years for certain categories of highly qualified personnel most in need, or large tax deductions (e.g. 25% in Sweden, 30% in the Netherlands, 35% in Austria or 40% in Korea)” (Dumont & Lemaitre 2004).

It is simplistic however, to think that skilled migrants will migrate to the most advantageous tax haven alone; what might be termed ‘social incentives’ also play a significant role. Factors such as cultural tolerance, political freedom, innovation, working conditions for the primary applicant (and their dependents), the availability of family migration, and a welfare ‘safety net’ are amongst other important considerations. Thus “perceived opportunities in the industry, lifestyle factors and the host societies’ attitude towards immigrants become very important criteria for deciding the destination” (Iredale 2001). Moreover, intangible attributes such as

skills? We get the people anyway; we get the stock... We bring people in, and they can drive taxis or dig holes in the Snowy Mountains, and they benefit the country” (JSCOM 2003).

weather and lifestyle considerations can be equally important. Accordingly, competitive skilled migration policies must bear in mind that:

Quality of life is very important to the highly skilled. They want to live where the weather is nice and the environment is clean. Safety, freedom of choice, flexibility to do and move, secured property rights and friendly surroundings in which they can raise healthy children are additional factors that influence the decision (Staubhaar 2000).

Therefore, what needs to be understood is that migration – including migration of the skilled – is a social as well as economic process (Castles 2004). Migration decisions are often made not by individuals but by families, and both family and community are crucial determinants independent of other incentives (*ibid*). Indeed, as Meyer pointedly notes, “what case studies on migrant networks reveal without any doubt is the importance of connections – human mediation – in the migration process” (Meyer 2001). As a result, support mechanisms, such as appropriate settlement services, are also important in achieving migration outcomes regardless of whether for humanitarian, family or economic migrants. Castles perhaps best articulates the underlying argument regarding the importance of the social dynamics of the migratory process; he writes:

Two types of belief have been particularly influential in migration policy formation. One is the economic belief in market behaviour based on neo-classical theory, according to which people move to maximize their individual utility (usually through higher income), and cease to move, or return home, if the cost-benefit equation changes. The second is the bureaucratic belief that regulations designed to categorize migrants and to regulate their admission and residence effectively shape aggregate behaviour. Together these two beliefs add up the idea that migration can be turned on and off like a tap by appropriate policy settings (Castles 2004).

History suggests however, that migration cannot be micromanaged in this fashion. Rather, whilst “a global labour market now exists in some occupations where a person’s skills are his/her greatest asset to be bought and sold” (Iredale 2000), one should not understate the importance of accounting for the social dynamics of migration. Policies may shape and facilitate outcomes, but they cannot dictate them. This consideration alone warrants continued research on migration of the skilled, especially as “compared with a relatively rich tradition in migration studies more generally... [there have] been very few studies of the decision-making process amongst highly skilled migrants” (Koser & Salt 1997). Consequently, additional data on the decision drivers and preferences of both actors and institutions involved in migration ecosystems, may further illuminate the demand and supply

side of the equation, and in turn advance our understanding of what it takes to be ‘competitive’ in the global market for skilled migrants.

2. MODERN MIGRATION SCHOLARSHIP

The recurrent themes discussed in the preceding section drew deliberately upon early, formative literature positioning highly-skilled migration. As noted from the outset, however, issues pertaining to global competition for skilled migrants have become an area of broad multidisciplinary concern, as evidenced by the explosion of scholarship from numerous academic quarters in the last two decades. To cover the field on all studies adjunct to modern migration, is of course, neither practical nor feasible. Nevertheless, to provide basic context for forthcoming theoretical positions, and empirically-driven assertions forwarded in upcoming chapters, some specific areas of literature are worthy of introductory exposition. To be clear, these subjects do not inform the theoretical focus of this thesis. Notwithstanding, the thesis does seek to make incremental, modest contributions with respect to each of the following bodies of work, particularly with regard to the ideas of choice, inertia, and discursivity.

2.1 Financialisation – Choice

The surge in geographical research on money and finance, and the ‘financialisation turn’ of the 2010s (which followed in the footsteps of preoccupation with globalisation in the 1990s and neoliberalism in the 2000s) has also quite recently begun to engage with matters pertaining to immigration. As Gibadullina remarks in her forensic study of the rise of ‘Anglophone financial geography’, the “[2008 Global Financial] crisis was a catalytic moment – money and finance had not only risen up the political agenda, they were evidently crucial for any understanding of broader structural changes in the economy” (Gibadullina 2021). Early publications focused upon the migration–development nexus, and rendering of migrants as transnational financial subjects through housing, with an important inflexion point being the “entry of financial institutions (national and transnational) into the remittances business and their alliance with government for the financialisation of migrant activities in an attempt to institutionalise migrants’ transnational economic practices and leverage remittances for development” (Zapata 2013). Subsequent work has veered into the impacts of financialisation on migration management too, noting for example, “the implicit hope that extending financial markets and networks might generate the economic opportunities necessary to put a halt to [uncoordinated] migration in the future” (Bakker

2015). Yet more recent studies focus on the financialisation of refugee humanitarianism (entangled with security practices), arguing that “far from generating financial inclusion, techniques of financialisation of humanitarianism should be situated among measures for regaining control over unruly movements, predicated upon exclusionary and temporary mechanisms of government” (Tazzioli 2019). Predominant interest, however, lies in the increasing financialisation of remittances, an agenda aimed “at integrating senders and recipients – migrants and their relatives and friends – into the global economy and into development processes by which, in the end, remittances become financialized” (Warnecke-Berger 2021), and power relations between the Global South and Global North reshaped.

The ‘financialisation lens’ research paradigm therefore provides a new and relatively diverse toolkit “to explain how seemingly localized financial processes could have unforeseen, widespread impacts on the national economies located on the other end of the world” (Gibadullina 2021). For the purposes of research herein, it also offers important parallel insights on ‘choice’, relevant to migration actors. By way of comparison, consider:

The average consumer is bound to struggle when attempting to understand the possible consequences associated with certain types of financial products. For some, the issue is simply one of a lack of knowledge and understanding of finance (in general) and the products and services (in particular) that require domain-specific judgment and experience. For others, more confident in their ability and the scope of their experience, there remain pitfalls for the unwary (Clark 2015).

So it is the case for emigration calculations, and the significance of using intermediaries to offset risk in destination choice decision making, as examined in forthcoming chapters. Indeed, as Clark advances in a more recent essay on human behaviour favouring materialism over transcendentalism, a willingness to leave the here and now for somewhere else is a risk “not ‘explained’ so much as assumed to be a characteristic of those who migrate” (Clark 2021). Notwithstanding, “few people look at all options in a systematic manner” because “essentially, people are not good at decision-making when it involves ambiguity, conflicting sources of information, and risk and uncertainty” (ibid). The parallels with the subject-matter of the thesis are stark: “Given anxiety about the issues, people can imitate others’ behaviour, draw lessons from others’ actions and experience for their own situation, and/or rely upon socially accepted ways of doing things that have the virtue of legitimacy” (ibid). Likewise, “where (internet-based) decision cues are not adequate given the nature and sophistication of the issues, advice can be had at a price”, and furthermore, “informed decision-making is the mantra of those who would wish to provide individuals with the knowledge and understanding necessary to make good on their separate and collective interests” (ibid).

2.2 Mobilities – Inertia

The ‘mobilities turn’ of the 1990s is of course, inextricably linked to questions of migration, involving as it does examination of both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital, and information across the world, and local processes of daily transport, movement through public and private spaces, and travel of material objects. In sum, from a mobilities perspective:

All the world seems to be on the move. Asylum seekers, international students, terrorists, members of diasporas, holidaymakers, business people, sports stars, refugees, backpackers, commuters, the early retired, young mobile professionals, prostitutes, armed forces – these and many others fill the world’s airports, buses, ships, and trains. The scale of this travelling is immense (Sheller & Urry 2006).

The ‘new mobilities paradigm’ is more though, than a postmodern, qualitatively-focused descendant of modern transportation studies. Rather, it is “a project which focuses on the universal but always particularly constructed *fact* of moving” (Cresswell 2010, my emphasis). Particularly coupled with the influence of the conception of spatiality – with the substance of places being constantly in motion and subject to constant reassembly and reconfiguration (Thrift 1996) – it nexuses “the fact of movement across scales and in a way that links the humanities at one end to the sciences at the other” (Cresswell 2010). All the same, for pure migration scholars, for whom migration studies remains an under-theorised field of social inquiry, the mobilities paradigm is not in and of itself sufficient to advance our understanding of migration processes as an intrinsic part of broader processes of social change and development. It does, however, provide scaffolding for:

meta-theoretical conceptualisation of migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities to move [which] (1) expands the theoretical concept of human mobility to include movement and non-movement, (2) improves our ability to develop a richer and more realistic understanding of the ways in which macro-level change affects people’s migratory agency and (3) enables us to elaborate new, theory-derived migration and mobility categories (de Haas 2021).

On this basis, the aspirations-capabilities framework defines “human mobility as people’s capability (freedom) to choose where to live – including the option to stay – rather than the act of moving itself. Moving and staying then become complementary manifestations of the same migratory agency (ibid)” – a position which is argued to move us “beyond the futile debate over whether migration or sedentary behaviour is the norm, since a truly agentic view on migration does not presume either moving or staying as the norm, but acknowledges that they are two sides of the same freedom-of-mobility coin” (ibid).

This thesis does not purport to make a theoretical supplement in opposition to, or in defence of the abovementioned vanguard thinking. Notwithstanding, to achieve a more meaningful understanding of agency in migration processes, and with respect to mobilities (and mobility in the functionalist sense, which has undoubtedly been curtailed by the COVID pandemic), it does lean towards the ‘inevitability of inertia’, if not necessarily the ‘fact of movement’. That is, whilst history suggests, that human hypermobility itself may continue to experience frictional constraints for a time – it is equally unlikely to be arrested to a point of immobility, indefinitely. Current forms of travel may yet recover, or reconfigure, or frankly, cede to other forms of mobility difficult to as yet practically envisage. What is less likely to persist is *inertia*. Moreover, even while conceptualising of migration as “a function of aspirations and capabilities to migrate within given sets of perceived opportunity structures” (ibid), the inevitability of inertia is (at the risk of extending the Newtonian metaphor) precisely the principle which supports the inevitability of international labour immigration, as a fundamental driver and tenet of the globalised economy – though veiled as an option, rather than presented as an immutable reality. This then supports the necessity to generate deeper understandings to explain its causes and consequences, and to create and communicate sincere scholarship to guide how it might best be managed and regulated, in practice, as well as theory – a guiding force behind this research endeavour.

2.3 Political Geography & Geopolitics – Discursivity

A third head of disciplinary literature relevant to the work to follow is the contribution of political geography, and geopolitics, towards conceptualising migration, mobility, and human movement – and the forces which guide, condition, curate, and also, impede immigration. Forefront in this regard is seminal geopolitical literature concerning borders and their reframing, whereby far from being just ‘artefacts on the ground’, borders:

are not simply practical phenomena that can be taken as given. They are complex human creations that are perpetually open to question. At an extreme, perhaps, existing borders are the result of processes in the past that are either no longer operative or are increasingly eclipsed by transnational or global pressures. In other words, borders are increasingly redundant, and thinking constrained by them restricts thinking about alternative political, social, and economic possibilities (Agnew 2008).

One of these possibilities, the ‘emigration state’, draws attention to the fact that there are forms of political organization beyond the modern geopolitical imagination that should be brought to the fore when considering better global migration governance. The suggestion in this regard is that:

The emigration state has been overlooked at least partly because it is unexpected by the modern geopolitical imagination, which sees the internationally competitive, territorial nation-state unit as the ideal model of political organization. As long as world politics are imagined this way, migration policy will be thought of either as “internal” immigration policy or “international” relations between sending and receiving states, while transnational state institutions and activities will be thought of as abnormal and perhaps dubious (Gamlen, 2008).

Thinking in this vein continues to be increasingly relevant, noting the rising significance of non-state actors as agents of migration. Notwithstanding, preoccupation with the borders of nation-states persist and pervade the literature – albeit in the face of some change in “scalar focus... from the politicoterritorial regulation of nation-state policies on immigration to supranational migration frameworks and transnational practices and experiences... [plus] theoretical framing [which] has moved from geopolitics to biopolitics” (Kuusisto-Arponen & Gilmartin 2015). Indeed if anything, political geography demonstrates an accelerated interest in border enforcement and biometric bordering, which is practiced by states with the help of hugely expanded economies of private security, and extends to multiple realms of social life (ibid). In tandem with climate change-induced migration, these developments have led even longstanding experts to continue to question how borders first-and-foremost will define future conflicts and geopolitics, and portend a future of more walls, barriers, and securitization in our daily lives (Dodds 2021).

Theorisation of movement as a constitutive political relation in light of the empirical advances generated by mobilities research, builds a bridge for some between migration and border security (Suliman 2018), noting that “in the era of biopolitics, illegal immigration is often viewed as a threat to global and national security” (Kuusisto-Arponen & Gilmartin 2015). It is also consistent with the empirical observation that modern geo-political scholarship “prioritise[s] international migration over internal, precarious migrants over privileged, and theoretical approaches over empirical” (ibid). Perhaps the latter though, creates opportunity costs – namely, diffusing focus from the practical objective of bridging the ‘discursive gap’ (Czaika & de Haas 2013) between migration policy rhetoric and reality. Of course, the politics inherent in using migration policy as a strategic political lever are never absent in scholarly calculations: interventions on Europe’s political futures in the wake of the so-called migration crisis of 2015 and Brexit (McConnell et al 2017) offer a perfect illustration, as do critical explorations of Australia’s “geopolitical strategy of mobility regulation that relies on processes simultaneously expanding geographies of control, while contracting spaces of rights” (Dickson 2015). Scrutiny of discursivity, similarly then, remains a goal for the thesis.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Original research conducted for this thesis was guided by deliberate consideration of: firstly, a conceptual direction to pursue with respect to Geography as a discipline; secondly, appropriate, practical and sensible methods for data collection in the context of researching immigration phenomena specifically; and finally, methodological justifications for the research design, with respect to its robustness and underlying logic.

3.1 Conceptual Direction

Conceptually, this thesis first aspired to move forward within the new ‘Geography of Public Policy’, articulated and advocated by geographer Ron Martin at the turn of the millennium (Martin 2001). Essentially, Martin bemoaned that the impact of human geography on the policy realm had been disappointingly limited for some time, and argued that “human geographers need to regrind their theoretical, empirical and political lenses on several fronts if they are to increase the social and public policy relevance of their work” (ibid). He contended moreover, that “increasingly, it seems, other social, political and environmental scientists, and even media pundits, shape public perception and government policy in areas where we as geographers could – indeed should – be having much greater influence” (ibid). His concerns were shared by other geographers; Lee, for example, concurred that “the quality of geography as a discipline should be judged by its use in policy design, implementation and assessment” (Lee 2002). Underlying this debate then, was the key question of “why... part of the discipline [had] turned its back on public policy?” (Dorling & Shaw 2002). That is, why does geography *fail* to be on the social policy agenda?⁵

Martin suggested that much contemporary social and economic geography had been of little practical or social relevance, owing to:

The effects on the subject of the postmodern and cultural ‘turns’; the consequential emphasis on ‘sexy’ philosophical, linguistic, and theoretical issues rather than on practical social research; the retreat from detailed, rigorous empirical work; the intellectual bias against policy studies; and the lack of political commitment (Martin 2001).

Again more scathing appraisals argued that “perhaps geographers have been arguing too much just with geographers in the academic geographical journals” (Dorling & Shaw 2002;

⁵ I use the word ‘fail’ advisedly, noting its use in this exact context by Dorling & Shaw (2002) at p638. Likewise, Martin concurs, on the *failure* of geographers to undertake policy relevant research, in Martin, R. (2002) ‘A geography for policy, or a policy for geography? A response to Dorling and Shaw’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 26(5): 643.

Massey 2002), being “focussed neither on achieving political change nor on communicating with the world ‘out there’” (ibid). Sir Peter Hall went further, in criticising the geographical vernacular itself, remarking that “geographers (and other social scientists) too often ‘talk only to each other in hermetically sealed languages’ and that there is too much pressure to publish only in recondite journals using... the approved, restricted speech code” (Martin 2002). Thus, “it is possible geographers are being ignored [sic] because people can neither hear them nor understand them” (Dorling & Shaw 2002). Hence, arguably, as the discipline has fragmented into a series of post-radical, post-Marxian movements – critical human geography, feminist geography, postmodern geography and cultural geography – “so the focus has been much more on absorbing new philosophical approaches and debates from social and cultural theory than on directing attention to practical social policy questions” (Martin 2001). Consequently, what this thesis initially seeks to do, in its own small way, is to:

Evaluate existing policies and policy-making practices to reveal their limitations, biases and effects... [and ultimately aspire to] exert a direct influence on policy-making processes, at all scales, with the aim of producing more appropriate and more effective forms of policy intervention” (ibid).

Two more modern streams of scholarship have subsequently compelled the substance of this thesis as being of relevance and applicability to Geography. The first, pertains to James et al (2018) on the health of economic geography as a sub-discipline, in the face of “a noticeable migration of economic geographers in the UK from Departments of Geography to academic positions in Business and Management Schools and related research centres” (James et al 2018). This paper revealed “common feelings [amongst economic geographers who have migrated] of their ‘research agenda not [being] taken seriously by colleagues’... and negative attitudes towards quantitative methods” (ibid) as greatly contributing to the ‘Economic Geography Diaspora’ (ibid). This matters because, whilst “UK economic geography is doing fine as an interdisciplinary nexus” (ibid), it equally, is less and less often a disciplinary starting point for socio-economic enquiry – particularly in domains where it was once a dominant force, such as migration, population and demographic studies.⁶ Not for the first time then, arises the question of “what kind of EG do we want, and how do we get there?” (ibid).

⁶ Of course, the success of economic geography in other domains, also accounts for its transition away from traditional realms towards areas of modern concern, as definitively documented in: Clark, G.L., Gertler, M.P. & Feldman, M.S. (eds.) (2000) *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; and its successor, Clark, G.L., Gertler, M.P., Feldman, M.S. & Wójcik, D. (eds.) (2018) *The New Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The second recent work encouraging this thesis as a geographical study, Danny Dorling's (2019) reflections upon 'kindness', confronts the latter question, arguing (amongst other things), that:

Geography in the UK remains the discipline that failed to be as kind as it could have been and as good as it could be... could do so much better in who it takes in, what it produces, and where it is going... [and that] economic geographers are seemingly not contributing to the understanding of what are fundamentally geographical processes (Dorling 2019).

Furthermore, of direct subject-matter relevance to this thesis, Dorling argues:

Geography may produce some amazing teachers, environmentalists, and even bus drivers ... but it is, and remains, the favourite subject of those who create hostile environments for immigrants, who create political parties that border on the fascist, of war-mongers, bankers and imperialists (ibid).

It is ironic; beginning with Ernest Ravenstein's 'Laws of Migration', Geography had been at the forefront of scholarship seeking to explain and model internal *and* international migration, and indeed continued to prominently do so right up to the 1970s, when geographers applied various spatial interaction models to migration. Since then however, there has been "less [Geography] discipline-specific research on the causes and consequences of migration" (Castree et al 2013) – notwithstanding invaluable contributions of the type from sociology and anthropology. Arguably however, migration should continue to be an area of preeminent concern to Geography and Geographers – as it was for (non-exhaustively) Graeme Hugo, Robyn Iredale, John Salt and Ron Skeldon, and continues to be more recently, for Geographers including Russell King, Jon Stilwell, Dan Hiebert, Brenda Yeoh, Michael Collyer, and Alan Gamlen. Thus, whether to dispassionately scrutinize, positively promote, or both, this thesis concurs that "geographers, with their broad-ranging subject matter, epistemological pluralism, and varied research methods, are ideally placed to carry out migration research and advance migration theory" (King 2012).

3.2 Research Methods

Table 1 summarises the fieldwork conducted in support of data collection for this thesis. Original qualitative data forms the backbone of the results presented, supported by some quantifiable expression of results for the latter empiric papers. In total, data from 246 respondents constitutes the empirical dataset from which results have been generated.

P	FIELDWORK TYPE	CITY	DATE	RESPONDENTS	n =
1	National Metropolis, 8th Conference, <i>Immigration & Canada's Place in a Changing World (Attendee)</i>	Vancouver, Canada	Mar 2006	Informal data collection only, not forming part of the empirical dataset	
	Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movement, <i>Immigration Futures, International Forum (Attendee)</i>	Prato, Italy	May 2006		
	Metropolis North America, 2nd Conference, <i>Migration Policy Forum: People, Labour, Borders & Security (Attendee)</i>	Washington DC, USA	Nov 2017		
	Conference Board of Canada, 3rd National Roundtable, <i>Canadian Immigration Summit (Invited Delegate)</i>	Ottawa, Canada	May 2018		
	International Metropolis, 24th Conference, <i>Promise of Migration: Inclusion, Economic Growth & Global Cooperation (Workshop Presenter)</i>	Ottawa, Canada	Jun 2019		
	Global Forum for Migration & Development, 12th Summit <i>Tech Solutions to Immigration Problems (Keynote Speaker)</i>	Quito, Ecuador	Jan 2020		
2	Semi-Structured Interviews <i>Comparative examination and evaluation of the policy dynamics of skilled migration in the USA, Canada and Australia – the role of the state, migration policy mechanisms, processing and assessment methods, and which 'pull factors' most influence the volume, frequency, duration, and direction of skilled migrant movements – from state, private, and public figure perspectives.</i>	Vancouver, Canada	Mar 2006	N (NGO)	3
				P (Public Figure)	3
		Ottawa, Canada	Apr 2006	G (Government)	21
				N (NGO)	1
		Washington DC, USA		G (Government)	5
				P (Public Figure)	5
				N (NGO)	7
		Toronto, Canada		C (Consultants)	5
				G (Government)	4
				P (Public Figure)	2
Adelaide, Australia	Apr 2008	G (Government)	14		
	P (Public Figure)	2			
Canberra, Australia	May 2008	G (Government)	8		
	P (Public Figure)	1			
3	Semi-Structured Interviews <i>Exploration of how and why skilled Indians seek to migrate to a destination country in preference to another, from complimentary actor angles.</i>	Chandigarh, India	Apr 2007	C (Consultants)	30
				A (Applicants)	30
		New Delhi, India		E (Embassy)	4
4	Online Survey <i>Examination of the extent to which countries utilise technology in the management and selection of economic migrants, based on a global survey conducted in partnership with the world's largest specialist immigration law firm.</i>	Abu Dhabi, Auckland, Bengaluru, Bogota, Brussels, Caracas, Doha, Dubai, Dublin, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Kochi, Kuala Lumpur, Lima, London, Mexico City, Perth, San Francisco, San Jose, Shanghai, Singapore, Sydney, Toronto, Zurich	May 2019	O (Employees of Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy LLP and Fragomen Global LLP)	101
				TOTAL	246

Table 1. Summary of Thesis Fieldwork and Primary Data Collection

The thesis dataset is divided into:

- 81 semi-structured, in-person, 60-120 minute interviews conducted across eight cities, providing the data for Paper 2;
- 34 semi-structured, in-person, 60-120 minute interviews conducted across two cities, plus 30 responses to a researcher-guided survey, providing the data for Paper 3; and
- 101 semi-structured, online, survey responses, remotely gathered from respondents drawn across twenty-five cities, providing the data for Paper 4.

Paper 1 is a conceptual rather than empirically driven work, but was unquestionably and substantially informed by involvement in six separate multi-day international summits, which are also listed in Table 1. Note that numerous other single-day symposia can be said to have informed the thesis, but are not itemised in the interests of brevity.

Formal data collection for each empirical paper was organised around consistent and comparable pre-prepared questions. Full details of these questions can be found in:

- Appendix A (page IX) for the focus questions put to interview subjects in Canada, Australia, and the USA, in relation to Paper 2;
- Appendix B (page XIX) for the focus questions put to interview subjects in India, in relation to Paper 3; and
- Appendix C (page XXVII) for the precise questions put to respondent subjects across the globe via online survey, in relation to Paper 4.

Across the totality of the thesis, informant subjects are categorised into classes, as follows:

1. *Class G (Immigration Department Staff & Migration Policy Makers)* – Individuals within government who formulate and inform immigration policy, and administrate migrant processing, were a key resource from whom to glean insight into the strengths and shortcomings of skilled migration mechanisms. As the core and frontline of the system, these individuals were generally very conversant with the practical ramifications of migration policy. A cross-section were interviewed anonymously, after obtaining official approval to work within government agencies. This encouraged a significant number of respondents to participate in the research; maintaining anonymity also facilitated the aim of allowing individuals an opportunity to freely critique policies and practices. Data from these interviews is reported as constituting evidence by country rather than by individual, with no data revealing the identity of any person or their position of employment.

2. *Class N (Non-Government Organisations)* – A range of individuals outside of government who interact with immigration operationally, via policy lobbying, visa and settlement services, were also invited to contribute on the basis of their stakeholder interest. These respondents were highly attuned to the practicalities of skilled migration, including post-arrival experiences. Data from these anonymous interviews is reported by class only, without revealing the identity of informants or their place of employment.
3. *Class P (Public Figures)* – Selected politicians and academics were invited to comment on-record with regard to relevant government policies pertaining to skilled migration – the only identifiable informant subjects for the thesis. Those asked to participate were identified and approached by the researcher on the basis of their public commentary and/or subject matter expertise regarding skilled migration and global labour competition.
4. *Class C (Consultant Employees of Migration Agency Firms)* – In recognition of the growing importance of private intermediaries, consultants who facilitate skilled migratory movements were interviewed on the basis of their stakeholder interest, in both India and Canada. Data from these interviews is conveyed as evidence reported by consultant-from-country, without identifying individual firms. Employing this method facilitated free critique of state-based migration activity whilst protecting private business interests.
5. *Class A (Applicants/Potential Émigrés)* – Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from skilled Indian individuals seeking emigration, to explore their motivations for wanting to leave India. Data was collected via a researcher-guided survey, to assist individuals with varied levels of English-language proficiency, onsite from the premises of migration agency firms. This data is reported without revealing individual respondent identities.
6. *Class E (Embassy/Consular Staff)* – As an adjunct to Class C and Class A informants, qualitative data was acquired from senior foreign consulate staff in New Delhi (representing the embassies of the USA, UK, Canada and Australia respectively) to assist with triangulation of facts and findings offered by non-governmental subjects. This data is reported as being from embassy-of-country, without identifying the individual respondent or their position of employment within a consulate.
7. *Class O (Fragomen Employees)* – Data was finally acquired from a global survey conducted in partnership with the world’s largest specialist immigration law firm, examining the extent to which forty-six countries utilise technology in the management and selection of

economic migrants. A proxy survey method was employed as a reasonable and efficient research strategy to provide fast, cost-efficient and accurate data in lieu of self-reports from governmental subjects across the world. Resultant data is reported by country, or in aggregate, without identifying individual respondents or their position of employment.

3.3 Methodological Considerations

The choice of employing a mixed methodology was deliberate and consistent with the conceptual direction of the research, geography's "long tradition of mixed-methods research" (Gamlen 2012), and the use of "mixed methods as a feasible and rigorous approach to studying new areas of migration policy" (ibid). Even so, conscious of the argument that "it is important that a migration study (just like any other social scientific study) should include reflection on methodology as well as a justification of the methods used" (Castles 2012), several points bear mentioning with respect to the research design, its robustness and underlying logic. In particular, methodological consideration has been given to this thesis vis-à-vis historical enquiry, quantification, theoretical orientation, objectivity and positionality, and immersion and cultural sensitivity.

Firstly, as is clear from Table 1 (and elaborated upon in the Preface), work on this thesis has taken place in two epochs, and elapsed an extraordinary number of years. This fact necessitated careful contemplation of the temporal nature of the study, bearing in mind that:

Social inquiry should be relevant to the pressing issues facing individuals and groups in society, and should be grounded in historical understanding. This is particularly important for migration research: it is indeed important to carry out micro-level studies of specific migratory experiences, but they should always be embedded in an understanding of the macro-level structural factors that shape human mobility in a specific historical situation (Castles 2012).

Following on, due consideration was given to whether this study, presented at this juncture, might be best rooted within a framework of Global History, given "its core concerns are with mobility and exchange, with processes that transcend borders and boundaries... [and] works of large-scale synthesis that attempt to capture global reality in a specific period... [whereby] the global becomes the ultimate frame of reference for any understanding of the past" (Conrad 2016). Ultimately however, a determination was made that whilst this thesis did warrant a global *perspective*, its partial reliance on historic data does not change its character as a fundamentally forward-looking, rather than historically reflexive work. Furthermore, consistent with other migration studies, it "benefit[s] a great deal from 'comparative studies'

of experiences in different societies, which can increase awareness of general trends and alternative approaches” (Castles 2012); as Conrad freely concedes, “a global history approach is not a panacea or a free pass... many phenomena will [rightly] continue to be studied in concrete, precisely demarcated contexts” (Conrad 2016).

The thesis is also firmly rooted in use of qualitative methods, “[which] can help us understand intentions and social meanings, but cannot give an accurate measurement of the frequency of certain attitudes or behaviours” (Castles 2012). For this reason, in defence of quantification, fieldwork for the thesis was nevertheless always underpinned by the belief that:

Abstract argument about conceptualization do not make a point well. Far more concrete arguments, backed up by examples and (more often than not) some statistics, are a great deal more convincing (to people with power). They get reported in the press, and can eventually have an impact on policy. Such studies have been more convincing in the past. They remain more convincing now (Dorling & Shaw 2002).⁷

Consequently, the overall research methodology has endeavoured to ensure progress beyond plainly reiterating the concerns expounded upon hitherto in longer form; that is, when *relevant and possible*, attempts have been made to ‘quantify the argument’, bearing in mind the sentiment that:

Unfortunately, the practical implications of quantification have been largely passed over by the epistemological flavour of debate in geography. By focusing so much attention on the (un)truth and (mis)representation by (dis)interested quantifiers, critical geographers risk losing sight of the practical effects of quantifying power (Demeritt 2001).

Quantifiable data does not however, form the foundation of the majority of the thesis. Rather, ‘close dialogues’ are utilized in the main, to provide qualitative depictions of truth for the empirical chapters examining migration narratives across the globe. This type of method, and the data emanating from it “is useful in this context, because of the potential richness of substantive observation, [and] the opportunity it promises for intellectual innovation” (Clark 1998). Moreover, “close dialogue is a means of understanding better the actual practice of decision making... It is a means of reintroducing geography... into a world that seems to have been made up for the benefit of theorists” (ibid).

⁷ Quantification, is not of course, without its problems or limitations. See for example: Poovey, M. (1998) *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and Porter, T. (1995) *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Regarding the theoretical orientation of the research, there has been no attempt to situate the work within a singular dialectic. The reason for this deliberate choice is as follows:

Social scientists are sometimes prone to being dismissive of research that has no obvious connections with theory – in either the grand or middle-range senses of the term. Such research is often dismissed as naïve empiricism. It would be harsh, not to say inaccurate, to brand as naïve empiricism the numerous studies in which the publications-as-theory strategy is employed, simply because the authors have not been preoccupied with theory. Such research is conditioned by and directed towards research questions that arise out of an interrogation of the literature. The data collection and analysis are subsequently geared to the illumination or resolution of the research issue or problem that has been defined at the outset. *The literature acts as a proxy for theory*. In many instances, theory is latent or implicit in the literature (Bryman 2004).

Thus the fieldwork for the research has sought to provide a basis from which to combine analyses of qualitative interview data alongside quantifiable data, interpret it within the literature, and conceptually orientate it within a ‘Geography of Public Policy’. The thesis is therefore an inductive inquiry, epistemologically interpretivist, and ontologically constructionist, bearing in mind that social phenomena and categories are in a constant state of revision, and this work examines a construction of skilled migration through observation of immigration processing and policy formation at specific junctures in history. Its intention is not to provide a perfectly simultaneous comparison of national programs and outcomes but rather, to examine these policies and the people practically applying and engaging with them to further elucidate the complex set of intertwined factors which comprise the international skilled migration equation. In that sense, it aspires to the philosophy that “the task remains for geographers, alongside other social and political scientists, to consider in more detail the lessons of migration history, encompassing an understanding of the causes of migration and its consequences, and to ensure that findings reach the public domain to inform political decision-making” (Black 1996).

Notions of scientific objectivity in interviewing are also relevant to mention here, noting that:

‘Reality’ is no longer assumed to be ‘out there’, waiting to be discovered, named and described by social researchers but is itself constituted in and by discourse, and embodied interactions, as are the representations that we choose to construct from fieldwork and interviewing... all interviewers are faced with the decision of whose voices and what claims should be heard in the text that eventually supersedes the interviews (McDowell 2011).

To further paraphrase McDowell, consistent with Clark (1998), the interview is undoubtedly a complex and contested social encounter riven with power relations – and data presented in

the thesis therefore makes no pretense of presenting a transparent, straightforward exchange of truth. Rather, consistent with best practice in research methods in migration, this study has endeavoured to be mindful of not only positionality, but *shifts* in positionality; data collection subjects across this thesis have ranged from ministers to migrant minorities, and lawyers to laypersons, and application of appropriate methods, as well as researcher influence on processes, have morphed accordingly. Semi-structured interviews have been used in the main though, as a conscious choice, bearing in mind that:

A study interested in the full stories and experiences of the interviewee must keep possibilities open and not limit respondents' answers; the proper technique in that case would be in-depth interviews. Conversely, if the research seeks to explore collective behaviour and patterns, the proper technique would be the use of questionnaires [...] The secret here is to keep a healthy balance between qualitative and quantitative information and methods. Remember that quantitative or numeric data alone is not enough; numbers alone cannot explain the complexity of real life. In the same way, qualitative data can be confirmed, clarified, and validated through quantitative data (Sanchez-Ayala 2012).

A final methodological consideration has been the importance of immersion and cultural sensitivity in the context of “participant and site observation... to study behaviour in its natural setting and to fully understand the spatial context of the everyday life of those being researched” (ibid). For example, picture this: a sweltering thirty-five degree day in Punjab, ceiling fans swirling, and hordes of potential migrants crammed into a waiting room, desperate to get five minutes of facetime with an immigration consultant offering a passage to elsewhere – this imagery captures the genesis of an empiric paper of the thesis. Accordingly, the importance of boots-on-the-ground fieldwork remained at the forefront of methodological choices for data collection. Moreover, whilst many of the fieldwork sites might lack the obvious appearance of exoticism:

Dislocation to a[ny] culturally different land can open windows into the psyche, a territory of the mind and heart. The research journey to the cultural Other can become a profound life experience, one that transforms the self... From several angles, foreign-based investigation holds the potential for reenchanting geographical discourse, especially if fieldwork is viewed as being *everything* done in the field (Gade 2001).

This perspective accords with the importance placed throughout the thesis with immersion, to assist in understanding the complexities of the relationship between migration and place for migrants and migration decision-makers alike. Indeed, as a rare discussion on the issue argues, “the analytical potential of these concepts [‘place’ and ‘sense of place’] has yet to be fully achieved as far as the study of migratory movements is concerned,” notwithstanding that

“qualitative methods have emerged as a useful way of understanding the complexities of migrants’ senses of place” (Mendoza & Moren-Alegret 2012). The latter point has again reinforced methodological choices for the research design – given “the most used method for assessing the relevance of the sense of place in migration processes has been the semi-structured interview, which offers a great deal of flexibility, and enables a combined analysis with other methods” (ibid). Immersive and participatory processes in the field have equally contributed to the ideas expressed across the thesis; even (relatively) passive engagement at conferences and fora have played a substantial part in helping to collectively and cumulatively coalesce the ideas presented herein. Thus, whilst perhaps not formalized ethnographic study, the totality of activity presented in Table 1 speaks to the extent to which this thesis might be regarded as a mixed-methods enterprise.

4. CHAPTER STRUCTURE

The body of this thesis henceforth aligns with the overall research design, and is organised in four substantive chapters, each of which also functions as a standalone academic paper. Each paper is based on its own discrete set of ideas and original fieldwork pertaining to the chapter specifically, but contributing to the anthology as a whole. The chapters engage with the overall research question of how states can maintain competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants, by considering the issue theoretically, then empirically from the perspective of receiving states, sending states, and migration apparatus and systems. Finally, the thesis concludes with a chapter reflecting upon contemporary developments and conceptual matters, with a view to remarking on the future of global competition for skilled immigration. The main themes to be engaged within each chapter are summarily described below.

4.1 Chapter 2 / Paper I – Literature Review & Theory

Chapter 2 is the overarching literature review for the ensuing three empiric papers, and along with the Introduction and Conclusion chapters, comprises the thesis ‘framing document’. It surveys studies and literature relating to skilled migration across different academic disciplines, with a particular focus on materials generated in the last twenty years. The choice of time period is deliberate – it correlates loosely with the decades preceding and following the Global Financial Crisis (GFC); skilled migration discourse varies noticeably on either side of the juncture which functioned as a disruptor of global hypermobility. The literature review is framed within a larger, novel idea – a proposed new model for economic migration policy which posits that: in order to maintain competitiveness in the global market for skilled

migrants, a nation state requires an economic migration policy with a balanced focus on four facets of flows – emigrational, transitional, educational, and preferential – that is, permanent migration, temporary workers, international students, and labour sourced via mobility provisions contained within trade agreements. The chapter argues that each element is necessary and complimentary, to support a holistic and sustainable approach to attracting immigrants and facilitating nation-building.

4.2 Chapter 3 / Paper II – Receiving States

Chapter 3 is the first of the three empiric papers of the thesis, and explores the distinct and dissimilar narratives surrounding the quest to attract and retain ‘the right migrant’ in the era preceding the GFC, in each of Canada, Australia, and the USA. Despite a common end goal to produce optimised immigration outcomes and stay competitive in the face of new states entering the global market for skilled migrants, the paper examines how each of these traditional receiving states has pursued markedly different policy parameters, as a consequence of domestic migration histories, and local societal and political considerations. Juxtaposed against ideal-typical models typologising selective migration policies, it reveals the extent of the ‘discursive gap’ between published migration policy rhetoric, and the reality of migration priorities as understood and driven by actors with agency to direct policy. Based upon the cumulative close dialogues acquired from actors investigated, the paper submits a four-part ‘stylised prescription’ for how states could act to maintain competitiveness within the global market for skilled migrants. It concludes that state-coordinated international migration cannot satisfy time-sensitive domestic labour market demand, however, might be able to satisfy longer-term labour, and demographic demand – such that international migration should be reaffirmed, as a long-game endeavour.

4.3 Chapter 4 / Paper III – Sending States

Chapter 4 shifts focus from destination countries and state actors to examine a key labour source country for many OECD recipient nations – India. It explores global competition for skilled migrants from the perspective of private migration intermediaries who facilitate migrant aspirations to the mutual benefit of agents and applicants, from their source and at their formative stages, based on unique data acquired from foreign consulate officers in Delhi, consultants in Chandigarh, and a cohort of skilled potential emigres from Punjab. It presents the calculus of consultants, arithmetic of applicants, and evaluations of embassy officers side-by-side, alongside a novel statistical case study examining the factors which

informed destination-choice decisions amongst the sample. In doing so, it highlights the overwhelming importance of pathways to permanent residency as a migration pull-factor, coupled with a desire amongst the cohort to pursue an almost indiscriminate ‘passage to elsewhere’, despite prospects for hardship abroad, or robust domestic macroeconomic conditions. Thus, it is more than a commentary on Indian outmigration; rather, it speaks to underexplored aspects of global migration processes – including sending state regimes, the recruitment of emigrants, and the underestimated influence of intermediaries on destination-choice decision-making for future skilled migrants.

4.4 Chapter 5 / Paper IV – Apparatus & Systems

Chapter 5 probes the assumption that nations are doing their best to manage migration and select economic migrants who will readily integrate and make positive socio-economic contributions, by considering whether states adequately employ technological solutions to immigration problems. Specifically, it considers the extent to which countries utilise technology in the management and selection of economic migrants, based on a global survey conducted in partnership with the world’s largest specialist immigration law firm. It finds that databases and paper-reliant processing methods are still commonly used in lieu of more intelligent workflow tools, whilst biometric data collection is becoming ubiquitous. It further reveals that Traditional Immigration Recipient countries, but also Gulf Cooperation Council nations, currently lead the field in developing technological systems to address immigration challenges. These findings frame a discussion regarding whether governments should actively harness biometric data, artificial intelligence and geolocation technologies, to improve immigration policy outcomes. The chapter concludes that doing so will be important for countries seeking to maintain competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants.

4.5 Chapter 6 – Conclusion

In the final part of the thesis, its underlying contentions, evidenced across the chapters, are reiterated: that countries can most effectively compete in the global market for skilled migrants by looking beyond servicing their immediate domestic labour-market demands, facilitating transitions from temporary to permanent residence, centralising administrative mechanisms, and removing barriers to social and economic integration. Essentially, the thesis encourages the utilisation of migration for ‘nation building’ vis-à-vis developing a deeper national permanent skills base, arguing that if it is indeed impracticable to be truly responsive

to short-term fluctuations in skills demand, investing in human capital more broadly may be a better investment for national economic *and* social growth. To this end, the thesis suggests that blunt policy responses to immigration challenges, such as simply raising and reducing category quotas, are ineffective in doing much other than attempting to satiate public opinion – which has been understandable insofar as there being no electoral gains in immigration in recent political history. Instead, the thesis posits that it is time to transcend the ‘discursive gap’ in migration discourse, consistent with the view that:

Unlike other aspects of globalisation, such as increased trade or investment, migration of labour, even for temporary periods, provokes significant social and political adjustments which are often stressful, and has implications for a range of economic and social policies – from education, health and social welfare, to international development. Governments concerned about migration must therefore go beyond mere gate-keeping and *integrate migration policy into mainstream planning* (ILO 2004).

Therefore, going forward, skilled migration policies must be seen in a much wider context than in the past – requiring “a substantial shift in policy thinking which many governments will have to face as they join in the ‘war’ over skills” (Iredale 2001).

The chapter then turns from the empirical findings and historic, to reflect upon the future of global competition for skilled immigration, bearing in mind recent ideological and political shifts to the right, growing resistance to globalisation, immigration and neoliberalism generally, and the COVID pandemic. Special mention is made of the UK amidst the contemporary considerations, in view of its momentous changing relationship within the EU with respect to free movement of persons. Equally, the current state of skilled migration policy arrangements across the globe, but especially in the USA, Canada, and Australia, are considered and juxtaposed with the past; many states are outwardly trending towards tighter controls and restrictiveness, and some towards systems of pre-selection and expressions of interest, with concomitant removal of access to judicial review under administrative law.

Finally, the thesis concludes with conceptual reflections, attempting to situate the relevance of the work presented, within geography as a discipline, and migration scholarship more broadly – as well as reflecting upon its limitations. Whilst the research supports the general view that skilled migratory movements from developing to developed countries, as well as between OECD nations will continue to be a priority on the immigration policy agenda, it questions the degree to which states will continue to overtly subscribe to the purportedly axiomatic idea of competing for the ‘best and brightest’. Instead, it cautiously suggests that we may be entering an as yet nebulous, ‘age of migration’. ■

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LITERATURE REVIEW & PAPER I – ECONOMIC MIGRATION POLICY:
QUO NUNC EAMUS?

1. ABSTRACT

This paper reviews migration literature of the last two decades, whilst arguing that nation states should reconceptualise the parameters of economic migration policy, away from traditionally discrete categories of ‘economic, family, and humanitarian’, and towards a model whereby all immigration is openly recognised to be of comparable socio-economic import. In the post-COVID era, notwithstanding disruptions to global hypermobility, it proposes that economic migration be rethought and reorganised categorically, as ‘emigrational, transitional, educational and preferential’, to better reflect the 21st century international mobility landscape. It further submits that recipient countries could reconceive domestic migration-for-development strategies, by striking a better balance between four facets of flows – permanent settlement, temporary workers, international students, and labour sourced via mobility provisions contained within bilateral and multilateral agreements – and in doing so, best maintain competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants, and a politically sustainable approach to attracting immigrants and facilitating nation-building.

Keywords: highly-skilled, mobility, permanent, student, temporary, trade

2. INTRODUCTION

The worlds within which sentient creatures live are made sense of through categories. The identification of categories, and the development of categorical understandings, are also important within research (Hackett 2017).

This paper is a prescription for reimagining economic migration policy, from the vantage of economic geography, into alternative constructed categories of greater utility than present divides, with an underlying emphasis on planning for immigration as a long-game endeavour. It is a paper of cross-disciplinary review, which surveys studies and literature relating to skilled migration, with a particular focus on materials generated in the last twenty years. The choice of time period is deliberate – it correlates loosely with the decades preceding and following the Global Financial Crisis (GFC); skilled migration discourse varies noticeably on either side of the juncture. It is a literature review framed within a larger idea – a proposed model for economic migration policy which posits that, in order to maintain competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants, a nation state requires an economic migration policy with a balanced focus on four facets of flows – permanent migration, temporary workers, international students, and labour sourced via mobility provisions contained within bilateral and multilateral agreements. It argues that each element is necessary and complimentary, to support a holistic and politically sustainable approach to attracting immigrants and facilitating nation-building.

Literatures on skilled migration are abundant, consistent with the fact that “over the past decades an increasing number of countries have developed a growing interest in attracting and retaining skilled and highly skilled migrant workers” (Czaika 2018). Rich empirical and theoretical studies, framed within and across academic disciplines, have attempted to typologise highly-skilled migration, as a discrete subset of migration studies. Yet questions remain regarding the extent to which these bodies of knowledge inform the practical construction and application of migration policies; arguably, “sending an academic book to policy makers is seldom the best way to influence their debates” (McDowell 2011). This is not said to diminish the virtue of said scholarship. Rather, it is an exhortation to guardians of that knowledge to continue to find ways to “consider in more detail the lessons of migration history, encompassing an understanding of the causes of migration and its consequences, and to ensure that findings reach the public domain to inform political decision-making” (Black 1996).

Key thinkers in migration studies duly note that “as a field of socio-scientific inquiry [it] is under-theorised”, exhibiting a “frequent lack of connection between theory and empirical work” (de Haas 2014). Debates surrounding the folly of attempting to manage the migration ‘tap’ by appropriate policy settings, likewise, are well worn (Castles 2004). What is more, preoccupation with migration policies designed to directly attract and retain the highly skilled undoubtedly “give the illusion that they manage the migration, but they omit the real drivers and complexity of the process” (Skeldon 2018). Where to then, from here? This paper suggests, to a place which situates skilled migration within a broader, *functional* context of economic migration – no doubt falling short of de Haas’ calls for greater theorisation, but hopefully addressing ‘The r/age of migration’ and extending beyond scholarship which ends at “empirically-grounded evidence to refute and/or concur with political and media representations of migration” (Smith 2019). This paper further contends that now is the time for such thinking; alongside ongoing unconstructive politicisation of migration discourse, the interdependency of the highly-skilled and lower-skilled has been brought into sharp focus by COVID, compelling the need for migration scholarship to inform macro migration modelling. Developments flanking the last, even remotely analogous situation, the GFC, are again instructive in this regard:

...a striking observation [of the GFC] is that we did not see any significant attempts to restrict skilled immigration. On the contrary, the liberalization of both admission and post-entry policies has followed similar trends before and after 2007/8... Despite some fine-tuning in shortage lists or credit point configurations in the countries with some sort of a points-based system, no significant policy reversal has occurred. Demand for highly qualified workers has rather intensified in certain occupations and countries continue to become active players in the recruitment of highly skilled migrants (Czaika & Parsons 2018).

The degree to which COVID is a different order of beast than the GFC, and might therefore catalyse ‘The end of an age?’ remains to be seen. Certainly, scholars are beginning the process of questioning what is to become of migration and mobility after the current pandemic – “does the COVID-19 lockdown represent a temporary trough in global population movements, or the end of the most recent age of migration?” (Gamlén 2020). Whilst it is too early to say, irrespective, reconsideration of economic migration policy writ large is overdue; its organisation across false dichotomies of skill, and more egregiously, partitions of ‘economic, family, and humanitarian’, have surely outlived their legitimacy. Moreover, “the relative silence of economic geographers on issues of migration... at base an economic phenomenon, driven by economic motives and forces, linked to economic systems, and with powerful economic effects” (King 2011), necessitates a response, now more than ever. This

paper, is a contribution in this vein, categorically reimagining economic migration, with a view to the future.

3. EMIGRATIONAL MIGRATION

Within current constructs of ‘economic, family, and humanitarian’ migration, only the latter ostensibly pertain to permanent emigration in practice. Most traditional immigration recipient nations offer limited access to direct permanent residency, and more recent entrants to the skilled migration market still largely offer no such pathways.¹ Instead, myriad economic class visas are primarily temporary arrangements in the first instance – designed to facilitate entry rather than promote settlement. Yet family and humanitarian emigrants remain of substantial socio-economic consequence – a fact that has been somewhat lost amidst preoccupation with differentiating them from ‘economic migrants’ – and therefore, they must be integrated into the economic immigration equation.

The partitioning of humanitarian and economic, is part of a “vivid debate with regard to the proper terms to use to describe refugees, forced migrants, humanitarian migrants, and asylum seekers, and whether these categories should be kept separate from economic or labor migrants” (Ehrkamp 2017). The refugee problem, specifically, is summarised as follows:

They first require access to asylum as protection against persecution in their country of origin (now guaranteed under the 1951 Convention). They then require on-going protection, and finally a solution to exile. Yet solutions today are instead largely conceived of in terms of stopping – and preferably reversing movement. Even refugee resettlement – the movement of refugees in a first country of asylum to a (Western) third country, where they will be offered permanent residency and a pathway to naturalisation – is largely framed as a humanitarian process, with applicants judged on protection needs alone (UNHCR 2011) (Long 2013).

Clearly, refugees are not ‘just’ migrants, and “maintain[ing] terms such as political asylum or refugee is to point to the responsibility of contemporary nation-states for abiding by their humanitarian and legal commitments” (Ehrkamp 2017). Notwithstanding, as Long argues, the post-Convention framework has unfortunately created a protection discourse which has inadvertently strengthened many states’ restrictionist migration agendas, precluded refugees from migration-development discourses, and turned refugees’ protection into a sedentary pursuit – preventing most from being able to freely move in order to secure the livelihoods to

¹ ‘Recent entrants’ non-exhaustively include Germany, Japan, and Nordic nations, which have undergone thorough review of their respective economic migration policy regimes in recent years, and still retained the status quo of offering limited pathways to permanency – as distinct from nation-states promoting ‘golden passport’ or ‘citizenship-for-sale’ schemes without any qualifying period of residence.

underpin long-term protection and sustainable solutions (Long 2013). There is consequently, a case to be made for reconnecting refugees to broader migration processes – recognising them anew, as refugees *and* migrants simultaneously – and affording them accelerated pathways to social and economic integration, as was arguably always intended by the framers of the Convention. As Long concludes, “this does not mean abandoning refugees’ access to an exceptional space for admission but it does mean recognizing the limits of a separate ‘refugee’ identity” (ibid).

Greater recognition of the economic contributions refugees will potentially make once resettled, follows from this. This is a matter which has also been partly neglected amidst preoccupation with humanitarian discourse and non-socioeconomic admission – but also, partly subverted by politicisation and fear-mongering vis-à-vis the welfare cost of accepting refugees. A growing academic literature suggests, however, that refugees may not be the unilateral burden the media frequently portrays them as. Recent modelling from the European Commission for instance, suggests that:

although the refugee integration... is costly for the public budget, in the medium- to long-run, the social, economic and fiscal benefits may significantly outweigh the short-run refugee integration costs... [and] net benefits of investment into refugee integration are higher, the higher are investments into refugee integration at the time of their arrival (Kancs & Lecca 2017).

Findings of this nature support the more general proposition from scions of demography that “Europe will have to attract considerable inflows of immigrants in order to sustain a reasonable pattern of growth... [as] the unfavourable consequences of an ageing and shrinking labour force can only up to a point be counteracted by more technology, richer human capital, improved social and working environment” (Livi-Bacci 2018). Indeed, even in the USA, it has been argued that “illegal immigration has a positive impact on the US [national] economy; although illegal immigrants impose a [net] fiscal cost at the state and local levels, this cost should be addressed by efficiently allocating resources between the federal and state governments” (Nadadur 2009).²

The economic experiences, value and contribution of humanitarian migrants, have received most considered treatment, however, in Canada and Australia – perhaps as jurisdictions

² The question of what proportion, of what cohort, of illegal/undocumented migrants to the USA are ‘economic migrants’ versus ‘genuine’ asylum claimants in pursuit of refugee status, is outside of the scope of this paper – as is engaging with the particular complexities of its system and the paralysis of immigration reform in the USA. The point is simply made here to reiterate that ‘non-economic’ migrants have economic value – however labelled or defined.

awash with longitudinal data, and seemingly in constant pursuit of migration policy perfection. Decades old studies, based on decades of data, have previously concluded that “refugees do not constitute a major drain on the economy... [a]lthough their economic performance is not as impressive as that of independent immigrants, for whom human capital is the selection criterion, it is generally robust” (DeVoretz et al 2004). The latter study found employment prospects to be a key determinant of economic outcomes, as well as private sponsorship and local job market conditions. Consistent with subsequent Australian work, it likewise agrees that for immigrants as a whole, it takes ten years to achieve full economic potential – approximately the same time it takes for integration policies to ‘pay off for receiving countries’ (Kancs & Lecca 2017). And yet, as a comprehensive review of literature assessing the economic contribution of refugees to Australia summarises, “the costs and benefits of refugee settlement are poorly understood among the general population... [t]he result is a debate based more on preconceived, ideological positions than on balanced consideration of the facts” (Parsons 2013). There is therefore, a real need for economic arguments articulating the ‘economic contribution’³ made by humanitarian migrants, to complement legal and moral arguments, and move beyond reliance upon “intangible [contributory] notions such as enhancing multiculturalism and cultural diversity” (ibid).

To be clear, we concur herein that “refugees are not, and should not be selected on the basis of their potential contribution to [an] economy” (DeVoretz et al 2004); and “the appropriate place for economic considerations [for refugee resettlement] is at best alongside ethical, humanitarian principles, not as a final determinant of refugee policy” (Parsons 2013). Accordingly, the intention here is not to open up the category of ‘refugee’, or wade into refugee law. Rather, it is to be critically aware of the ‘constructedness of categories’ (such as refugee and migrant), “use[d] as a mechanism to distinguish, divide and discriminate” (Crawley & Skleparis 2018) – and to challenge these classifications. Others have begun to do so already, in novel, if different ways. Anderson, for example, in “recognising the constructed nature of the categories of migrant and citizen”, concludes with “the insight that what is bad for migrants is not good for citizens, indeed, it is often bad for citizens as well” – arguing that whether one is a ‘migrant’ or a ‘citizen’ matters both normatively and empirically, to both groups (Anderson 2019). The constructedness of migration categories matters likewise, ‘economically’, more than has been previously acknowledged.

³ What constitutes an ‘economic contribution’ is its own separate issue, not elaborated upon herein. Suffice to say humanitarian and family class migrants make tangible economic contributions, non-exhaustively, via direct and indirect taxation payments, as well as business ownership, innovation, filling labour market vacancies, entrepreneurship, and developing trade linkages.

It is of course possible, that the arguments forwarded thus far, are yet further evidence of surrender to the allure of the ‘new migration-and-development optimism’. As Gamlen explains, in the past two decades:

Migration had been identified as a key international issue but one where many difficult interest-conflicts stymied multilateral cooperation. Linking it to the issue of development, over which there was more consensus, offered international policy-makers a ‘backdoor way’ of putting migration on the international agenda (Gamlen 2014).

The result, in the eyes of critics, has been an excessively optimistic ‘migration-and-development mania’ which, “almost ignor[es] strong first-order effects that are negative in the determined search for second – or third – order effects that might be positive” (ibid). Humanitarian migration certainly does involve upfront socio-economic costs to host societies – as is even truer of family streams, which reunify permanent residents with elderly parents and/or siblings, small though these numbers may be for jurisdictions worldwide. Arguably, however, redressing structural distortions in migration methodology would help one to better gauge the true extent of emigrational costs and benefits – bearing in mind that even “according to the new optimism, the key variable is migration policy: as long as the policies are right, migration benefits everyone” (ibid). There is no doubt, some truth in the latter statement. The point made herein, however, is that when the policies are wantonly wrong, via miscategorisation and misconstrual, migration benefits few, if any.

4. TRANSITIONAL MIGRATION

Schemes for economic migration leading directly to permanent residency do exist in limited form in most traditional recipient countries, though are largely dwarfed in quantum and contemplation, by temporary migration pathways. What permanent economic migration avenues are available, are invariably tethered to ‘skill’, and to a lesser extent, ‘capital’ – that is, ‘permanent skilled’ and ‘investor/entrepreneur class’ visa programs respectively. In this section, however, we advocate for neither permanent nor temporary migration per se. Rather, the suggestion is that future focus for economic migration policy (in temporal terms), should be on ‘transitional’ migration – instead of relying upon binary and dichotomous categories, which firstly, poorly align with migration realities, and secondly, are predicated on the questionably constructed concept of ‘skill’ itself.

Academics have long identified the problematic nature of temporal bifurcation, noting for example, that:

The links between temporary and permanent movement are inextricably interwoven in the lives of those approved for residence, and policy makers concerned about their settlement and labour market experiences need to be fully aware of this interconnectedness between forms of movement which have tended to get treated separately for policy purposes (Bedford & Ho 2006).

There is no doubt an elegant simplicity to compartmentalising migration into these categories, however, which partly accounts for their ubiquity in the organisation of immigration programs worldwide. Consequently, scholarly focus had been content to note that “transitions to [permanent] residence are being used now as a major strategy to attract longer-term residents” (ibid), and that “the provision of permanency rights is also an important incentive for high-skilled migrants” (Czaika & Parsons 2017). Recent analysis from econometricians, however, more directly supports the contention herein that ‘transitional’ may be a better axis from which to do empirical assessment:

Temporary migrations tend to be the rule rather than the exception. However, possibly due to a lack of appropriate data and analytical tools, the micro-foundations of gravity equations for international migration have relied on static models that regard the decision to migrate as permanent... this approach can lead to an incorrect specification of the gravity equation, even if the stochastic component of location-specific utility is not correlated across countries (Bertoli et al 2016).

The latter study, draws on the literature involving the determinants of international migration flows, static and dynamic discrete choice models, and estimation of linear models with a common factor structure in the error term, and builds upon these by also attempting to account for the *sequential* nature of migration decisions, and the importance of expectations about future economic conditions at origin. Equally (if not more) compelling, is the first judicious cross-country assessment of policies aimed to attract and select highly-skilled workers, which concludes that:

[There is] an increasing hybridization of skill-selective immigration systems. Demand-driven policies coexist with supply-driven elements in an attempt to balance the conflicting aims of numbers versus employability... supply-led systems – that is, points-based systems – increase both the absolute numbers of high-skilled migrants and the skill composition of international labor flows. Conversely, demand-driven systems, which are usually based on the principle of job contingency and are often supplemented by case-by-case (labor market test) or occupation-by-occupation (shortage lists) assessments of labor market needs, are shown to have little effect—and potentially even a negative one (Czaika & Parsons 2017).

In sum, recent policy developments worldwide continue to attest to a global penchant for the highly-skilled⁴, broadly accepting that “PBSs [points-based systems] appear to represent the most effective policy for attracting high-skilled migrants” (ibid) – which consequently, also leads to a reliance upon neat, binary compartments, to which PBSs’ are predisposed. To borrow from Ehrkamp though, “migration is rarely a simple, linear move from point A to point B” (Ehrkamp 2019) – in *time or space*. As such, migration in reality is never really temporary or permanent – “international migrants tend to move more than once in their lives” (Bertoli et al 2016) and “studies of secondary migration... that is, internal migration after an initial period of settlement – more recently termed ‘onward migration’... suggest that there is often no clear endpoint to a migration movement” (Ehrkamp 2019).

Recognition of this fact, has led geographers in particular, to engage with the spatial dimension of migration equations, specifically “providing in-depth analyses and definitions of transit migration and by exploring migrants’ journeys and embodied experiences in transit spaces and with deterrence policies” (Ehrkamp 2019). Such studies suggest that “migration research would benefit from exploring in concert the complex and dynamic spatialities of transit and transnationalism in migrants’ lives and in institutional processes” (ibid). In practice though, there is little acknowledgement of these phenomena, at least within policy design. Accordingly, traditional immigration recipient countries, for example, continue to persist with region-specific migration mechanisms, intended to geographically disperse migrants and prevent their agglomeration in major metropolises, with varying degrees of success.⁵ And yet, despite the best efforts of policy makers, migrants move, eventually, somewhere else, in all likelihood.

Equally predictable, is how governments respond to continued demand for foreign workers during economic downturns, summarised as follows:

Apart from turning a blind eye to irregular labour migration, there are two ways in which governments respond to demand for migrant labour during economic hard times. First, despite a rhetorical emphasis on restricting labour immigration, they continue to facilitate the entry of highly skilled labour migrants and the employment of migrants who enter a country with a non-economic motive. Second, they encourage resident workers to take up jobs in occupations where migrant workers are concentrated (Devitt 2015).

⁴ Why highly-skilled migration programs are *en vogue* is not re-examined here – it is a matter addressed exhaustively (if not definitively) elsewhere.

⁵ The contrasting fortunes of Canada’s Provincial Nominee Program versus Australia’s Skilled Independent Regional, or various Australian state-sponsored visas, are illustrative of this point. Suffice to say, even permanent emigrational visas (to regional areas) frequently become points of temporary transit and transitionary migration.

Both assertions are borne out in Devitt's exploration of French and British government responses to foreign labour demand between 2008 and 2013 – but presciently, it seems, again now in the midst of the COVID pandemic.⁶ Indeed at the present juncture, a further development has been a growing recognition firstly, of the interdependency of the highly-skilled and low-skilled – not just doctors needing nurses and porters, but also financiers needing baristas, and everyone needing delivery drivers – but also secondly with reference to Devitt's latter point, questions striking at the heart of economic migration policy like, 'can anyone pick fruit?' The latter is a serious query, which genuinely challenges axiomatic precepts in migration thinking which assume seasonal agricultural work as definitively low-skilled (or unskilled even), and agrarian workers therefore not warranting of ongoing access rights, let alone possibilities to transition to longer-stay. Early (mid-pandemic) evidence from economies reliant on primary production, however, suggest otherwise: few furloughed workers harvest with ease, and fewer still endure in the industry.⁷

The underlying issue here is the construct of 'skill' itself, used as a foundation for modern immigration policy globally – as some sort of self-evident truth, and conceptual proxy for 'economically worthy'. Very recent research has, however, begun to directly challenge the concept of skill and skill categorisation in both government policy and academic research. Notably, a set of papers in a special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, collectively argues that migrants' skills are socially constructed; editors of the anthology conclude that:

Empirical evidence indicates that the skill categories in operation neither reflect migrants' actual ability nor their post-migration labour market outcomes. The phenomena of skill mismatch and skill wastage among 'skilled' professionals, in particular, put the ethics as well as the meaning of skill-based selective migration policy into question... by treating skill as fixed attributes that can be sorted into different categories of desirability and subjected to different degrees of control, selective migration policies still run the risk of taxonomising human beings... As such, 'skill' can be as meaningless as 'race' (or ethnicity, cultural background, etc.) in terms of a migrant's actual abilities and contribution to the host nation (Liu-Farrer et al 2020).

⁶ With regards to the former, it is true (at the time of writing) that global mobility has been deliberately constrained by most nation-states – borders have been closed and facilitation of travel restricted – but, for how long? Arguably, temporarily, or perhaps indefinitely, but in all probability, not permanently.

⁷ These comments are made pursuant to the remarks of Philip Martin at a *Metropolis International* webinar on 22 May 2020, on options for the US agricultural sector in the face of rising agricultural labour costs; see <https://acs-aec.ca/en/events/is-covid-19-reshaping-north-america-an-online-conference-on-the-borders-boundaries-and-mobility-in-the-united-states-canada-and-mexico/>.

Again, as with time-based compartmentalisation, classification of migrants by skill (generally conflated with levels of education and duration of vocational experience) has proved a neat metric by which to sort migrant admission and calculate potential labour market viability – resulting in a range of definitions by organisations and governments. Nevertheless, if anything, “variations and apparent elasticity of the concept confirm that skill is at best a context-dependent operational concept”, and moreover, “not intrinsically correlated with educational level or occupational category” (ibid). Accordingly, at the very minimum, perhaps it is time to stop exploiting ‘highly-skilled migration’ as proxy nomenclature for ‘good-for-the-economy’ immigration.

5. EDUCATIONAL MIGRATION

In the preceding section, we have argued that all migration is essentially transitional, not temporary or permanent, and this would be a more accurate, but also practical concept to use in crafting economic migration policy going forward – notwithstanding the importance of also providing for pathways to permanency. The extent to which admission programs should continue to hinge upon ‘skill’, likewise, is less than certain. Our focus now turns to ‘educational’ migration, in view of its extraordinary growth in recent decades, and huge economic importance to recipient, but also sending states – notwithstanding that, educational migration should also in fact be understood as a subsidiary component of transitional migration.

Growth in international and foreign tertiary student numbers has been huge in the last two decades, rising from just over two million in 1998 to 5.6 million in 2018 (OECD 2020). OECD countries attract 70 per cent of all mobile⁸ students, of which 18% are hosted in the USA, followed by the UK and Australia (both 8%), Germany (6%), Canada and France (4%) and Japan (3%) – though movement towards non-OECD destinations is currently accelerating faster than to OECD nations. Students from Asia contribute the largest numbers worldwide, accounting for 57% of all mobile students to the OECD, made up of 30% from China and India combined, and the remainder from other Asian countries. Notably though, ratios of mobile enrolment as a percentage of total tertiary enrolment, are highest in Luxembourg (48%), then Australia (27%), New Zealand (20%), the UK and Switzerland

⁸ The OECD defines ‘mobile’ students as those who are either ‘foreign’ (those who are not citizens of the country in which they are enrolled and who may be long-term residents or even be born in the host country), or ‘international’ (those who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study and are not permanent or usual residents of their country of study – usually a subset of ‘foreign’).

(both 18%), and Canada (14%) (ibid). This conspicuous presence, partially accounts for the distorted sense in much literature of students largely moving to Australia, Canada and the UK – whereas, in terms of volume, intakes to the USA (with only 5% mobile students) are actually almost equivalent to those three jurisdictions combined.

Accounting for the rapid expansion of internationally mobile students is not the focus of this paper – suffice to say that:

While the reasons... are complex, researchers agree that the pace of growth has been much greater than for other types of migration (King et al 2011). In an era of rising political concerns about many aspects of international migration, this particular form of mobility has proved relatively uncontroversial⁹... perceived as transient, and also... recognised as a means of generating significant revenues through student tuition fees (Findlay et al 2017).

In respect of the latter, it is relevant to note the contribution of Findlay as an early¹⁰ proponent of the need to assess both the demand and supply-side of international student mobility; that is, “the motivations of mobile students and their parents... [plus] the supply-side practices of those seeking to recruit talented young people... [into] higher education” (Findlay 2010). Current iterations of this line of scholarship conclude that “to understand international student flows it is necessary to think of education as a product”, whereby “those engaged in providing education are social actors whose marketing, recruiting and branding practices selectively mould the nature of student mobility” (Findlay et al 2017). Educational migration is thus, a ‘constructed process’, to consider alongside the various aforementioned constructed categories and concepts.

Parallel scholarship from Hawthorne over the same time span is also noteworthy – primarily for its empirical contribution amidst a plethora of “existing study-migration literature, which is dominated by policy and qualitative perspectives” (Hawthorne & To 2014). In contrast to studies focused on scale, sources, policy evolution, migrant decision-making, and location with theory, this work pointedly draws attention to labour market outcomes for former international students, finding in summary that:

⁹ Student migration is not immune to politics, however, as evidenced in recent years by the dramatic reduction of Tier 4 visas in the UK in response to government promises to lower net migration. Study to residence pathways, likewise, are subject to political winds; again in the UK context, Tier 1 Post-Study visas were abolished in 2012 (accompanied by rhetoric arguing that entrepreneur, post-PhD and Tier-2 employer sponsored visas would suffice instead) – but are essentially being resuscitated in 2021 as ‘Graduate Route’ visas to bolster labour supply.

¹⁰ Vertovec, however, was arguably the first scholar to draw direct attention to the study-migration pathway as “an integral part of transnational migration systems”, facilitating labour circulation and “recruitment with a specific view towards longer-term or permanent settlement’ Vertovec, S. (2002) *Transnational networks and skilled labour migration*. COMPAS Working Paper. Oxford: Centre on Migration, Policy and Society.

[In] the UK case study, international students can inflate net migration flows and fuel populist debate – resulting in pathway cuts, regardless of their prospective value as skilled migrants... [In] the US and UK case studies, students’ retention can lead to labour market substitution rather than complementarity – problematic if protection of local jobs is a primary policy aim... [In] the Australian case study, employers demonstrate keen interest in the study-migration pathway but demand skilled workers with strong host-country language ability, advanced qualifications, and permanent resident status. In oversupplied fields they also show a marked preference for domestic graduates (Hawthorne 2018).

Findings by Hawthorne have been extremely influential in setting the Australian policy agenda in relation to the study-migration pathway, and more recently, Canadian government efforts to attract larger student numbers also. At face value, fiscal export education returns appear extremely attractive globally; in 2005 the USA and UK earned \$US14.5 billion and £7.5 billion annually from international students, and in 2014 Australia and Canada \$A18 billion and \$C8 billion respectively (ibid). Gusto for growth in numbers and tuition dollars may, however, obfuscate the true economic value of this stream of migration – particularly for countries who have been seduced by the allure of export education, without drilling into the practical, empirical labour market ramifications.¹¹ Indeed, the actual value of student migration is tempered by a range of questions, including what is being studied, by whom, at what types of institution, and with what post-study labour market result?

Investigations into the aforementioned reveal that the economic performance and contribution of students, is variable, to say the least. Hawthorne’s own findings in Australia, suggest that skilled graduates (former international students) have fared worse than state and/or employer-sponsored, onshore and offshore skilled independent, and *even* family class migrants on wage differentials, for example, despite having overall high labour market participation and low unemployment rates (ibid). Analogous work in the US context, similarly reveals that:

Despite the widespread belief that US-educated students are among the best and the brightest, and indeed they may be highly capable individuals, it appears that they are not as highly selected as individuals who enter first as temporary workers... students experience an increase in earnings after adjusting to permanent status when they finally earn the same as natives. Student status sets in play a trajectory of initially very

¹¹ Australian skilled migration policy has, by contrast, been very closely guided by labour-focused scholars such as Birrell, Hawthorne and Richardson as firstly, expert policy review panellists, then recommenders of government priorities, and finally researchers of the outcomes with privileged access to state immigration data. The robustness of such work is not in question, nor the value of having migration scholarship directly interface with policy setting. However, by utilising a narrow band of expert ideas, which have also set the terms of reference for research and solved self-selected enquiries, one might reasonably query, are there broader questions that might be asked of what the state requires of economic migration policy?

low earnings that do not improve until the final step in the visa pathway up to seven years after they start working following graduation (Lowell & Avato 2014).

The situation is similarly problematic in less traditional migration destinations. Germany and Japan, for example, “have liberalised immigration controls for skilled migrants, set targets for foreign student enrolments in university, and introduced visa categories to enable foreign graduates to enter their labour markets” (Liu-Farrer & Shire 2020) to address their declining workforce populations. And yet, despite favourable conditions for integrating foreign graduates into skilled employment, in both countries today, “a relatively modest share of foreign graduates actually receive jobs appropriate to their skill-level and remain in these labour markets” (ibid).

Cultural and language barriers no doubt account for some underemployment and placement into occupational niches, noting also the new definitional elasticity of “the bottom tiers of the ‘skilled’ category to incorporate occupational groups that had been formally labelled as ‘unskilled’ or ‘semi-skilled’, including agricultural workers, housekeepers and construction workers” (Liu-Farrer et al 2020). Equally though, it may be that poor outcomes for skilled graduates are a function of their lack of expeditious options for permanent settlement and/or full participation and integration into the host polity. Indeed, the socio-economic flexibility afforded by permanency has even been mooted to be worthy of consideration in the USA context to accelerate graduate labour market integration; “migrant workers ability to achieve steady, rather than discontinuous, earnings growth requires policies that make their visa portable... permit[ting] them to readily change employers” – more attainable via “an admission system that favours fully-portable permanent visas to improve worker productivity” (Lowell & Avato 2014).

Students themselves are, however, attuned to post-graduation realities of study abroad, despite the best efforts of those promoting it to convey a “narrative of international study as a precursor to potential global citizenship” (Findlay et al 2017). As one recent multi-scalar analysis of actual graduate experiences summarises, “while many international students embark on their international education with high hopes of gaining employment... their experiences made most of them accept these plans as unrealistic”, demonstrating the “disjuncture between the ‘imagined’ outcomes of studying abroad and the students’ reality” (Moskal 2016). In sum, for mobile students, whilst it is easy to study, it is hard to work, and harder still to fully socioeconomically integrate.

To what extent then, are mobile students a necessity, amidst the pandemic? Preliminary evidence from recipient states suggests they are certainly more than a luxury; New Zealand, for example, has in October 2020 approved 250 overseas graduate students to enter the country as an exception to its current closed-border policy, in view of their economic value¹² – a move which rather emulates the longstanding US focus on securing international doctoral students. Hence, whilst unbridled expansion of educational migration may no longer be as probable, and higher-education not the refuge in periods of low employment it is often thought to be (such as after the GFC), its demand and supply will continue – though, perhaps favouring quality in favour of quantum, in both regards. The curtailment of international (and internal) mobility, coupled with shifts to ‘contactless’ learning experiences, may lead to less willingness on the part of discerning transnational consumers to cross borders ‘just’ to study. Simultaneously though, the creation of oversupply by sending states – educating for export – continues unabated, as evidenced by states “channelling aspiring [nurse] migrants sideways to other sectors of the labour market” (Ortiga 2020). And finally, there are recipient states, for whom the desire (and need) for foreign skills, labour and/or lucrative tuitions, seem unlikely to arrest indefinitely.

6. PREFERENTIAL MIGRATION

Literatures examined in the preceding section validate the argument that educational migration provides less reliable, out-of-the-box-implementable human capital, than is often claimed. In fact, given limited time to find suitable work, unevenness of career opportunities, and barriers to settlement, mobile students are empirically proved to be not economically dissimilar from humanitarian and family migrants – and therefore would be better categorised in ‘transitional’ terms, requiring of time to settle and make fuller contributions. Despite imperfect labour market outcomes, however, it is also clear that both recipient and sending states have ongoing interest in foreign workers and students, irrespective of whether they become settlers. For this reason, in this penultimate section, we argue that skilful future economic migration policy requires some measure of a final ingredient: temporary labour sourced via mobility provisions contained within bilateral and/or multilateral agreements – essentially, to provide states with an avenue for brokering movement with preferential

¹² As officially explained by the NZ government, the exception “is a balanced decision that recognises the vital role international education will play in the recovery and rebuild of New Zealand... [given] international PhDs and other postgraduate students make a significant contribution to our research and innovation systems.” Hipkins, C. (2020) ‘Border exceptions for a small number of international students with visas’, *beehive.govt.nz* Press Release, 12 October 2020.

partners, manage labour supply chains and inventory, and most critically, cope with the often heated polemics of immigration.

Although comparatively little attention has been paid to the ‘trade-mobility’ nexus (relative to other studies of migration), it is not a new area of enquiry. Rich work in the area exists from early 2000 onwards, accompanying the maturation of GATS Mode 4 commitments globally.¹³ It is not till the following decade, however, that studies began to emerge detailing quantitative estimates of gains, in support of the proposition that “the entire world suffers from a loss of potential income that could be realized through greater [trade-]mobility” (Stephenson & Hufbauer 2011). Some gravity modelling even found “overwhelming evidence of a pro-migration effect of PTAs [preferential trade agreements]”, and further argued that “if governments are constrained from increasing migration inflows (e.g. because of negative attitudes towards migration amongst the electorate), they could use PTAs to boost immigration in case of labour market shortages” (Orefice 2012). Indeed, contemporaneous legal scholarship from a key commentator¹⁴, reported that “when it comes to the migration of high-skill labour... countries increasingly opt for venues outside the regulatory constraints of traditional immigration law and prefer the mobility chapters of free trade agreements” (Panizzon 2011). Still, numbers involved in movement associated with global trade in services have been comparatively small-scale, despite general enthusiasm for the prospects of ‘trade-ification’ of migration flows (Lavenex & Jurje 2015) and suggestions that “movement in this area is likely to increase” (Howe & Owens 2016). Partly this is attributable to the unwieldy and lengthy process of agreeing multistate accords. Consequently, scholars have generally advocated for bilateralism in economic migration management, suggesting that:

There are manifold benefits of bilateralism, ranging from correcting the high-skill selectivity of the multilateral GATS Mode 4 and domestic law, to prospecting the grounds for future regional migration agreements, and to delegating certain responsibilities in migration to the private sector. Bilateralism does, however, have its downsides, including an asymmetric balance of interests tilted in favour of the destination country, a poor human rights record, and a potential incompatibility with the MFN clause of art II GATS (Panizzon 2011).

In excess of three-hundred trade agreement are currently registered with the WTO, of which seventy-seven contained labour provisions in 2016 (covering 136 countries), of which almost two-thirds came into existence after 2008 (ILO 2017). Most reference the 1998 *Declaration on*

¹³ For a comprehensive early study of GATS Mode 4, see for example: Mattoo, A. & Carzaniga, A. (eds.) (2003) *Moving People to Deliver Services*. Washington DC: The World Bank.

¹⁴ For another detailed exploration of the economic and political ramifications of liberalization of national rules of migration through international legal agreements, see also: Trachtman, J.P. (2009) *The International Law of Economic Migration*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and similar labour-standards instruments; labour provisions in trade agreements (LPTA) are consequently said to ease labour-market access for working-age women and narrow the gender wage gap, whilst not diverting or decreasing trade flows (ibid). More recent scholarship does question their efficacy in this regard though, with some “empirical analysis reveal[ing] that labour provisions might be a suitable instrument to ensure labour standards, but also that a ‘global race to the bottom’ may not be prevented through these provisions per-se” (Martinez-Zarzoso & Kruse 2019). Indeed, “an unwillingness to convert [trade-labour linkages] rhetoric into practice” (Araujo 2018) seems commonplace globally, noting lukewarm treatments by traditional immigration destinations (bar Canada), and total absence of LPTA use by most nations in Asia and the Middle East. In this respect, it is salient to remember that migration clauses in trade agreements are threefold, pertaining to security, rights, and mobility (Jurje & Lavenex 2014) – with the former being much more commonly employed than the latter.

Advocating for mobility provisions is, however, shrewd in in the current health and political climate.¹⁵ In sum, opposition to immigration isn’t always economically rational, nor immigration limited by technology. Rather, the most common constraint is politics – and more specifically intractable attitudes of the polity. As Hainmueller and collaborators explain:

Consistently, immigration attitudes show little evidence of being strongly correlated with personal economic circumstances. Instead, research finds that immigration attitudes are shaped by sociotropic concerns about its cultural impacts – and to a lesser extent its economic impacts – on the nation as a whole. This pattern of results... holds for the United States, Canada, and Western Europe... [whereas] as an explanation of mass attitudes toward immigration, the labor market competition hypothesis has repeatedly failed to find empirical support, making it something of a zombie theory (Hainmueller & Hopkins 2014).¹⁶

Judicious economic migration policies are thus, constrained by less-economically-judicious anti-immigration sentiments. In a world with few limited-friction labour markets but persistent demand then, and where geographic proximity and regionalism increasingly matter more than mega-regionalism, mobility provisions offer options for states – who may already feel a need to finesse their citizenry with “state discourses and policies systematically construct[ing] foreign workers (unlike foreign talent) as outsiders” (Yeoh 2013). Therefore, whether via “the free trade template... used to ‘hunt globally for talent’” (Panizzon 2011), or

¹⁵ This is especially the case in the UK context, given forthcoming changes with EU membership; see for example, Winters, LA & Tambari, N. (2017) *Can FTAs Enhance Opportunities for UK Higher Education after Brexit?* London: Universities UK.

¹⁶ See also Hainmueller, J. & Hiscox, M.J. (2010) ‘Attitudes toward Highly Skilled and Low-skilled Immigration: Evidence from a Survey Experiment’, *American Political Science Review*, 104(1): 61-84.

bilateral agreements to accrue “the benefits of entry of low-skilled migrants [which] tend to be immediate, concentrated and measurable in economic terms” (Martin 2015), preferential migration matters also, in curating balanced economic migration policy.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has patently not attempted to “‘go native’ in the sense of truly understanding the historical emergence, logic and thought-world of each theory, discipline and paradigm ‘from within’” (de Haas 2014), pertaining to migration. Notwithstanding, it has attempted to discard historical tropes bounding migration scholarship, and present blue-sky thinking in earnest, consistent with a need to “embed migration research in a more general understanding of *contemporary* society” (Castles 2010). It concurs with the argument that, “unless skilled migration is placed within a broader context of development policy and a more integrated approach to immigration policy, its management will remain an illusion” (Skeldon 2018), and likewise, calls for scholarship to “make valuable interventions within political, policy, media and lay discourses of migration” (Smith 2019). It further concurs with early assessments of possible post-pandemic futures: demand for immigrant labour and international study may fall and not recover, migrant decision-making might change, anti-immigrant sentiment could ferment, autocracy thrive, restrictions proliferate, travel remain cautious, and commuter flows decline alongside the acceleration of digitisation (Gamlen 2020). All, are possibilities. Notwithstanding, the model proposed herein, whilst bold, and undoubtedly flawed – remains *prima facie* viable. What is more, in the absence of the rebuttable presumption, it is arguably also desirable, if economic migration policy is to begin to overcome the significant ‘discursive gap’ long evidenced in migration policies generally (Czaika & de Haas 2013).

Whilst “the drop in immigration flows into major industrialized countries hit by the financial and economic crisis was rather short-lived” (Czaika & Parsons 2018), unabated expansion into the ‘fourth globalisation’ which “creates the right humus for ‘more’ migration, rather than for ‘less migration’” (Livi-Bacci 2018), may not be as certain in the decade ahead. Immigrants across the skill gamut are nevertheless, argued to be not only a demographic necessity, but also a social one – “[they constitute] a growing proportion of the labour force in agriculture... [and] their settlement in rural areas may sustain the local economy, give new life to declining or abandoned villages, safeguard a precious historical patrimony and protect the environment” (ibid). Meanwhile, at the other end of the skill spectrum, moves by traditional immigrant recipient nations suggest that the desire for ‘human capital’ harvesting

continues, despite the pandemic. Recent overtures by Australia and the UK in relation to mass procurement of persons from Hong Kong, are illustrative¹⁷ – of benevolence and/or self-interest, depending on one’s perspective.

“The current obsession with immigration as a problem” (Anderson 2019), may or not be problematic. It could however, be reconceived as an opportunity for renewal in the forthcoming, as yet *uncertain*, age of migration. Then again, as has been wryly noted, “perhaps we are experiencing not an ‘age of migration’ but an age of migration research” (ibid). As with migration-and-development optimism/pessimism debates, this is a claim bearing “an atavistic resemblance to earlier ones” (Gamlen 2014); scholars have trumpeted that “at no other time in the past century has there been such focused and intense global interest in international migration” (Bedford & Ho 2006) for years now. The border closing nature of COVID might make now a special case, and unlike the GFC, which “was used differently by countries. Whereas some implemented policy restrictions, others remained open towards high-skilled immigrants or even further liberalised their policies” (Cerna 2016). Perhaps then, there is an analogous lesson to be learnt from the failures of reticence and austerity in the wake of that last substantial disruption to global order – and states could actively promote and facilitate migration in years ahead, to support future growth. If so, vaccine or no vaccine, economic migration should be rethought with a view to the longer term; mobility might not be indefinitely arrested, but new frictions will likely pose challenges previously outside of our realm of conception.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned, this paper does not propose to dispense of categories, but rather, to reorganise the baskets into which they are gathered in the first instance – without even necessarily wading into the morality of the “recently intensified securitization of migration” or “increasing militarization of migration management and offshore detention” (Ehrkamp 2017). To do so would be a first step in rethinking current regimes which unquestionably create uncertainty and economic inefficiency, if not also undue waste. Likewise, if the goal remains to maintain competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants, the prescription is clear: “Countries providing a road to permanency attract, on average, double the number of high-skilled migrants in comparison with those that do not. Permanency rights... increase the option value of staying longer in the host country and expand future opportunities” (Czaika & Parsons 2017). Equally, perhaps future economic migration policy focus should shift away from current preoccupations with skill altogether,

¹⁷ For further details, see for example: Hartcher, P. (2020) ‘Australia set to join ‘the greatest human capital harvest in recent memory’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 2020.

and towards a ‘human-centred approach’ supporting the “need to *rethink the way nation-states categorise migrants*, but also how we employ these concepts in our own studies” (Lui-Farrer et al 2020). Economic migration policy, as with life itself, is indeed made sense of through categories, which both organise reality, and become reality. Development of better categorical understandings, therefore, can only help to guide us towards better immigration futures. ■

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PAPER II – NARRATIVES ON COMPETITION FOR SKILLED MIGRANTS
FROM CANADA, AUSTRALIA, AND THE USA IN THE PRE-GFC ERA

1. ABSTRACT

This paper presents narratives on competition for skilled migrants from Canada, Australia, and the USA in the pre-GFC era, using rare primary data acquired from within, and adjunct to state immigration apparatuses. Juxtaposed against Koslowski's (2014) ideal-typical models typologising selective migration policies, it reveals the extent of the 'discursive gap' (Czaika & de Haas 2013) between published migration policy rhetoric, and the reality of migration priorities as understood and driven by actors with agency to direct policy. Based upon the cumulative close dialogues acquired from actors investigated, the paper proposes a four-part 'stylised prescription' for how states could act to maintain competitiveness within the global market for skilled migrants. It concludes that state-coordinated international migration cannot satisfy time-sensitive domestic labour market demand, however, might be able to satisfy longer-term labour, and demographic demand – such that international migration should be reaffirmed, as a long-game endeavour.

Keywords: close dialogue; discursive gap; highly-skilled; immigration; stylised fact

2. INTRODUCTION

Competition for skilled migrant labour between nations is not new, but is increasingly fierce. It presented an especially significant challenge for traditional immigration recipient (TIR) countries including Canada, Australia, and the USA in the decade preceding the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), given the entry of many other OECD member nations to the global skilled migration market, and free movement of persons within the EU. A mission for these states, therefore, in an era of relative hypermobility, was to find ways to attract and retain skilled labour in a highly competitive, lucrative and fluid international marketplace.

This paper considers the divergent approaches taken by the aforementioned states towards this common end, by presenting narratives on competition for skilled migrants from Canada, Australia and the USA in the pre-GFC era, using rare primary data acquired from within, and adjunct to state immigration apparatuses. Juxtaposed against Koslowski's (2014) ideal-typical models typologising selective migration policies, it submits that the *jurisdictional disposition* of states is significant in informing their policies and attendant outcomes, and accounts for some of the 'discursive gap' (Czaika & de Haas 2013) between published migration policy rhetoric, and the reality of migration priorities as understood and driven by actors with agency to direct policy. It suggests that policymakers have been constrained by the narrow parameters within which immigration is allowed to be explained to the public at large, given there has been little positive political capital in being anything but anti-immigration for decades – despite the real, active and aggressive efforts of the TIR nations to compete for skilled labour in the last twenty years.

Based upon the totality of the close dialogues acquired from actors investigated, the paper proposes a four-part *stylised prescription* for how states could act to maintain competitiveness within the global market for skilled migrants: by looking beyond servicing their immediate domestic labour-market demands, facilitating transitions from temporary to permanent residence, centralising immigration administrative mechanisms, and removing barriers to social and economic integration. It concludes as stylised fact, that state-coordinated international migration cannot satisfy time-sensitive domestic labour market demand, however, might be able to satisfy longer-term labour, and demographic demand – such that international migration should be reaffirmed, as a long-game endeavour. Accordingly, the paper encourages the utilisation of immigration for 'nation building' vis-à-vis developing a deeper national permanent skills base, arguing that it is impracticable to be truly responsive to

short-term fluctuations in skills demand, and therefore, investing in human capital more broadly may be a better investment for economic and social growth.

To be clear, this paper is not a comparative evaluation of the effectiveness of selective migration policy models; the literature brims with efforts to gauge and evaluate (Czaika & de Haas 2013; Boucher & Cerna 2014; Boyd 2014; Cerna 2014; Chand & Tung 2019; Hercog & Sandoz 2018; Kofman 2014), descriptively calculate (Hawthorne & To 2014; Lowell & Avato 2014; Smith & Fernandez 2017), and econometrically model and statistically quantify (Blit et al 2019; Docquier & Rapoport 2012; Grogger & Hanson 2011; Ortega & Peri 2013) the ‘success’ of skilled migration policies, using different disciplinary and methodological yardsticks. The value of such scholarship is not in dispute. Notwithstanding, what such studies commonly and consistently demonstrate are the inherent weaknesses and limitations of using immigration to *prima facie* satisfy labour market demands – at least at a rate commensurate with published policy rhetoric. Hence, the evocation (and perhaps provocation) herein is instead, to encourage broader re-thinking of the function, purpose, and realities of international immigration, in the midst of a pandemic, and at the geopolitical foothills of the forthcoming uncertain age of migration.

Whilst the propositions and stylised prescription forwarded are predicated upon pre-GFC data, significantly, pre-GFC thinking is also the migration logic TIR nations rebounded to post-GFC, in view of the economic necessity of migrant inflows in a globalised world. It is the thinking, moreover, that the paper contends TIR nations will essentially default to again, in post-pandemic futures, in the absence of interventions which challenge orthodoxy. That is, states will continue to pursue optimised immigration outcomes, aligned to satisfying short-term demands of their local labour market, whilst attempting to finesse migration polemics – albeit in place-specific, divergent ways, aligned to domestic societal conditions. Instead, the suggestion made by this paper is that states might benefit from creating and communicating new narratives on the necessity for, and desirability and value of, international immigration as a pillar of procuring post-pandemic prosperity.

3. IDEAL-TYPICAL MODELS, JURISDICTIONAL DISPOSITIONS & DISCURSIVE GAPS

Koslowski's (2014) ideal-typical models typologising selective migration policies provide a sensible starting point for understanding immigration logic that has proliferated worldwide in the last two decades – prioritising acquisition of the highly-skilled, in pursuit of the 'best and brightest', to ensure national economic competitiveness, and state-to-state competitiveness for skilled migrant labour as a resource. In summary, selective migration policies are grouped by him into three models:

the "human capital" model based on government selection of permanent immigrants using a point system as practised by Canada; the "neo-corporatist" model based on government selection using a point system with extensive business and labour participation, as practised by Australia; and the market-oriented, demand-driven model based on employer selection of migrants, as practised by the US (Koslowski 2014).

Earlier, foundational, comparative analysis of selective migration policies (by Koser & Salt 1997, for example) is said to have conflated TIR approaches together into an oversimplified 'New World' mode of immigrant labour selection, with subsequent categorisation (by the IOM 2002, initially) likewise collapsing thinking into an imperfect binary of 'supply-driven versus demand-driven systems'. Koslowski's categorisations are thus presented as a more accurate (if still idealised) depiction of the policy models employed globally:

the human capital model with a point system emphasizing education and language; the neo-corporatist model with a point system emphasizing occupations in demand as determined by industry cooperating with labour; and a demand-driven model and that allows employers (instead of the government) to select the highly skilled by sponsoring migrants for temporary visas and permanent residence (Koslowski 2014).

Ironically, Koslowski is the first to admit, and reconfirm in follow-up work, that these idealised models tended towards the anachronistic even at the time of writing; "the three ideal-typical selective migration policy models may soon become more historical artefacts than actual descriptions of current government policy practice as the governments of each country move their policies towards other models" (Koslowski 2018). Other significant contributors to debates on highly-skilled migration similarly remark: "Recent policy developments demonstrate, however, an increasing hybridization of skill-selective immigration systems. Demand-driven policies coexist with supply-driven elements in an attempt to balance the conflicting aims of numbers versus employability" (Czaika & Parsons 2017). Thus, neatly compartmentalising is problematic, because states borrow from one

another such that there are no ‘pure’ systems. How better to understand them, then? And what more can be known, to support our understanding of these models?

This paper characterises the nature of immigration apparatus in each of the aforementioned states in adjunct fashion; the story of Australian immigration can be distilled to a narrative of ‘bullishness’, Canada by ‘correctness’, the USA by a cavalier ‘indifference’. These ‘jurisdictional dispositions’, whilst simplistic at face value, are argued to be powerful, focused characterisations which help to explain how immigration has, and may continue to be conditioned in place-specific ways. In relation to each state, the paper forwards the following core arguments:

- Canada’s narrative of uniqueness through overt commitment to multiculturalism as a state-sponsored policy has been symbolically instrumental in defining its attractiveness for migrants – however, produce mixed results in securing global talent because of its almost slavish adherence to procedural ‘correctness’;
- Australia, the literal geographic outlier, has ‘bullishly’ led skilled migration policy developments globally for decades – spearheading points systems and preselection tools such as SkillsSelect – but with differential domestic results, particularly vis-à-vis regional dispersion of migrants and tertiary student migration programs; and
- Two major factors have underpinned the success of the USA as the most competitive skilled migration destination since the latter half of the 20th century: the ‘attraction of economy’ and the ‘attraction of mythology’ – neither of which is actually the product of the states’ cavalier ‘indifference’ towards procuring the world’s best and brightest.

Canada: Where Multiculturalism Matters

This section considers Canada’s distinctive shift in the 2000’s to a human capital focused policy for immigration, and the history of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* 2002 which enacted the approach; Russo (2008) best describes the evolution and catalyst of securitisation post 9/11 concerns. Uniquely amongst OECD nations, Canada sought to recruit people meeting a minimum standard but able to fit into a flexible, interchangeable, dynamic economy – at a time when all other nations were keenly focussed on using immigration to service time-sensitive, specific labour market needs. The system continued to utilise its points test at its core, but an evolved version with renewed emphasis on ‘adaptability’, alongside standard metrics of an applicant’s level of education, language proficiency, age and work experience.

The underlying section narrative is one of ‘correctness’ and bucking the global trend, and the potential consequences of doing so. Canada alone operated within a paradigm aligning its immigration approach to an overarching long-term policy goal of augmenting the national population – and all while also offering relatively generous terms to migrants’ vis-à-vis access to settlement services, social security and public funds. But perhaps most notably, the significance of Canada’s official and overt commitment to multiculturalism as a state-sponsored policy is considered, and argued to be symbolically instrumental in defining its attractiveness for migrants. Indeed, this is the case to the extent that “the management of diversity has led to the normative theories of multiculturalism, [and] interculturalism, inspired by Canadian political theory and by Canadian reality” (Kastoryano 2018).

Australia: A Fair Go, No?

This section begins with a brief history and background to past immigration strategies and policies in Australia aimed at populating ‘The Lucky Country’, before exploring more recent shifts towards short-term and contract employment programs which have served to inspire other OECD competitors. It touches upon the complex tapestry of permanent and temporary migration schemes, which place increased emphasis on attracting young, skilled, English proficient migrants with skills in demand who are able to gain employment quickly and make a positive contribution to Australia’s economy. It also notes the significance and success rate for State-Specific Migration Mechanisms which seek to encourage regional development and geographical dissemination of the migrant population, with respect to Sapeha, H. (2017).

The section observes the irony of Australia – the literal geographic outlier – being something of a ground zero in recent times for the idea that OECD states should actively compete for the ‘best and brightest’ in the global market for skills. Likewise, it observes how “Europe’s far right fell in love with Australia’s immigration policy” (Polakow-Suransky 2017). Ironically then, whilst the country has undoubtedly been at the forefront of many migration policy developments subsequently emulated by others, it is argued that many of its bullish schemes have been ill-conceived, and produced significant unintended consequences. Chief amongst these was the inadvertent use of the tertiary student and skilled migration programs to service the country’s unskilled labour needs, brought about by accident rather than design.

This section begins with an historic examination of the legal labour importation schemes into the USA through temporary visa admission categories, and most notably the H-1B Specialty Worker Visa for ‘aliens coming temporarily to perform services in a specialty occupation’. It discusses the *Immigration Act* (1990) as the first in a series of turning points which were designed to introduce a broadened focus on the economic skills and potential of immigrants, while preserving the overriding commitment to family reunion which is unique to the USA’s immigration system. It then considers how a focus on temporary rather than permanent migration mechanisms, appears to not have acted as a significant disincentive to skilled migrants heading towards America (unlike with other countries), owing in no small part to the prevalence and quality of engineering and science research opportunities available – which are a competitive advantage for the USA.

The section forwards the argument that two major factors underpin the success of the USA as the ‘most competitive’ skilled migration destination since the latter half of the 20th century. The first of these is the ‘attraction of economy’, which even in times of poor economic performance, endures as a pull factor for skilled migrants and tertiary students. The second is the ‘attraction of mythology’, which likewise, remains a critical factor in attracting migrants to an indefatigable American dream which may or may not even really exist (anymore). Thus the story of the USA, supported by the empiric findings, is one of seemingly effortless attainment of skilled workers, in spite of an overall immigration policy framework of state ‘indifference’ not explicitly aimed to secure them.

In closing, the section also draws attention to recent scholarship tacitly supporting this provocative position. Blit et al (2019) argue, for example, that “the USA is likely an outlier... owing to its exceptional ability to attract top foreign talent through its world-renowned universities, leading technology firms, employer driven immigrant selection programs (the H-1B, in particular) and perhaps most importantly its higher labor market returns to skill” (ibid). Likewise, Kennedy (2019), which forensically documents the rise and fall of H-1Bs, and notes the relative power of firms in shaping immigration policy, including those in high-tech. Finally the point is made that, as argued by Light (2013), it is the migration industry (in the very broadest sense) in the USA that has always been more relevant than the state in facilitating historic human movement – and this remains the case in the globalised era.

The question then arises as to what precisely is meant by a ‘discursive gap’? Relying entirely and heavily upon the owners of the nomenclature, I note:

In qualitative and quantitative assessments of the effectiveness of immigration policies, it is often unclear whether policy discourses, policies on paper, or implemented policies are used as an evaluative benchmark. To improve conceptual clarity, we elaborated a framework for analyzing immigration policy effectiveness based on the distinction between three policy gaps: the discursive gap (the discrepancy between public discourses and policies on paper), the implementation gap (the disparity between policies on paper and their implementation), and the efficacy gap (the extent to which implemented policies affect migration). To avoid confusion, empirical evaluations should specify the policy gap they are addressing Czaika & de Haas (2013)...

Frequently, the (generally tougher) public discourses are implicitly or explicitly used as an analytical benchmark in evaluating migration policy effects and effectiveness, which can easily lead to an overestimation of policy failure. For instance, if we assume that governments want to stop migration based on politicians’ aggressive public statements, it is tempting to conclude that policies have failed if immigration continues or increases. However, public discourses are often not matched by policy formation and implementation. Discursive gaps are very common in public policy and should not be automatically equated with policy failure. [Czaika & de Haas 2103]

Mayblin also notes the duplicitous nature of immigration debate in the context of asylum seekers; for example, “disingenuous asylum seekers (economic migrants in disguise) are ‘pulled’ to particular countries by economic opportunities” (Mayblin 2019). I then proceed to identify three examples of significant discursive gaps, arising from data collected for this study:

- From Canada – data which demonstrates that despite policy rhetoric to the contrary, suggesting a fair and functional immigration apparatus sequentially and logically considering candidates for immigration, known system-paralysis from applicant backlogs far exceeding that which has since been publicly acknowledged;
- From Australia – data confirming that the skilled immigration program has long been knowingly used to service Australia’s unskilled labour market needs; and
- From USA – data documenting the delusion of ‘comprehensive immigration reform’.

Thus what the historic empirical data contributed by the paper does, is show that these concerns, brought to light in publication years after the fact, were issues long known to practitioners. The jurisdictional dispositions of each state are at the core of their ideal-type models – worth knowing because they anchor policy variations. That is, deviation is possible only within tolerances. Fundamental reorganisation of migration policy then, arguably overdue, is only truly possible by recognising the foundational constraints.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

This paper is built upon qualitative interview data derived from eighty-one semi-structured interviews conducted with respondents in six cities, organised by three broad classes of respondent. Methodologically, it is predicated on the use, collection and presentation of ‘close dialogues’ (Clark 1998), to provide empirical accounts of migration realities in each jurisdiction, as distinct from idealised and/or theoretical depictions of migration policies.

CITY	DATE	RESPONDENTS	n =	RESPONDENT DETAILS
Washington DC, USA	Apr 2006	G (Government)	6	USCIS (US Citizenship & Immigration Services), National Science Foundation, US Census Bureau, Office of Immigration Statistics Homeland Security
		P (Public Figure)	4	Susan Martin, Demetri Papademetriou, B. Lindsay Lowell, Andrew Schoenholtz
Vancouver, Canada	Mar 2006	N (NGO)	3	Peopplewise, Vancouver Community College, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia
		P (Public Figure)	3	David Ley, Catherine Dauvergne, Daniel Hiebert
Ottawa, Canada	Apr 2006	G (Government)	21	CIC (Citizenship and Immigration Canada), StatsCan (Statistics Canada), HRSDC (Human Resources and Social Development Canada), Privy Council Office
		N (NGO)	1	Immigration Consultant
Toronto, Canada	Apr 2006	N (NGO)	12	Immigration Law Firms, Costi Immigrant Services, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, WES (World Education Services), Laidlaw Foundation, Maytree Foundation
		G (Government)	4	CIC (Citizenship and Immigration Canada), Ministry of Economic Development, City of Toronto Council
		P (Public Figure)	2	Lucia Lo, Carl James
Adelaide, Australia	Apr 2008	G (Government)	14	DIAC (Department of Immigration and Citizenship), South Australian Government
		P (Public Figure)	2	Graeme Hugo, Sue Richardson
Canberra, Australia	May 2008	G (Government)	8	DIAC (Department of Immigration and Citizenship), Australian Federal Parliament
		P (Public Figure)	1	Phillip Ruddock
TOTAL		(G 53, N 16, P 12)	81	(USA 10, Canada 56, Australia 25)

Table 1. Summary of Government (G), Non-Government (N), and Public Figures (P) Interviewed

In defence of my research design and methodology, and especially the choice to convey ideas as a ‘stylised prescription’ leading to the conclusion of an actual stylised fact (especially absent an underlying econometric model), I would draw attention to the following literature. Firstly, Clark (1998) provides the underlying validation of my data collection method; choosing close dialogue over the design of watertight economic model was a conscious choice because:

Unlike other forms of empirical research, close dialogue relies upon the intimacy or closeness of researchers to industry respondents, a level of personal commitment quite at odds with the conventional notions of scientific disassociation and objectivity... [it] is a mode of case-study research, one that uses structured and

unstructured interviews in the context of relationships between nominal equals to reveal the actual logic of decision making (Clark 1998).

Notwithstanding, “our ability to study migration is significantly enhanced by carefully conceived comparative research designs” (Bloemraad 2013) – which admittedly, was not entirely the case at the genesis of data collection for this paper. Rather, initially, enormous amounts of data were collected across a vast range of topics, in an effort to cover the field on virtually all angles on skilled migration pertinent pre-GFC (see Appendix A Focus Questions for Interviewees). Why compare, what to compare, and whom to compare (ibid), were never the issue herein. Instead the methodological question was, how to compare, contextualise, and *characterise*, the data and results emanating from pursuit of the same fifteen-plus lines of enquiry pursued, across the globe, across all respondent subjects, across the totality of time.

The position I reached, was the surprising absence of stylised facts pertaining to immigration, gave me the licence to try to frame the totality of my data in the idiom of such. Partridge & Rickman (1999), Stark & Wang (2002), Bertoli & Brucker (2011), and Nakajima & Tabuchi (2011) are early examples. Gerolimetto & Magrini (2018) is a more recent one (interregional mobility in the EU), as with Russo & Salsano (2019) (on electoral systems and immigration), and Griffith (2020) perhaps the most recent attempt “to assess and revise stylized facts concerning the relationships between environmental change and human migration” (ibid). Less convincing but perhaps more innovative is Kreickemeier & Wrona (2017) “developing a model that can explain two-way migration of high-skilled individuals between countries at the same level of economic development” (ibid). Most comprehensive and compelling though was Mariani et al (2021), notably concluding that:

“The evidence available for Italy certainly does not match the policy relevance of an issue that has been dominating the public debate in the recent years. Moreover, if taken at face value, the evidence for Italy does not lead to any conclusion alarming enough to justify the concerns present in the society at large. Therefore, either the analysis of the economic consequences of immigration is not the relevant dimension to focus on or it has not addressed some very relevant issues” (ibid).

What I did was inductive data collection, to try to better understand the reality of highly-skilled migration, beyond polished policy documentation (and even subsequently flow data). What follows from it, is a stylised prescription for state competitiveness, and perhaps rethinking international migration in the post-pandemic era, derived from the cumulative totality of the close dialogues. I note also, that blue-sky thinking exists elsewhere too – Collier (2013) and Goldin et al (2011) – are significant examples. My contribution is very modest by comparison, but perhaps offers some value nonetheless.

5. LOOKING BEYOND IMMEDIATE LABOUR-MARKET DEMANDS

The first of my four propositions is that states should look beyond trying to use international migration to service their short term domestic labour market demands – because frankly, it is now well evidenced to be a poor strategy. My data, supported by the literature, shows time and again that attempting to fill time-sensitive job vacancies with temporary workers mostly creates underemployment, wage distortions, and education and expectation mismatches. It's an inefficient use of state resources; there is in fact a case to be made for encouraging states to focus on long-term immigration, and empower non-state actors – intermediaries, firms and the migration industry – to facilitate temporary labour movements on their behalf instead. The latter increasingly have superior capacity and access to tools and infrastructure to quickly job-match by industry and place – even taking into account triaging systems like Australia's Skill Select and Canada's Express Entry. Looking beyond satisfying immediate labour market demand means more than just focusing on longer term immigration candidates, and giving non-government players the imprimatur to actively expedite workers globally. Fundamentally, it requires moving away from using 'skill' as the bedrock construct used to organise immigration logic; preoccupation with 'skill' is what has created the current policy orthodoxy. The literature identifies this issue also, beginning with special editions edited by Boucher and Cerna (2014), and more recently by Liu-Farrer et al (2020):

While the notion of skill is imbued with the notion that it is the objective product of merit, the papers included in this issue instead underline the arbitrariness as well as inflexibility of what determines its hierarchical scaling and interpretation. As such, 'skill' can be as meaningless as 'race' (or ethnicity, cultural background, etc.) in terms of a migrant's actual abilities and contribution to the host nation... It is worthwhile to bear in mind that the categories of 'highly skilled professionals', 'skilled labour' and 'guest workers' are but visa categories, not actual people. (Liu-Farrer et al 2020)

All of the subjects interviewed for this paper – in 2006-2008 – were asked “Who is a ‘skilled’ migrant in your opinion? Are existing government definitions of ‘skilled’ appropriate?” at the outset (See Appendix A). Virtually universally, even then, policy-makers and practitioners and politicians alike, spoke to this deeply problematic premise at the core of migration logic. And yet it has persisted to the point of permeating even recently ‘reimagined’ immigration systems:

Japan is not the only country that has a broad boundary of skilled migration. Australia and New Zealand already have admitted migrants without tertiary education in certain sectors (e.g. farmers, welders and masons) in their regional ‘skilled migration’ schemes... Germany also passed a new immigration law in December 2019 to admit non-EU migrants in the ‘mid-skilled segment’ who do not have tertiary education. As long as they have vocational training and possess knowledge of the German language, they are allowed to work in any occupations and/or look for jobs (Oishi 2020).

6. FACILITATING TRANSITIONS TO PERMANENT RESIDENCE

The second of my four propositions is that nation-states should do more to facilitate transitions for migrants towards permanent residency, creating a general principle where the possibility for staying becomes more the norm than the exception. The literature has always wrestled with this issue – whether it is effective, let alone justifiable and/or sensible to promote temporary guest worker programs, given they so frequently end up resulting in visa-overstayers, the creation of irregularities for the state, and demographic and welfare state distortions. The argument inevitability seeps into the consciousness of the newer migration recipient states; Germany and Japan, for all their extensive recent remodelling of immigration systems, still essentially resist the idea of allowing for transitions to permanency, and will no doubt cyclically repeat past program performance resulting in what some will construe as ‘policy failure’. New studies on talent acquisition in Asia, relatedly reinforce that:

the degree of precarity is higher in Singapore where the majority of highly skilled immigrants have to work on a temporary basis than that in countries where pathways to permanent residency and citizenship are more predictable, such as Australia, Canada and the United States, but few countries are fully open to skilled immigrants. The contradictory role of nation-state in regulating skilled migration – attracting foreign talent while restricting their incorporation into the national polity – deserves further research (Zhan & Zhou 2019).

It may be that further scholarly work on the issue is warranted; a correlated concern identified in existing literature such as Boyd (2014) is that comparative studies of migration can be foundationally flawed by making comparisons based on the assumption of permanent policies. Again, however, I advocate for the abovementioned not based on a philosophical position in the first instance; rather, I do so because my data recognises it as the inexorable reality. Respondents of all persuasions uniformly recognise that migrants come to stay. They are highly motivated by the possibility of permanent residency, and more often than not, dissuaded by the absence of (at least eventually) finding a pathway to legitimate long-term residence. Moreover, they *find* ways to stay, often unexpectedly, and in defiance of the sophisticated mechanisms used to stop them countenancing the option. Indeed, even when they categorically arrive with no intention to stay (notably as students), they often do. A significant allied reality is that migrants move, after arrival, more often than not, with equivalent regularity – something acknowledged in scant literature outside of the Canadian context. A notable exception is Sapeha (2017) which exposes the Australian situation when it comes to migrants’ intentions to move or stay in initial destination.

7. CENTRALISING ADMINISTRATIVE MECHANISMS

The third of my four propositions is that states could better compete in the global market for skilled migrants, ‘against’ other states, but more importantly, with respect to their internal struggle to satisfy labour market demand within the finite capacity of government, by centralising immigration administrative mechanisms. This is an observation born of close dialogue – the kind of proposition that cannot be intellectually reasoned by ‘economists’ economic geography’ (Clark 1998). The argument is not simply a reflection of state actors bemoaning the inefficiencies inherent in public administration, or resource constraints generally. Rather, it speaks to three, interrelated ideas, no doubt influenced by a ‘geographers’ economic geography.

The first sub-point is the most mundane: that immigration outcomes would be improved simply by consolidating sprawling visa categories, and improving processing speed and administration. Specifics for ‘renovating the existing house’ are articulated in my data, but also, for example, more recently by contemporary literature such as Chand & Tung (2019). The issue is that the speed at which immigration systems are tinkered with is breathtakingly fast; even measured against the yardstick of other areas of public policy, or considering lag-times for publication of scholarly literature, solutions for renovation are frequently obsolete by the time they have been readied for public consumption. Accordingly, in this respect, centralisation of administrative mechanisms also necessitates reimagining of categorical understandings of economic migration generally. Bulldoze and rebuild, rather than renovate.

Secondly then, allied to building anew, is to create systems with better integration to modern tools and technology. Again, the historic close dialogues acquired for this study, from the jurisdictions still regarded as the vanguard immigration actors on the global stage, demonstrate that immigration infrastructure has always been thought of as rather backward looking – a point supported by the recent ‘technological-turn’ in immigration scholarship. Immigration administration in the era of globalisation specifically, has been hemmed into being entirely reactive – responding to ‘crises’, to geopolitical changes, and narratives of constraining humanitarian (bad) immigration versus facilitating skilled (good) immigration. Finally, for all the technological sophistry in the world, geography (actually) matters, as ever, even when considering administration. Close dialogues from the pre-GFC era confirm the success of Australia’s strategy of consolidating its economic immigration apparatus into a single place (Adelaide); by contrast globally dispersed migration decision-making has and continues to hinder North American efforts (noting also the demise of the UK’s HSMP).

8. REMOVING BARRIERS TO SOCIAL & ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

The fourth of my four propositions is that states would, on aggregate, be *significantly* better off by investing in removing barriers to social and economic integration for immigrants of all classifications – if not also, more positively investing in integration too. This is a statement that would be supported by my data to the point of it being almost stylised fact of its own; outputs from think-tanks, NGO's and settlement services, decry the waste inherent in actively creating barriers and hurdles to both social and economic integration – to say nothing of Australia's approach to offshoring and indefinite detention of asylum seekers. Huge bodies of published literature in refugee, asylum, and border studies point to how much money has been used and/or wasted in keeping people out, whilst other studies of skilled migration simultaneously reiterate how labour-market outcomes are consistently and dramatically improved by investment in literacy upskilling, social integration, and settlement services generally. Testing the net policy difference in the post-WW2 era is relatively uncharted, noting also that: “immigrant labour is vulnerable to exploitation in the era of neoliberal globalization regardless of skill levels. The terms, such as precarity, insecurity, uncertainty, and permanent temporality, which are usually employed to characterize low-skilled immigrants, can also be applied to at least some of highly skilled immigrants” (Zhan & Zhou 2019).

As noted in a widely cited study, “in general, people do not gain happiness from an increase in their incomes, and migration as a means of gaining an increased income might not amount to an exception to that general pattern” (Bartram 2013). Migrant happiness needn't be a normative policy goal, but migrant unhappiness surely shouldn't be (especially if it is economically irrational). All migrant inflows take time to economically mature – a decade on average, by most current accounts now – so a genuine, rational, alternative is to reconsider the balance between bordering and integration.

In sum, the current orthodoxy persists because it is predicated on disingenuous narratives and discursive gaps; for example, it has been “conclusively established that the idea of the economic pull imaginary absolutely dominated (UK) government explanations for taking away the right to work for asylum seekers, over and above any other reason” (Mayblin 2017). Likewise, it has been politically expedient:

Racism – in its apparently palatable expressions as anti-immigrant sentiment or Islamophobia, or even through more subtle hierarchies of deservingness – has (again) turned out to be a highly successful tool for reactionary mobilization of voters, as demonstrated by Britain's Brexit vote and the gains of anti-immigrant parties in the 2017 elections in Austria, the Netherlands, and Germany (Erkhamp 2019).

The task remains therefore, to build – and normalise and communicate – a better economic case for immigration, for example, starting with disaggregating the different types of job-education mismatch experienced by immigrants (Banerjee et al 2019), but more ambitiously, presenting the positive effect economic integration has on the economy of host countries (Quak 2019).

9. CONCLUSION

The paper culminates by considering the original historic data presented, in the context of modern developments in each state examined. With respect to an attempt to make a scholarly contribution, it notes the value of intellectual reasoning built upon close dialogue – recognising the importance of primary sources and unconstrained empirical testimony to explain phenomena, including the economic, absent econometrics.

Whilst unable to make any claim with regard to whether we are approaching the post-globalisation era, the paper reflects upon whether and if a future of hypermobility might exist again in the post-COVID geopolitical landscape, and the role TIR nations may play in facilitating economic migration movements globally. It concludes that states will, most likely, owing to underlying jurisdictional disposition, and absent of creative intervention, continue to pursue optimised immigration outcomes (and pursuit of the ‘right migrant’), aligned to satisfying the demands of their local labour market, whilst attempting to manage migration polemics – albeit in place-specific, divergent ways, aligned to local societal conditions. Finally, the paper ends by reiterating that states might instead, benefit from creating and communicating new narratives on the necessity for, and value of, international immigration as a pillar of procuring post-pandemic prosperity.

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PAPER III – A PASSAGE TO ELSEWHERE: INDIAN INTERMEDIARY
INFLUENCE UPON HISTORICAL OUTMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

1. ABSTRACT

India has been a prime labour source country for all traditional immigration recipient nations for decades. Outmigration of Indians has been facilitated by its industry of migration agency and immigration consultancy, which seeks to creatively facilitate migrant aspirations to the mutual benefit of agents and applicants. This paper transforms understanding of this phenomenon by examining it from its source and at its formative stage, based on rare data acquired from consultants and pre-departure applicants in Chandigarh, and foreign consulate officers in New Delhi. It triangulates the calculations of consultants, alongside embassy official perspectives, and a novel case study surveying the factors which informed destination-choice decisions amongst the applicant sample. The results highlight the overwhelming importance of pathways to permanent residency as a pull-factor at that time, the substantial impact of intermediary influence at origin, and a desire amongst the potential émigré cohort to pursue a passage to elsewhere, despite robust domestic macroeconomic conditions, and prospects for hardship abroad.

Keywords: agent, consultant, PR, pull-factor, highly-skilled

2. INTRODUCTION

Instead of trying to singularly define what the migration industries are, the more productive question is to ask what work does an understanding of migration industries do? (Cranston et al 2018)

To say that “high-skilled migration policies are *en vogue*” (Czaika & Parsons 2017) is an understatement. OECD and traditional immigration recipient nations have led the charge pursuing them, but have been increasingly followed by countries historically regarded as primarily sending-states – China and India being notable examples. Nevertheless, despite the decades-long ‘war for talent’ (Axelrod et al 2001) and zeal for pursuing the ‘global competition’ for it (OECD 2008; Kuptsch & Pang 2006), data and evidence on these issues remain significantly biased towards historical receiving countries. Indeed, as elders of migration studies have observed, “most migration research has taken the situation in northern destination countries as its starting point, neglecting the perspectives of origin and transit countries, and of migrants” (Castles 2010).

This paper is a contribution towards redressing this imbalance, and understanding global migration from an origin-country of global import – India, a prime labour source nation for all traditional immigration recipient states for decades. Specifically, it examines outmigration of Indians as facilitated by its industry of migration agency and immigration consultancy, cross-referenced with examination of the migration motivations of a pre-departure migrant cohort serviced by the same consultants in Chandigarh, and supplemented by insights from senior foreign consulate officers apprised to the activities of both groups. It is in this regard pre-eminently, that this paper makes a unique contribution – exploring these phenomena at their *formative* stages, directly at their local source. Moreover, by contrast with existing scholarship on intermediaries (largely based in destination countries), the work observes and triangulates complimentary actors – consultants, applicants, and officials – in an *origin* country, at a pre-departure stage, no less. Its findings continue to “question the assumption of Indian-skilled migrants as a privileged group” (Qureshi et al 2013), and significantly, add empirical weight to the twin contentions that “high-skilled migrants are... hypothesized to be strongly attracted by prospects of permanent residency” (Czaika & Parsons 2017), and “offers of permanent residency, while attracting the highly skilled... prove more attractive to non-high-skilled workers” (ibid). What is more, it inductively reveals new insights including fundamentally, that

intermediaries exhibit considerably more influence on destination-choice decision-making for non-elite potential skilled migrants, than existing studies may suggest.

The data and analysis make an original and timely contribution to the global migration research agenda, highlighting the importance of migration intermediaries at the pre-departure stage – a matter which should be of heightened interest to policy makers and scholars alike, given the current global pandemic, restrictions on hypermobility, and calls for rethinking immigration as a long-game endeavour. Thus, whilst intermediary influence on historical outmigration is proved herein to be considerable, it may be more significant still if the forthcoming era is indeed typified by ‘longer stays, less churn’ (Yeoh 2020), requiring states to work more closely with these influential facilitators of international migration.

3. POSITIONING INDIAN INTERMEDIARIES

No examination of the rich macro, meso, and micro level literature which exists in relation to migration from India, is complete without situating it within contributions made by Binod Khadria. Adjunct to insights on race, ethnicity, and the Indian diaspora from others (including M. Baumann, N.R. Chakravarti, C. Clark, P.C. Jain, R.K Jain, J.S. Mangat, C. Peach, B. Pillay, R.R. Ramchandani, S.I Rajan, P. Saran, H. Tinker, S. Vertovec, and K.C. Zachariah), Khadria’s output over decades warrants specific recognition, given its scope and connection to labour migration. His early publications are rooted in exploration of scientific migration in the context of brain drain and brain gain (Krishna & Khadria 1997) – themes which pervade throughout his work (see Khadria 2002) and ultimately provided some of the impetus for the establishment of the *International Migration and Diaspora Studies Project* (IMDS) at Jawaharlal Nehru University (see Khadria et al 2008). Subsequent studies captured the newfound ‘generic IT worker’ emigration of Indians, shifting substantively away from PhD students and professionals in specific occupations, and geographically towards newly emerging destinations in continental Europe, Australasia, East Asia, and South-East Asia, in addition to traditional host countries in the West (Khadria 2001). Thereafter, Khadria was amongst the first in the Indian context, to recognise the significance of outmigration of health care professionals (Khadria 2004) and nurses especially (Khadria 2007), and latterly, the rise in demand for labour in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, for South Asians in the ‘hinterland’ willing to undertake the ‘dirty, difficult and dangerous’, and ultimately also the more occupationally ‘desirable, demanded and diasporic’ (Khadria 2010 and 2016).

Despite expansive contributions, however, even Khadria has proffered little regarding migration intermediaries (or pre-departure decision-making). Whilst studies examining the role of recruiters in labour migration exist, until the mid-2000s the orthodox view presented by them was essentially that the organization of labour migration had “been left in the hands of private agents whose profitability often [came] at the expense of the workers themselves”, with states playing “a minor part in recruitment, leaving the task to commercial brokers who make job placements for a fee” (Abella 2004). Works examining firstly, the role of sending states as facilitators of migration, and secondly, engaging the question of how labour migration is “fostered, constrained, shaped and assisted” (Cranton et al 2018) by intermediaries, are more recent additions to scholarship, and worthy of exposition in turn, to contextualise the results presented hereafter.

Firstly, states are now understood to be engaging in bilateral facilitation of outmigration as an export, remittance and development strategy (see Rodriguez 2010; Iskander 2010; and Ennis & Walton-Roberts 2018); this is widely known to occur in the realm of healthcare and the Philippines, but less commonly attributed to other countries including India, Mexico, Morocco, South Korea and Indonesia. Thompson and Walton-Roberts’ paper on the “global structuring of feminised migrant mobility in the area of nursing”, for example, maps the connections between India’s (and the Philippines’) increasing role in the provision of nurses for international markets, finding that the Indian state is beginning to progressively provide nurses for global demand, despite inadequate supply for its own domestic healthcare sector and “confounding discourses of promotion and restriction” (Thompson & Walton-Roberts 2019).

These studies are precursors to a seismic shift in recent migration scholarship which recognises that sending states have *agency* as managers of international labour migration, and now develop domestic human capital explicitly to target particular foreign markets (Lee 2019). Thus, where sending states were once historically deemphasised in theoretical frameworks to understand labour migration, they are today acknowledged as actors who directly and indirectly intervene in the preparation of migrants for work abroad, help to create linkages between potential employers and migrants, and act as a kind of quality assurance for particular markets. State interventions have furthermore, begun to be categorised into basic modalities, as regimes which “accommodate, facilitate, or direct migrants” – notwithstanding that receiving countries possess most of the power to set the terms of the labour exchange (Lee 2017). Within this paradigm, modern India is seen to be a ‘facilitative but limited’ state, enabling flows through existing channels, and attempting to maximise the gains from, and minimise the costs of

migration, by providing certification for highly skilled workers and some minimal regulation of the recruitment and emigration of unskilled workers.

Notwithstanding these advances, attempts to explicate sending state regimes have yet to intersect with theorisations of international student mobility, despite the long held view that competing for global talent requires the pursuit of both highly skilled labour *and* students (Kuptsch & Pang 2006). Accordingly, early work on this issue by Findlay remains germane, recognising that “in a globally competitive higher education sector it is not just the motivations of mobile students and their parents that are important, but also the supply-side practices of those seeking to recruit talented young people from other countries into universities and other institutes of higher education” (Findlay 2010). More recent attempts to advance theorisation in the field, have offered conceptual frameworks whereby international student migration can be alternatively conceived of as either: a subset of highly skilled migration, or both a product and an underlying mechanism of the globalisation of higher education, or as part of global youth mobility cultures, or in relation to class analysis (King & Sondhi 2018). Uncertainty remains, however, which has no doubt catalysed calls for further scholarship, and specifically, rethinking international migration to and from China and India (Li, Bedford & Khadria 2019), bearing in mind that “the ‘global race for talent’ is no longer a privilege enjoyed only by developed countries” (Li et al 2019).

Secondly then, such calls are all the more pressing, alongside growing literature focused upon intermediaries – parallel facilitators of outmigration, who straddle the juncture of demand and supply side practices. This includes a recent assemblage of papers presented in a special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* ‘Exploring the Migration Industries’. This collection includes perspectives exploring “the role that migration industries play in both acting as agents for the state and assisting migrants to circumvent the state” (Cranston et al 2018), the “relationship between intermediaries, reputation and skilled migration flows” (Harvey et al 2018), and the “need to think about the intersections between migration industries, visa regulations and international student mobility (Beech 2018). Another pertinent contribution beseeches that, “we could enhance our knowledge on migration industries with studies that constantly shift between the perspective of the migrant, the social network, the facilitator and controller” (Schapendonk 2018) – precisely what this paper does, in assessing Indian intermediary influence upon historical outmigration to Australia.

Adjunct to intermediary literatures, but likewise of relevance herein, are connections to be made with ‘Anglophone financial geography’ scholarship (Gibadullina 2021). The ‘financialisation lens’ research paradigm provides a relatively new toolkit “to explain how seemingly localized financial processes could have unforeseen, widespread impacts on the national economies located on the other end of the world” (ibid) – but important insights on ‘choice’, relevant to migration too. That is:

The average consumer is bound to struggle when attempting to understand the possible consequences associated with certain types of financial products. For some, the issue is simply one of a lack of knowledge and understanding of finance (in general) and the products and services (in particular) that require domain-specific judgment and experience. For others, more confident in their ability and the scope of their experience, there remain pitfalls for the unwary (Clark 2015).

So it is the case for migration calculations, and the significance of using intermediaries to offset risk in destination choice decision making. As Clark notes in a more recent essay on human behaviour favouring materialism over transcendentalism, a willingness to leave the here and now for somewhere else is a risk “not ‘explained’ so much as assumed to be a characteristic of those who migrate” (Clark 2021). Notwithstanding, “few people look at all options in a systematic manner” because “essentially, people are not good at decision-making when it involves ambiguity, conflicting sources of information, and risk and uncertainty” (ibid). The parallels with the subject-matter of this paper are stark: “Given anxiety about the issues, people can *imitate* others’ behaviour, draw *lessons* from others’ actions and experience for their own situation, and/or *rely* upon socially accepted ways of doing things that have the virtue of legitimacy” (ibid). Likewise, “where (internet-based) decision cues are not adequate given the nature and sophistication of the issues, advice can be had at a price”, and furthermore, “informed decision-making is the mantra of those who would wish to provide individuals with the knowledge and understanding necessary to make good on their separate and collective interests” (ibid).

Of direct subject-matter relevance to this paper then are past works from Baas, Birrell et al, and Hawthorne, explicitly exploring Indian student migration to Australia. Baas’ PhD thesis, was a first detailed micro-level exploration of this particular narrative, based on fieldwork conducted in Melbourne in 2005 with 130 predominantly middle-class students, originating from major Indian metropolises (Baas 2009). It poignantly illustrates a specific migrant lived experience, and the factors that informed and drove it at the turn of the last decade. Notable amongst these drivers was the ready-possibility at that time, of acquiring Australian permanent residency (PR) via ‘two-step migration pathways’ – a theme which Baas continues to explore vis-à-vis the

“increasing conflation and entanglement between categories of international students and skilled migrants” (Baas 2019).

Birrell, Healy and Kinnaird however, lay first claim to the specific suggestion that the surge in interest from Indians seeking to study in Australia in this era, was a direct function of their desire to gain a PR visa on completion of their course (Birrell et al 2007). They subsequently reaffirmed and rearticulated this contention with reference to the formidable forces of a “bourgeoning industry of migration agents and private education providers”, calling for urgent further investigation of these matters, lest they ‘distort’ the intent of Australia’s skilled migration programme (Birrell et al 2009). Actual intermediaries in India, however, or their influence on decision-making and migratory movements, were never subjected to direct investigation in the aforementioned studies.

What transpired then and thereafter was nevertheless, analysed by Hawthorne, who provides the most empirically detailed examination of Indian students and the evolution of the study-migration pathway in Australia up to 2012. Situated within a wide discussion detailing Australia’s shift towards prioritisation of skilled migration from 1999 onwards, and subsequent student-migrant employment outcomes, her work observed that Indian students “were supremely pragmatic in relation to the study and migration pathway... [such that] by the time of Australia’s 2005–06 skilled migration review, the majority were enrolled in relatively cheap, academically less taxing, lower ranking university courses” (Hawthorne 2014). The work is framed, furthermore, in relation to the idea of ‘perverse study-migration incentives’ – how they developed, what their consequences were, and ultimately how they were addressed to ‘restore integrity’ to Australia’s study-migration pathway. This paper probes this ‘perversion’ – questioning for whom these outcomes were perverse, really, bearing in mind what some have labelled the significant ‘discursive gap’ evidenced in migration policies (Czaika & de Haas 2013). It further distinguishes itself from extant literature by directly investigating Indian intermediary activity, and in three additional important ways.

Firstly, with respect to applicants, its findings contrast markedly with other recent studies examining Indian pre-departure migrants and destinations choices. Thus, unlike Mehdi et al (2019), this study evidences no preference amongst Indians for continental Europe as a preferred location for students or skilled labour migrants – something which appears to be quite a recent development. Likewise, it does not find that “the possibility of settlement is particularly unimportant”, by contrast with a Euro-focused study of a pre-departure cohort of Indian students surveyed in 2009 (Hercog & van de Laar 2016). Quite the opposite, in fact.

This is attributable in part, no doubt, to potential bias in research design herein, and historically different global conditions and policy parameters. However, it is also a function of reduced elitism-bias than in other sampled cohorts.

Secondly, this paper provides perspectives from demographics still almost completely undocumented in current literature: consultants from India's migration heartland, and graduated, non-elite, skilled Punjabi applicants from the same geographic locale with 'choices' as well as 'preferences', to use the vernacular of Crawley and Hagen-Zanker (2019). Notwithstanding 'choice', the applicants in particular differentiate themselves from those studied in prior literature; whilst they are not refugees (per the aforementioned study), nor are they the Indian middle-classes examined abroad in New Zealand by Hussain (2018) or in New York by Thomas (2017), or equally, the ultra-elite published academics investigated by Toma and Villares-Varela (2019) or Mumbai upper-middle-classes studied by Tuxen and Robertson (2019). Rather, they are drawn from the skilled pool of (urban *and* rural) Punjab – “a group significant both in number and in their reputation for [migratory] ‘success’ [across the globe]” (Qureshi et al 2013) – but rarely encountered first-hand in the literature, except by Singh (2011), Qureshi et al (2013) and McGarrigle and Ascensão (2018).

Thirdly and finally, regarding international migration decision-making and destination selection among skilled migrants, “thus far, research has rarely ventured into the pre-departure period... particularly using a qualitative methodology. Even more rare are studies that consider destination selection among skilled migrants who have the most choices about where to settle” (Tabor et al 2015). The present work is such a study, examining “the extent to which a potential migrant considers multiple countries as destinations before selecting” (ibid), amidst the scarce micro-level literature which has investigated Indian migration *from within* India. Furthermore, consistent with Schapendonk (2018), it delves into these questions by *contrasting perspectives* of pre-departure applicants, controlling officials, and the intermediary consultants who influence migrant journeys – necessarily, given “it is increasingly recognised that an understanding of contemporary migration is not complete without an understanding of the mediating practices that facilitate and constrain it” (Deshingkar 2019). Thus, this paper is also a response to the avenue created for “further studies incorporating perspectives of more diverse intermediary networks in different parts of the world... providing comparative insights and framing new academic understandings of the migration industry” (Khan 2019). It transcends orthodox labour migration theory which posits that intermediaries offer their services for monetary returns only, detailing the intricacies of the Indian migration industries, to tackle the “gaping

theoretical hole concerning the position, contribution and relations of profit-driven actors in the social organization of international migration” (Hernández León 2013).

4. RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

To capture the narratives alluded to thus far, this study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, for fieldwork conducted exclusively onsite, in India during April 2007. Data collection was deliberately focused in Chandigarh, the capital of the state of Punjab and Haryana, and then site of the majority of Indian migration outflows. In total sixty individuals were canvassed in-person, comprising thirty consultants (representing nineteen firms) and thirty prospective applicants considering emigration (drawn from the waiting rooms of three of those firms). Four senior foreign consulate staff were subsequently interviewed in New Delhi (representing the embassies of the USA, UK, Canada and Australia respectively) to assist with triangulation of facts and findings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the consultants and embassy staff, based on separate pre-prepared questionnaires which sought background information, then detailed qualitative responses to fifteen common open-ended focus questions. By contrast, the applicant class were investigated via a guided survey, involving twelve categorical variables capturing demographic information, then twenty-five Likert-type scale questions, followed by six in-depth queries.

4.1 Questionnaire Design & Implementation

The questionnaire for consultants specifically enquired about a firm’s background, including its size (number of employees and offices), years in operation, preferred migration destinations for clients, current number of clients, visa success rate, registration status with any professional associations, cost of services, and average time taken to process applications. Open-ended questions in relation to ‘consultancy’ then explored: why clients chose to emigrate; why clients chose a given country in preference to another; whether clients considered non-traditional immigration recipient countries; why clients chose to use consultancy services; what services the firm provided; how clients were secured; what major difficulties clients faced in obtaining migration; what attributes were most significant to clients in choosing a potential destination; whether clients were encouraged to consider migrating to regional/rural areas; and whether clients were briefed on potential post-migration hazards and difficulties. Open-ended questions in relation to ‘awareness and the future’, then examined: to what degree there was a competitive

global market for skilled migrants; whether India was poised¹ to achieve major economic and social improvement; concerns regarding if the firm was contributing to Indian brain drain; the likelihood of skilled Indians seeking to emigrate even if economic growth continued to improve; and in the decade ahead, the likelihood of India repatriating more of its diaspora, or attracting more migrants of OECD origin.

With respect to the organisational and recruitment process, firms were identified purposefully initially from advertisements in local print publications (see Figure 1)², and cold-called in-person to introduce and invite participation in the study. Appointments for interviews were thereafter scheduled with employees of receptive firms, with subsequent participants being secured via snowball, non-probability sampling. Interview sessions ranged in duration but were completed in approximately one hour on average, beginning with an introduction, provision of a detailed Project Information Statement, and obtaining signed informed consent documentation from each subject.

¹ The term ‘poised’ was very deliberately chosen, with reference to use of the term by Sir Michael Arthur (then UK High Commissioner to India) in a well-publicised contemporaneous address, arguing that India was at that time, ‘poised’ on the verge of achieving major economic and social change for the better.

² This graphic is for illustrative purposes only. Firms identifiable within it were not necessarily approached, nor participants in this research, or providers of any interview data which contributed towards this paper.

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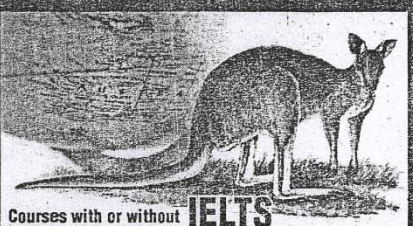
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Figure 1. Local Newspaper Advertisements, April 2007

4.2 Survey Design & Implementation

Content for the applicant survey explored each individual's motivations for wanting to leave India. Respondents were sourced from the premises of three consultancy firms who provided permission to directly approach individuals waiting to seek migration advice. Subsequent subjects were acquired via non-probability snowball sampling. No incentive was offered in exchange for participation, beyond the opportunity to participate in the research – though this was seemingly sufficient inducement, given often long wait times for consultations.

The data collection process involved explaining the study, answering any preliminary queries, and obtaining signed informed consent from each individual participant. Thereafter, each respondent was verbally guided through questions 'census-style': firstly being categorised by age, marital status, number of children, gender, religion, preferred migration destination, visa type sought, desired period of stay, highest qualification obtained, current profession, and number of years employed. Participants were then asked to rate factors relating to their desire to emigrate, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). Twenty-five questions were explored, grouped into categories exploring pull factors, economic integration, and awareness and the future. Thus, in relation to 'pull factors', respondents were questioned about the significance of variables in their choice of destination – rates of personal taxation, indirect taxation, the availability of unemployment benefits, welfare payments and public housing, quality of healthcare, quality of education for children, presence of family, family reunion prospects, the weather, political environment, and level of cultural tolerance. Similarly, in relation to 'economic integration', questions examined their willingness to be underemployed, concerns for working in one's chosen field, and the likelihood of returning to education for foreign credential recognition or acquisition of new qualifications. Questions pertaining to 'awareness and the future', mirrored those asked in the consultant questionnaire.

Finally, as an adjunct to the quantifiable survey data, potential émigrés were asked six open-ended questions, exploring: why they were choosing emigration; why they preferred their given destination country in preference to others; if they would consider emigrating to a non-traditional immigration recipient country; why they had chosen to use migration agency services; how difficult the process of applying to emigrate had been to date and any major obstacles; and, how long the process had taken so far, and if this was longer or shorter than they expected.

4.3 Methodological Observations

All interview data and onsite field observations were captured via contemporaneous handwritten notetaking, then transcribed to digital form for coding, cross-referencing, and thematic analysis of recurrent themes and concepts. Audio from interviews was deliberately not recorded, to place participants at ease and encourage candour. The methods employed were successful overall as a collection strategy, as a function of adequate preparation and application of appropriate techniques, consistent with optimal ‘interviewing techniques for migrant minority groups’ (Sanchez-Ayala 2012). Likewise, in the spirit of ‘building better methods in economic geography’, the research has endeavoured “to engage with bridging the qualitative/quantitative divide, clarifying causality in empirical research, selecting appropriate data, improving rigor...and ensuring high ethical standards in this work” (Bathelt & Li 2020). Nevertheless, three points bear mentioning, vis-à-vis sample size, positionality, and sampling scheme.

Firstly, although the study canvassed only sixty-four subjects in total, this can be fairly considered ‘large by qualitative research standards’ (Smith et al 2009), if “not large enough to draw inferential conclusions, being a small, non-random sample” (Tabor et al 2015). The sample size is on par with comparable, recent studies: Tuxen and Robertson (2019) for example, draws primarily on interviews conducted with twenty-six prospective international students plus twelve education agents/counsellors; likewise, in Conrad and Meyer-Ohle (2019), the interview data stem from discussions with thirty-three employees, nineteen companies and ten brokers in total.

Secondly, whilst semi-structured in-depth interviews utilising open-ended questions were the appropriate instrument to maximise quality data collection from consultants and consular staff (and likewise supervised administration of the applicant survey, to guide and collect quantifiable results), there can be no doubt that, “rather than being a transparent, straightforward exchange of information, the interview is a complex and contested social encounter riven with power relations... [and] all interviewers are faced with the decision of whose voices and what claims should be heard in the text that eventually supersedes the interviews” (McDowell 2011). This study therefore makes no claim to providing ‘notions of scientific objectivity in interviewing’ (ibid), rather fully acknowledging that “value-free research, if not impossible, is almost impossible to obtain” (Sanchez-Ayala 2012, citing Edward Said (1979) *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage). It has sought, however, to mitigate the “unequal relation of power where the interviewer is in the position of interpreting the lives of the interviewees... privileging certain

points of view while silencing others” (Sanchez-Ayala 2012) – specifically by conducting interviews one-on-one mainly (but with multiple persons when required, as dictated by the comfort and convenience preferences of participants), and by collecting all data in the respondent’s place and territory, to allow the researcher “to study behaviour in its natural setting and to fully understand the spatial context of the everyday life of those being researched” (ibid).

Thirdly, regarding the sampling scheme, whilst snowball non-probability sampling was appropriate (given the challenge of locating members of the target population), an element of probability cluster sampling could be said to have been employed, as applicants were technically chosen from a subset of the firms involved. Notwithstanding, this was not done to try to achieve “representativeness of the sample in order to generate generalizations about the total target population with the least possible [statistical] error” (ibid). Rather, the research was designed to produce descriptive, and not inferential results or statistics, particularly in relation to the applicant survey.

As with similar recent studies, results are henceforth presented using a combination of “interview data, field observations and the analysis of primary and secondary policy sources” (Conrad & Meyer-Ohle 2019). Likewise, quotes are used to illustrate findings and “should not be misunderstood as single evidence, but as illustrations of general findings... gained through triangulation of the interview data” (ibid). Lastly, attribution of views is anonymised, to protect the privacy of individuals, but also the commercial interests of firms; although some agencies have rebranded and/or restructured, almost all are still operational today.

5. CONSULTANT CALCULUS

Calculus is the mathematical study of continuous change – use of the term is employed here quite deliberately, to reflect the dynamism and responsiveness of consultant networks operating within the “particularly active Punjab region of India” (Birrell et al 2009) at the time of investigation. Table 1 summarises the background of each firm investigated, making clear at a glance, the preference for traditional immigration recipient destinations amongst consultants at that time, as well as common claims of high success rates, large client bases, and registrations/affiliations with professional accreditation bodies. More variability is found in firm size, age, and cost of services – though the mean price for permanent migration applications was approximately 75000 INR, and student migration income generated primarily from successful placement commissions ranging from 5-35 per cent of course fees. Notably,

almost no firms were interested in facilitating temporary work migration, because as consultants explained, “work permits are very dicey because of offers of employment sticking and the requests to refund monies” (C22) – “if a work permit doesn’t work out because of the employer it’s messy” (C1).

C#	TYPE	F#	NO OF STAFF	NO OF OFFICES	YEARS	PREFERRED DESTINATIONS	NO OF CLIENTS	CLIENT SUCCESS RATE	REGISTRATIONS	COST OF SERVICES
1	Solo		24 (Head Office)	4 (IND)	11	CAN, AUS, UK	10K (database) 7K (in process)	99% (overall)	CAN, AUS, UK, USA, NZ, SIN	USD 2-3K (P); Free (non-USA/CAN) ~10% commission (S)
2	Duo	1	89 (Chandigarh) 150 (All)	-	12	CAN, AUS (mainly) NZ & UK (less)	10K	99% (S) 80% (CAN)	CSIC associate MARA (AUS)	GBP 700 (P); 10% commission + GBP 500 completion bonus (S)
3				-						
4	Solo		-	25 (inc affiliates)	12	CAN, AUS	7-8K	-	Yes	INR 79K (P); INR 40-80K (S)
5	Solo	2	60 (All)	10 (IND)	3	AUS, UK	800 (annually)	99% (overall)	Not sure	20% commission (S)
6	Solo	3	12 (Chandigarh)	1 (IND)	4	AUS, CAN (mainly) UK (less)	330 (in process)	90% (overall)	CSIC; Ministry of Labour (IND)	INR 75K (P); INR 10K + INR ~35K commission (S)
7	Duo	4	30 (Head Office) 1 (AUS)	25 (inc affiliates)	4	CAN, AUS, UK, SIN, CYP	800 (annually)	60% (overall): 100% (SIN), 50% (CAN), 100% (P)	AISA, NAFSA, IVSA, BAC, INA, CAW	INR 40K (P); INR 1K refundable + commission (S)
8										
9	Solo	5	14 (Chandigarh) 1 (MYS)	2 (IND & MYS)	9	CAN, AUS, UK	400 (P), 250 (W), 50 (S) (annually)	95% (P); 100% (AUS), 25% (CAN), 30% (UK) (S)	APIEC; CSIC; Ministry of Labour	INR 69K (P); INR 60-75K (W); 10- 20% commission (S)
10	Solo	6	5 (Chandigarh)	7 (All) Head Office (CAN)	1	CAN, AUS, UK (mainly) USA (tourist only)	110 (P), 40 (S)	99% (P); 95% (S)	No, but parent company does	INR 50K (P); INR 150 (W); INR 5-10K + 20-30% commission (S)
11	Duo	7	250 (All)	30 (inc affiliates) Head Office (CAN)	14	CAN, AUS	1K+ (in process)	96-98% (P); 95% (AUS), 70-80% (CAN)	CSIC; MARA	INR 75K (inc post visa services) INR 65K (some), INR 50K (none) (P)
12										
13	Solo	8	7 (Chandigarh)	2 (IND)	2.5	AUS	200 (in process)	100% (overall)	No	AUD 2K (P); AUD 10K Investors; INR 3K + 15% commission (S)
14	Solo	9	10 (Chandigarh)	4 (IND)	4	AUS, NZ, SIN, EU, CAN	20 (in process)	95% (overall)	No, as a Private Limited Company	INR 20K (CAN), Free (Non-CAN) + 10% commission (S)
15	Solo		20 (All)	4 (IND)	4	CAN, USA, UK, POL, SIN, AUS, NZ, CHE	1000 (annually)	90% (overall)	No, but an ISO Company	INR 50K (P); 15-20% commission (S)
16										
17	Trio	10	5 (Chandigarh)	10 (IND)	12	UK (mainly) CAN, IRE (less)	30 per session (S) (annually)	99% (S)	British Council	5-10% commission (S)
18										
19	Solo	11	15 (Chandigarh)	7 (IND)	4	AUS, CYP, UK, CAN	600 (S), 50 (P) (annually)	100% (S); unsure (P)	No	INR 100K (P); INR 3K + 15-20% commission (S)
20	Solo	12	12 (Chandigarh)	1 (IND)	6	AUS, CAN	40 (annually)	90% (S); 50% (P)	Ministry of Labour	INR 70K (P); 25-35% commission (S)
21	Solo	13	15 (Chandigarh)	4 (IND)	3.5	AUS (mainly) NZ (less)	450 (S), 200 (P) (annually)	100% (S); 98% (P)	MARA, Migration Institute, AIRI	INR 70K+ (P); INR 3K refundable + 10-30% commission (S)
22	Solo	14	19 (Chandigarh)	1 (IND)	6	AUS (mainly) CAN (less)	400 (S), 20 (P) (annually)	100% (overall)	AIEI, EERA	INR 75K (P); INR 5K part-refundable + 10-20% commission (S)
23	Solo	15	14 (Chandigarh)	7 (IND)	7	AUS	750 (in process)	100% (S)	AERI	5-10% commission (S)
24	Solo	16	5 (Chandigarh)	7 (IND)	6	UK (mainly) CAN, AUS (less)	150 (S) (annually)	99% (S)	No	~25% commission (S)
25	Duo	17	200+ (All)	5 (IND)	10+	AUS, UK	800 (S), 200 (P) (annually)	100% (S); <100% (P)	MARA	INR 95K+ (P); commission (S)
26										
27	Duo	18	12 (Chandigarh) 200 (All)	12 (IND)	4	UK (mainly) AUS, NZ, CAN, USA (less)	100s (S) (annually)	100% (overall)	No	Commission (S)
28										
29	Duo	19	Subjects elected to withdraw from study mid-interview, for unspecific reasons. Interview was completed, but signed consent forms and interview notes returned to subjects.							
30										

Migration Categories: (P) – Permanent Skilled Visa (S) – Temporary Student Visa (W) – Temporary Work Permit Visa

Table 1. Demographic Summary of Consultants (C) and Firms (F) Interviewed

5.1 Emigration Calculus – Why and Where?

The central question of why clients choose to emigrate was answered with considerable calculation – in the view of consultants, applicants were seeking better social and economic futures for themselves and their (current *and* future) family, motivated by chain migration logic (social networks of friends and family), underpinned importantly by, *the fastest, easiest and most reliable migration process available*. Thus, whilst application processing times varied, study migration was generally regarded as preferable to direct pursuit of permanent migration, and Australia regarded as the then destination-of-choice. The UK was in fact commonly reported for providing the fastest study-visa turnaround, and Canada seen to be a more favourable destination for long-term settlement – but Australia regarded as the most *reliably fast* for study and PR (taking 9-18 months, versus years for all other jurisdictions).

The predominant rationale for emigration was said to be economic insofar as India lacking the “ability to match market opportunities” overseas, and “accumulating enough capital for a good life (minus family assistance/inheritance) not [being] possible [domestically]” (C2). This was argued to be the case, in spite of India’s robust economy; GDP growth was averaging an unprecedented 8.8 percent annually from 2003 to 2008 (Acharya 2008), accompanied by consolidation of key macroeconomic indicators (Kapur & Mohan 2014). However, social/socioeconomic reasons were regarded as the more significant migration driver – migration “for the sake of the family and future” as per Kōu, Mulder and Bailey (2017). Emigration of clients from mostly agricultural and rural backgrounds was moreover, a matter of “keeping up with the Joneses” (C15) – opportunity and prestige, noting “in every family one or two are abroad in some Punjabi villages” (C5). Hence amidst a climate of diminishing landholdings and “more increasingly divided between families” (C6), emigration was perceived as a path to respectability, “better quality of life, education, [and] economy” (C25).

Pragmatic arithmetic underpinning destination selection was clearly thought to exist too, whereby obtaining stability and certainty was a major consideration also. Thus, avoiding places with ‘frequently changing entitlements’ giving rise to ‘a sense of precariousness’ (as described by Qureshi et al 2013) was a focus for the consultants, as well as their clients. For most consultants, this ruled out advocating the UK and USA in particular, leaving Australia as “the recent destination-of-choice because it takes one year versus four years for Canada” (C3). Perceived discrimination and language barriers to social integration in non-English-speaking jurisdictions rendered them as unfavourable options for the average applicant, except for those with specialised skills (C6). As separate consultants neatly summarised, “unless [clients] have

someone known in random countries or have been rejected at all destinations, they only think of the big four,” (C23) – “all students want Australia/Canada/UK/USA... we also lack expertise in other countries [and have] no tie-ups with Germany, Japan, Ireland, etcetera” (C21).

The importance of ‘tie-ups’ – linkages with overseas training organisations, universities, and ancillary service providers – was frequently noted by consultants. As one group explained, “we only deal with universities we have tie-ups with... we only send quality students who are going to join the University because if they don’t complete [their course] we don’t get commissions” (C16-18). Some firms were further, keen to communicate the breadth of their networks as a matter of pride; one claimed for example to have “tie-ups with forty-two universities” (C15), in countries including “Belgium, Poland, France, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, UK, and USA” (C14). However, it was more commonly reported that “no consultants in Chandigarh assist these [non-traditional recipient] countries” (C10), notwithstanding that clients “do compare [between destination options]” (C9), and highly valued “friends and relatives’ word-of-mouth... [and the presence of] existing established ethnic communities” (ibid). The ‘where’ of emigration calculus then, came down to this: “when Indians want to relocate, they want it to be permanent” (C2). Consequently, the ubiquitous refrain was one of ‘pushing Australia’ – because “we know it well” (C13), “that’s where our expertise is” (C22), “vocational programmes and shorter wait times” (C6), and fundamentally, “because of PR rather than quality of education” (C24). Indeed, even consultancies whose prime focus was facilitation of “students who really want[ed] to study/go abroad (not for PR)” were inclined to “encourage [applicants] to take one year work permit[s] afterwards” (C27-28).

5.2 Factors of Influence to Clients

Specific factors influencing destination choice for clients were argued to be less significant than satisfying the overarching aspiration for surety – “weather, political climate, etcetera – people [are] not concerned about it till after the visa is issued... they think about family first, then children’s education and social and cultural acceptance” (C6). Notwithstanding, it was reported that for applicants, “healthcare and family reunification are major concerns” (C9), along with “presence of friends and relatives” (C13) in destination countries. Push factors were commonly noted too – the sense that clients “just want to leave India” (C14, C19, C21). There were limits though to this desire to emigrate, especially in relation to migration to rural and regional locations. Because of “fear of the unknown” (C1) applicants were said to be “not swayed by SIRV [Skilled Independent Regional Visa] and PNP [Provincial Nominee Program] unless they

wouldn't otherwise qualify"³ (ibid); likewise, consultants admitted, "we...don't really push SIRV, PNP because of geographic isolation" (C4), and similarly "I prefer they go to big cities as that's where the best opportunities exist...big cities have better Indian communities and even food" (C2-3). Some in fact, actively advised against non-metropolitan migration, wary of "conflicting views on whether there really are decent opportunities in regional areas" (C6).

In this respect, consultants demonstrated considerable regard for the welfare of their clients, by contrast with "a vast majority of scholarship on migration intermediaries...which often associates individuals such as smugglers, traffickers, and marriage brokers with migrant exploitation and unscrupulous activities" (Khan 2019). Indeed, "much less attention has been given to the ways in which brokers help migrants achieve their goals and buttress their agency" (Deshinker 2019). Consultants in this study, however, reported a wide array of information conveyed pre-departure, to equip their clients for post-arrival realities – "we explain that going to a new country is like getting married – there is an adjustment period" (C9). More specifically, "we tell them underemployment is very likely (at the beginning especially)" (C2-3), "life won't be easy, [there] might be cultural differences, [it] will take time to settle down" (C6), "[the] cost of living is high" (C8), "finding a part-time job will be hard... [and] accommodation tough too" (C24). Yet others drew attention to the lack of immediate access to public healthcare, the challenges of acquiring a national insurance number or bank account, and probable social isolation, homesickness, culture shock, and problems with food. "We'll do it, no problem", is their response" (C16-18), was the client reaction according to several consultants. Furthermore, as another narrated, "they don't want to know about problems... they don't want to hear negative, only positive... if we tell them then they'll go to another consultant" (C14). The underpinning explanation for seeking a passage to elsewhere to a fault? "People are okay with just getting onshore at any cost – they want PR" (C5).

5.3 Use of Intermediaries

Consultants contended that they were able to help applicants "put their best foot forward" (C1), sometimes using trade secrets, to project visa cases to embassies professionally and presentably (C10); "if your child is sick, you consult a doctor... similarly it is for us... we provide correct presentation for these people" (C4). They further opined that clients used intermediary services out of cultural habit and for convenience, but also out of fear – the suggestion being

³ The SIRV (Skilled Independent Regional Visa) and PNP (Provincial Nominee Program) were the primary geographic dispersion schemes employed by the Australian and Canadian governments respectively.

that applicants could “have a mental block that acquiring documentation is difficult” (C6), be “scared of an initial rejection prejudicing later [applications]” (C7-8), and be “scared to do themselves and take risk of a refusal stamp on passport” (C14). Consequently, for a “once-in-a-lifetime matter... [for which] they aren’t aware of complexities of documentation, [and might have] lack of time... trust in a professional” explained use of consultants, despite the ready availability of documents and online application options (C9). This was even more so that case for “people who have no one to lean on overseas” (C11-12).

In this regard, in the vernacular of Khan, consultants generally were “intermediaries [positioned] as legitimate professionals involved in better income strategies and new livelihood options for their clients” (Khan 2019). Large firms tended to express pride in their range and quality of in-house services, and smaller ones their commitment to personalised service and attention to detail. A respondent in the latter category noted for example, “I research on the net daily to keep abreast of changes – the big operators don’t have time to do that... the biggest consultancies treat the clients like a factory production... people enter this business for money, [but] not us” (C13). For firms of all sizes however, securing clients required active, and often personal engagement; the “real conversion is always [from] one-to-one conversation” (C2-3) – though supported by advertising in local newspapers, free hotel seminars, and presentations to professional bodies. Furthermore, whilst it is true that “the roadsides of Punjab are plastered with adverts for consultants purveying student migration services”, and “overseas study has generated a multi-million pound industry comprising agents, brokers, English language coaching and assessment institutions that are stoking and profiting from the dreams of prospective migrants” (Qureshi et al 2013) – consultants typically described their endeavours as vocational, rather than simply commercial enterprise.

Nowhere was this clearer than in relation to their willingness to assist clients with limited financial flexibility. Indeed, an inability to adequately demonstrate finances required for visa issuance, was said to be the most common difficulty faced by applicants, as a consequence of there being “no culture of savings in India” (C24) and issues of illiquidity (rather than scarcity) “for rural Punjabis, who are [still] willing to sell some land to send their sons abroad” (C10). Consultants were largely unequivocal though in declaring “we do not arrange sponsors”, notwithstanding some “bad consultants who arrange sponsors for 4-5 per cent [commissions]” (C21). Rather, their expectation was generally that applicants should secure external sponsorship and be able to satisfy IELTS requirements as preconditions for having any possible success abroad post-migration.

5.4 Consultancy Sentiments

Consultant views on global migration issues, and India's position within a perceived competitive market for skilled migrants, evidenced deep knowledge of the subject – areas examined noting “the complex realities of their everyday professional praxis and their own perspectives about their roles have been subject to scant empirical analysis” (Khan 2019). Growing global demand for Indian students was said to be unquestionable, notwithstanding a general perception of Indians being considered abroad as ‘qualified labour’ rather than ‘skilled people’ (C9). Nevertheless, continued emigration of Indians, irrespective of domestic conditions, was thought to be a *fait accompli*; it “will always continue till such time that we can exercise proper population growth control... [plus] destination countries need people because of low population growth” (C11-12). Thus, the general view was that “the process will go on, though maybe [via] a new segment of people... [but] the trend won't end” (C6) – not least because “people want PR for [the] next generation... [and] coming back is a very easy option [once you have PR]” (C16-18).

Consultants were unabashed about facilitating migrant movements too, and defended their vocational imperative to not “deprive [clients] of a better life” (C27-28) – especially bearing in mind that India was less ‘poised’ for transformation than often suggested. Regarding the latter, there was in fact widespread scepticism:

It's mostly media hype, despite economic growth. The upper 5-7 per cent of the population is affected, but it does not filter down. Most of our clients are outside of the 5-7 per cent. Australia only wants skilled migrants, not the 5-7 per cent (upper management types). Foreigners for example rise into management. No one doing well in India wants to leave – people *not* doing well want to leave (C1).

Consequently, consultants also had virtually no sympathy for the argument that they might be negatively contributing to brain drain. Rather, a purportedly endless pool of local labour, reinforced by return migration options, remittance flows, local unemployment, and work opportunities abroad, led most to conclude “I doubt if they would have benefited India as much if they stayed” (*ibid*) and further, that “the numbers [emigrating] are too small to dent manpower in India” (C2-3). An additional factor was the ‘quality’ of those exported; to “Australia and New Zealand [there is] no brain drain because [we're] not sending very good brains – but for Canada and US, yes, we brain drain” (C27-28). In fact, despite consultants ‘pushing Australia’, they equally conceded “the US still gets the best and brightest (not Australia)” (C22), and a focus geared towards helping non-elite Punjabis to “earn over there and spend over here” (C14). Correspondingly, most saw little prospect for a meaningful

increase of OECD workers entering India, or large-scale return of the diaspora in the decade ahead, noting “people only come back for their own self-good and interest – not because of good for India” (C27-28). Rather, in concordance with recent findings on diaspora policies (such as Li et al 2019), most forecasted nominal return migration from the upper echelons of academia and science only.

6. APPLICANT ARITHMETIC

Unlike calculus, arithmetic is a more pragmatic branch of mathematics involving the study of numbers and the properties of the traditional operations applied to them. Again, use of the term here is deliberate: applicant thinking was governed by practical calculations, from potential émigrés with levels of knowledge and agency not to be underestimated. Table 2 describes each such interview subject, along with their destination preferences.

Demographically, the cohort researched was unexpectedly uniform – all single, childless, males, ranging in age from 17-30 years (with a mean of 23.5), of which two-thirds were Sikh and a third Hindu. Two-thirds also held Bachelors degrees, and half, office employment experience in professions including engineering, IT, banking, teaching and call centre work.⁴ There was no attempt to create homogeneity of respondents – this was achieved purely via the sampling scheme and availability of participants (and surprising absence of others – notably females, who were present but only accompanying male friends seeking immigration advice). Most remarkable however, was the consistency of findings regarding destination preference: in this cohort, *all* the subjects were seeking to migrate to Australia, and less than a third even countenanced an alternative country. Furthermore, whilst 90 per cent were pursuing a less-than-two-year student visa, 80 per cent nevertheless indicated a desire to stay abroad for more than five years. This mirrors subsequent findings of Khoo et al from 2008, who likewise found that 89 per cent of Indian 457 visa holders in Australia either had or intended to apply for PR, based on Australia’s “direct pathway from temporary work visa to permanent residency status after 2 years” (Velayutham 2013).

⁴ Note that a limitation of this dataset is that half the respondents were recorded as having no profession or years of employment. In actual fact, most of these respondents were engaged in agriculture, but did not identify (mostly familial) work to be their full-time profession.

Interview		Personal Information					Education & Work Status			Destination Preference			
A#	TYPE	AGE	STATUS	CHILDREN	GENDER	RELIGION	QUALIFICATION	PROFESSION	EMPLOYED (YRS)	FIRST CHOICE	ALTERNATIVE	VISA TYPE	DESIRED STAY (YRS)
1	Solo	20	Single	None	Male	Sikh	High School	None	No	Australia	None	Student	5+
2	Solo	30	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	Engineer	1-4	Australia	None	Permanent	1-2
3	Solo	28	Single	None	Male	Hindu	Bachelors	IT	1-4	Australia	None	Student	5+
4	Solo	24	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	IT	0-1	Australia	None	Student	2-4
5	Solo	21	Single	None	Male	Sikh	High School	Call Centre	1-4	Australia	None	Student	5+
6	Duo	23	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	Engineer	0-1	Australia	USA	Student	5+
7		23	Single	None	Male	Hindu	Bachelors	IT	0-1	Australia	None	Permanent	5+
8	Duo	27	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	Engineer	1-4	Australia	NZ	Permanent	5+
9		27	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	Banking	1-4	Australia	NZ	Student	5+
10	Solo	21	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	None	No	Australia	None	Student	0-1
11	Solo	22	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	None	No	Australia	None	Student	5+
12	Solo	23	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	None	No	Australia	None	Student	5+
13	Solo	17	Single	None	Male	Hindu	High School	None	No	Australia	None	Student	5+
14	Solo	26	Single	None	Male	Hindu	Bachelors	Call Centre	1-4	Australia	None	Student	5+
15	Solo	25	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	None	No	Australia	None	Student	5+
16	Trio	23	Single	None	Male	Hindu	Bachelors	IT	0-1	Australia	None	Student	5+
17		25	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Masters	None	No	Australia	None	Student	2-4
18	Duo	21	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	None	No	Australia	None	Student	5+
19		19	Single	None	Male	Sikh	High School	None	No	Australia	None	Student	5+
20	Duo	19	Single	None	Male	Hindu	High School	None	No	Australia	None	Student	5+
21		26	Single	None	Male	Hindu	Bachelors	Call Centre	5+	Australia	None	Student	5+
22	Duo	23	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	Call Centre	0-1	Australia	None	Student	5+
23		19	Single	None	Male	Sikh	High School	Call Centre	0-1	Australia	CAN	Student	5+
24	Duo	20	Single	None	Male	Sikh	High School	None	No	Australia	NZ	Student	1-2
25		23	Single	None	Male	Hindu	Bachelors	None	No	Australia	NZ	Student	1-2
26	Solo	20	Single	None	Male	Sikh	High School	None	No	Australia	UK	Student	5+
27	Duo	22	Single	None	Male	Hindu	High School	None	No	Australia	CAN	Student	5+
28		25	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	Engineer	5+	Australia	None	Student	5+
29	Solo	26	Single	None	Male	Hindu	Bachelors	Teacher	1-4	Australia	None	Student	5+
30	Solo	27	Single	None	Male	Sikh	Bachelors	Engineer	1-4	Australia	CAN	Student	5+

Table 2. Demographic Summary of Applicants (A) Interviewed

6.1 Emigration Arithmetic – What, Why and Where?

Echoing newer research which suggests that “nursing has become an occupation that young Indians are attracted to because it offers opportunities for overseas, not domestic, employment” (Thompson & Walton-Roberts 2019), applicants likewise were pragmatic about choosing to study “whatever is easy but leads to something” (A20). “Every type of work has

value and meaning – I’ll do whatever it takes” (A12) was a common sentiment, meaning an openness to consultant-recommended courses in community welfare, automotive repair, and AC refrigeration, as well as the more commonly-known options of hairdressing and commercial cookery. A notable minority of respondents did in fact express a bona fide desire to complete diplomas in these sectors with a view to progressing to degree studies. Generally though, subject-selection was driven less by personal interest, and more by matching the wants of the recipient state – a confirmation of how “populations in India...see international migration as one viable option to enhance their and their families’ income security and social status” (Thompson & Walton-Roberts 2019). However, answers to why one might emigrate were generally more blunt, and consistent with the lack of regional opportunity for high-skilled work in Punjab identified by Qureshi et al (2013). Thus, applicants commonly reported, “I can’t meet my needs here – I have to rely on my parents” (A15), or that there were “no dignified jobs here at the moment” (A19), and in sum, that “I can’t stay and contribute to India so I have no options [but to try migration]” (A8-9). Furthermore, consistent with the work of Kone et al (2018) on the role of provincial/state borders inhibiting mobility within a country, applicants seemingly also viewed moving overseas as more logical and worthwhile than cross-district migration; opportunities were to be found abroad, not elsewhere in India, in the first instance. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, a third of applicants explicitly noted the availability of PR in Australia as an attraction – though several also made a point to say that acquiring it was not their express intention, but a possibility on their radar. Nevertheless, the opportunity cost of emigration was low enough to justify “giv[ing] it a try” (A26), given views such as “hospitality is easy, plus if I don’t like it there I can return here and open a restaurant” (A14).

Of course, some respondents did view Australia in favourable terms in its own right, loosely regarding it as “a growing country, good for jobs” (A5) and a “land of opportunity [sporting] lots of peace and open air” (A11) – but also critically, as a country where “GDP is increasing, and inflation is low” (A6). Likewise, comparatively, it was seen to be “affordable for study” (A21-22) and “still very multicultural” (A24-25). Ease of access to Australia was the dominant narrative conveyed though, especially by contrast with Canada, the USA, and UK, which were seen to be uncertain if not impossible options. Accordingly, motivated by the perception of a “100 per cent visa success rate” (A26) (often confirmed by the successful chain migration of peers following the same study-to-settlement path) most applicants were “not applying to anywhere else, because Australia is very easy – no interview, no rejections” (A16). This contrasts sharply with “findings suggest[ing] that immigration regulations and the easiness to obtain a visa have a relatively small importance on [Indian] researchers’ first moves in comparison with

other factors” (Toma & Villares-Varela 2019) – notwithstanding the different cohorts under investigation. Indeed, ease of visa availability was even regarded as a time-sensitive consideration to capitalise upon: “it’s the right time now – after this year, the process with visas will get harder again” (A19-20).

6.2 Consultant Usage

On the issue of why applicants were using intermediary services, a nuanced finding emerged: some were in fact, merely conferring with consultants, before directly lodging their applications. Reasons ranged from “[I] didn’t use a consultant because my friend said not to – they helped me put my file together [instead]” (A1), to “for Australia the information was available on the net” (A2), and “they [agents] can’t help me once I reach there anyway” (A4). Equally, several were wary of the services provided, noting that “agents change [and there are] lots of hidden fees even when it’s supposedly free (e.g. document charges)” (A3). Most applicants, however, were using a consultant for ‘proper guidance’, and compelled by thoughts such as, “my time is precious so paying some money to save time is the best option” (A6-7). This was the case despite the fact that most applicants reported little difficulty in navigating application processes; “[it’s] not very hard if your English is okay... friends with IELTS problems have the hardest time” (A3), but “consultants make it easy” (A5), was the general view. The exception pertained to demonstrating adequate finances, and specifically liquidity; numerous applicants reported that “our money is tied up in land and businesses” (A6-7), and therefore satisfying financial criteria for visas could be “very hard because we are [from] farming backgrounds and if we have money we buy land” (A15). Generally, applicants said they would “manage with the help of family and friends... [rather than risk using] dodgy financiers” (A8-9) to navigate visa requirements. Equally, consistent with a recent study:

Indian students reported that some families would collect money from various relatives that would cover the amount required by the university and deposit it into their account so they can show a bank statement demonstrating that they do in fact have adequate financial means. They also confided that a bribe or having a relative who works in the bank can also lead to the necessary statement, even if the money is not available (Thomas 2017).

This phenomena was found to be widespread at the time of data collection – as was the more nefarious practice of (a few) firms freely admitting to illegitimately supply applicant bank accounts with deposits to temporarily satisfy financial means tests, in exchange for off-book extra charges. To be clear, the majority of consultancies gave the impression of operating bona fide businesses; many decried the behaviour of rogue firms creating “a lot of unhealthy

competition in Chandigarh because of false promises” (C27-28), and some were even engaged in corporate espionage, admitting “we’ve sent fake clients undercover to investigate [Firm X]” (C13), to ascertain how “dodgy [firms]... lure people with ads saying ‘if 30+, no degree, no English, can still get you a visa’” (C14). Commercial entities with “plush offices, lots of ads and staff... disappear[ing] overnight” was not irregular though, leading one consultant to admit that “as someone in the business I don’t even know of the unscrupulous agents until they are gone” (C6). Fortunately, it was also reported that “the embassies are very well informed about this... [and] shortly they’re going to hire a chartered accountancy firm to do the investigating” (C21) – a report subsequently confirmed via the public prosecution of *Healthyway Immigration* for widespread systematic immigration fraud, involving issuance of fake bank guarantees and “forged documents to show fixed deposits in the bank accounts of their clients while processing visa applications.”⁵

6.3 Factors of Influence for Applicants

Applicant data supported the aforementioned ‘emigration calculus’ consultant view: to reiterate, that applicants were seeking emigration to improve social and economic futures for themselves and their (current and future) family, motivated by chain migration and the fastest, easiest and most reliable migration process available. Accordingly, many reflected positively on the speed of Australian visa processing times, and were even pre-emptively planning when to lodge PR paperwork. Others were unambiguously choosing Australia based on its speediness, stating for example “I was trying with UK for last two years... now I have given up and want Australia” (A26). However, ready availability of a pathway to permanency was arguably the most compelling factor of influence to applicants in their destination choice; its absence (in countries such as the UK and Germany) was likewise noted as a distinct disincentive (A6-7). Thus, as a duo of consultants neatly summarised: “given a choice Indian people still want permanent migration... [the] only mitigating factor is total processing time... [because] permanence gives security – people fear temporary visa uncertainty” (C2-3).

Figure 2 offers quantitative support to this proposition, presenting a ranking of how influential a variety of factors were to the applicant cohort investigated, in their selection of destination (pursuant to the applicant survey described in section 3.2). The factors of influence,

⁵ Details of this criminal prosecution were reported in the Indian Express News Service in August 2011, in multiple articles including ‘With help from UK agency, police uncover magnitude of Healthyway Immigration fraud’ (18/08/11), ‘Healthyway fraud: Cops find 197 fake documents’ (26/08/11), ‘Healthyway fraud mastermind arrested’ (28/08/11), and ‘Healthyway fraud: CA sent to police remand’ (31/08/11).

transformed from raw Likert-scale data to quantile means ordered within the dataset (such that the most influential value is 1, least 0, and median 0.5) reveal three important insights – notwithstanding that, whilst “numbers alone cannot explain the complexity of real life... qualitative data can be confirmed, clarified, and validated through quantitative data” (Sanchez-Ayala 2012).

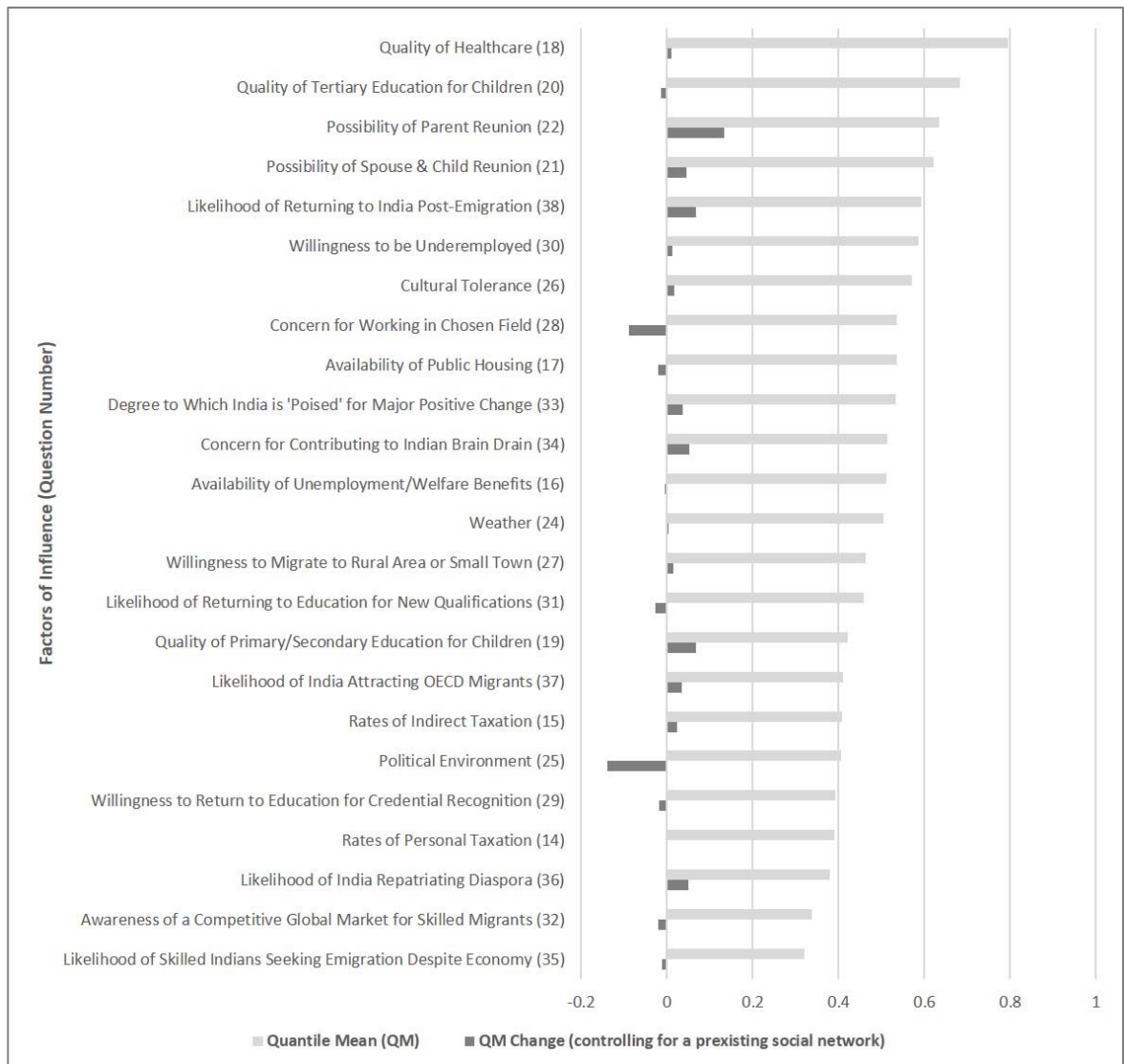


Figure 2. Factors of Influence for Applicants Considering Migration

Firstly, unlike other studies which have investigated Indian students’ motivations for studying abroad, this cohort was not principally driven by desires “to study at a world-class university, to access an international career, to experience a unique adventure, and family encouragement” (King & Sondhi 2018). Rather, as Figure 2 shows, quality of healthcare, quality of tertiary education for children, and possibilities for parental, spousal and child reunion, were the issues

ranking highest – all factors associated with long-term settlement and the future. Recent financialisation literature similarly echoes that “the nature, provision, and funding of health care appear to be important in dampening or facilitating risk-taking (by migrants)” (Clark 2021). Secondly, consistent with the recent work of Lo et al (2019) which suggests that brain waste and underemployment are endemic for even highly-skilled Indian emigrants, this cohort exhibited a high-degree of willingness to be underemployed, and little concern for working in one’s chosen field post-emigration – a finding also in accordance with Qureshi et al (2013) vis-à-vis post-arrival ‘devaluation of qualifications and under-employment’. And finally, notwithstanding methodological dissimilarity, Figure 2 reaffirms that “distance-one connections appear to be a key driver of the choice of the intended destination” (Bertoli & Ruysen 2018); the darker bars presented in Figure 2 control for when applicants had a pre-existing social network in Australia (of friends or family), and suggest that when they did, they were even more influenced by factors associated with long-term residency, and even less concerned by temporal factors such as destination political environment.

All of the aforementioned quantitative findings are of course, tangential or proxies to the question of whether the ready availability of PR was the incentive to emigrate to Australia – which was not directly posed to applicants. The reason: “On some occasions it is necessary to formulate questions in a rather indirect form... it can be the best choice to formulate questions that might involve a sensitive issue for the interviewee in a subtle way” (Sanchez-Ayala 2012). This was gauged to be the case at the time. Nevertheless, it bears mentioning that applicants gave little sense that they were doing anything iniquitous in choosing Australia – rather, most intimated they were simply seeking to pragmatically maximise their migration opportunity.

7. EMBASSY EVALUATIONS

Elite interviews conducted with senior foreign consulate staff (each of approximately deputy Consul-General level) revealed narratives of great interest in their own right, but are beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail. Fundamentally, they affirmed virtually all specific facts and findings emanating from consultant and applicant consultations; consular authorities were well apprised of the weight of intermediary influence, and the attraction of permanent settlement. A representative of the Australian embassy stated it was ‘fairly evident’ that Indians were guided to choose to study ‘Migration-Occupation-in-Demand-List’ courses ‘motivated by PR’; spokespersons for other embassies likewise, noted the ‘intention to return’ requirement for students undermining the ‘aura of the USA’, and similar disincentives such as in-person visa

interviews and slow processing times resulting in “a lot of really good candidates choos[ing] to go elsewhere” (E3). Embassy officials were similarly unified in their evaluation of why applicants chose to use consultancy services generally. It’s “part of [Punjabi] societal culture... if you want to do something, you do it through someone... who can steer you through the process” (E4); in fact, “it appears that lots of applications look to be done independently, but are actually done via agents who don’t declare themselves” (E1). Generally, this was said to be attributable to “lack of knowledge... lots of [applicants] see it as considerably more difficult than it is... [and] agents do a very good job of promoting the ‘difficulty’... target[ing] the lower end of those capable of migrating” (E2).

A core issue for consular actors though, was “vast differences in the quality of service provided by agents” (E1). Indeed it was bemoaned that “some stretch the criteria etcetera by forging documents... [but it’s] hard to pin on them because of [proving] chain of causation for fraud... we know or suspect some problems but can’t do much... [because it’s] a very resource intensive task” (ibid). At the time of data collection, the British High Commission was beginning “a campaign to educate people about the fact that they can do it themselves and not pay consultants” (E4), and commencing the pilot of ‘outsourcing investigative verification’ which in tandem with their “quite extensive libraries of forged and non-forged documents” (ibid), led to the aforementioned prosecution of *Healthyway Immigration*. However, by and large, embassies tolerated rogue intermediary activity within limits – not least to maintain competitiveness in the market for skilled migrants, at a time of unfettered global hypermobility.

The latter point raises a notable, related issue – namely that “there is a range from highly-skilled to *just skilled*” (E1) migrants who emanated from Punjab at that time. Again, this was a widely known fact, accepted by embassy officials, consultants, and applicants alike – despite public posturing at destinations, which might suggest that economic migration was accessible to only highly-skilled candidates. Rather, consistent with Czaika and de Haas (2013) on ‘discursive gaps’, and de Haas et al (2018) vis-à-vis ‘impressions of restrictiveness’, this study found evidence of a considerable difference between the rhetoric and reality of immigration policies. Embassy officials were candid in noting that “we need a lot of semi-skilled too” (E1), and likewise admitted finding “successful HSMP [Highly-Skilled-Migration-Program] recipients working in Tesco stacking shelves” (E4). Where this paper differs from previous scholarship, however, is in questioning to what extent states have regarded migrant underemployment undesirable – or even ‘perverse’, to use Hawthorne’s nomenclature.

Whilst it is undoubtedly the case that “receiving states like Britain are not adequately using the skills of migrants, which is an obstacle to ‘brain exchange’ or ‘brain circulation’” (Qureshi et al 2013), arguably, even “dependence on consultants and agents, who charge high fees but channel prospective migrants towards low-prestige institutions” (ibid) was not entirely regarded as problematic for Australia. On one hand, studies scrutinising Indians’ pursuit of Australian study-settlement paths have argued that “it is hard to imagine that the Commonwealth Government intended the outcomes described”, and that “mostly well-intentioned measures... to attract more migrant tradespersons... to open up training opportunities... [and] mak[e] the assessment process for migration purposes more streamlined, have been hijacked by the migration industry” (Birrell et al 2007). Equally though, as one consultant pointed out, “Australian Visa is most easy – they never ask you why you choose this course – why is it not related to prior study etcetera” (C19). Furthermore, in the words of another, “look at [advertised] demand in Australia – it’s only for tradesmen... ultimately the students who get PR [are welcome] because [they’ll do] call centre and trade work... it’s the skilled [emigrating to] becoming unskilled” (C21). Finally, consider this sentiment from the Australian Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Migration 2004 review of skilled labour migration programs:

Does it matter so much to the nation’s growth that we bring skilled people... to Australia and put them in jobs that do not require the skills? We get the people anyway; we get the stock... We bring people in, and they can drive taxis or dig holes in the Snow Mountains, and they benefit the country (Senator Tsebin Tchen, JSCOM 2003).

8. INTERMEDIARY FUTURES

Findings from this study bear an atavistic resemblance to modern conclusions on education-migration industry inflows into Japan, which similarly intimate that “international education [has been used] as a side door [for labour]” (Liu-Farrer & Tran 2019). Two overarching and intertwined theoretical assertions follow, of ongoing consequence. Firstly, data uncovered herein supports the proposition that traditional immigration recipient states have long been complicit in using education-migration to serve their national interest to supply necessary human capital, even where doing so contributes to the ‘reserve army of labour’. Thus, what is conventionally regarded as residual migrant ‘brain waste’ might in fact be more credibly described here, as flexible labour solicited by the recipient state to service the demands of skilled *and* lesser-skilled economic sectors. The question of whether such labour was historically acquired by policy accident or design is debateable. What is not, however, is evidence of a

mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationship at play between the state and prospective migrants – generating profitable rather than purely perverse outcomes for any actor.

Secondly then, this paper highlights the critical role of migration intermediaries in mediating the aforementioned, as lubricators and facilitators of labour migration, entrusted directly by applicants, *but also indirectly* by the recipient state to deliver human capital. This finding is noteworthy in its own right, but even more significant in the context of the current pandemic; trusted intermediary facilitators of labour migration are being realised as a necessity at a time of constrained mobility. Preferential pathways and privileged access to migration will arguably become more and more commonplace – whether under the auspices of ‘vaccine passports’, guise of ‘travel corridors’, or use of other euphemisms by the state. Noting the value of consultants in influencing decision making regarding destination choice, the forthcoming uncertain age of migration may therefore, be characterised by increasing reliance upon intermediaries and the migration industries, to shepherd economic migrants between willing partner states, given also the doggedness of demand for skilled labour globally. Consequently, “to better unpack the social, economic and geographical complexities of migration processes” (Cranston et al 2018), both policy makers and researchers alike, should be mindful that post-pandemic migration futures are likely to be synergetic with intermediary futures.

9. CONCLUSION

Inspired by recent scholarship examining intermediaries, largely in destination countries, this paper has likewise, “uncovered the rarely investigated perceptions of increasingly significant actors in contemporary migration processes” (Khan 2019). However, by doing so at origin and pre-departure, its findings challenge aspects of existing understandings of Indian migrants and their destinations choices. The data presented juxtaposes the perspectives of a complimentary suite of actors – consultants, applicants, and embassy officials – to provide a holistic picture of Indian outmigration, from its source and at a formative stage in the migration cycle, in the era preceding the transformation of the Australian study-migration pipeline. The paper empirically evidences the overwhelming importance of pathways to permanent residency as a migration pull-factor, coupled with a desire amongst the research cohort to pursue an almost indiscriminate passage to Australia – perhaps perversely, but arguably in earnest. More generally, it highlights the true extent of intermediary influence on pre-departure decision-making, and concludes that migration industries and mediators of labour migration will be increasingly important in the post-pandemic global mobility landscape. ■

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PAPER IV – iMIGRATION? EXPLORING THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO
MANAGE AND SELECT ECONOMIC IMMIGRANTS

1. ABSTRACT

This paper considers whether states adequately employ technological solutions to address immigration problems. Specifically, it explores the extent to which countries currently utilise technology in the management and selection of economic migrants, based on a global survey of specialist legal practitioners. It finds that databases and paper-reliant processing methods are still used in much of the world in lieu of more intelligent workflow tools, including in technologically advanced Asian and European states. Equally, it reveals that Traditional Immigration Recipient countries, but also Gulf Cooperation Council nations, lead the field in developing technological systems to address immigration challenges. These findings frame subsequent discussion of how governments could more actively harness biometric data, artificial intelligence and geolocation technologies, to improve economic immigration policy outcomes, notwithstanding legitimate privacy and data-protection concerns.

Keywords: app, AI, biometric, immigration policy, technology and innovation

2. INTRODUCTION

Popular interest and public policy concern with immigration is high across the globe. Underpinning the discourse is the idea that nations are doing their best to manage migration and select economic migrants who will readily integrate and make positive socio-economic contributions – within an increasingly fierce competitive global market for skilled migrants no less. However, nearly two decades since initial multilateral observation that issues relating to international mobility of highly-skilled workers were receiving increasing attention from policy-makers (Dumont & Lemaitre 2004; OECD 2008), questions remain regarding how states can maintain relative competitiveness in pursuit of global talent; what avenues exist beyond blunt policy responses to immigration challenges, such as tinkering with category parameters and quotas?

This paper explores this question with a focus on technology – existing and emergent. It considers whether states adequately employ technological solutions to immigration problems, bearing in mind tools of digitisation already at our disposal, but also newer technologies involving biometric data, artificial intelligence (AI) and geolocation functionalities. Specifically, it examines the extent to which countries currently utilise technology in the management and selection of economic migrants, based on a global survey conducted within the world's largest specialist immigration legal services firm, Fragomen. Qualitative findings are presented, accompanied by quantitative results generated via numerical analysis, to provide a robust empirical basis for discussion regarding whether governments could consider more aggressively harnessing technological tools and methods, to improve immigration policy outcomes.

Family and humanitarian streams of immigration fall outside of the scope of this study, because of Fragomen's work focus being economic immigration. Technology is unquestionably also relevant to the challenges faced by states regarding forced and irregular migration, and refugee and asylum-seeker movements. Indeed, current literature regarding the intersections of technology with immigration almost exclusively confront the dangers attendant for non-economic and vulnerable migrants – and rightly so. The objective of this paper, however, is wholly different to extant literature, which it does not seek to diminish but supplement. That is, this study cautiously considers the potential, positive possibilities of technology with regards to economic immigration. We recognise that resistance to technology is not asinine, and nor are data protection and privacy concerns unwarranted. Nevertheless, whilst not acquiescing to change as a *fait accompli*, we argue that we must

move beyond primarily decrying new technologies without investigating positive possibilities also.

To reiterate, we are not evangelists for technology. Rather, we present herein an inductive empirically-driven research contribution with concrete implications for policy makers, researchers, and broader society – a novel first foray into investigating how technology (which is always problematic, challenging and disruptive, as well as potentially frightening), could be part of the solution to migration challenges, in the decades ahead. The unique dataset and findings presented validate the importance of improving speed and efficiency of immigration administration and processing. Opportunities exist beyond simply digitisation though; AI, biometric and geolocation technologies have notably, been exactly what has underpinned some of the most successful responses to COVID-19 (*vis-à-vis* contact tracing). Similar openings exist in the context of the ongoing facilitation of labour mobility. Accordingly, we contribute knowledge germane to designing, implementing, and sustaining effective international technology policies apropos economic migration for the post-COVID landscape.

Foreshadowing what follows, we note four matters. Firstly, this paper substantially contributes to migration scholarship empirically, through its examination of a uniquely created, global, comparative data set canvassing elite immigration law practitioners – intermediaries barely recognised in current literature. Secondly, the paper is methodologically novel in the field, utilising sentiment analysis to support its assessment of qualitative respondent data. Thirdly, we investigate herein an area of mounting contemporary relevance which is academically underexplored, and notably, offer constructive ways forward. And fourthly, the paper is situated within the relevant literature but does not purport to be a theoretical treatise. Rather, it attempts to illuminate how technology is *actually* used, and might be better used by states in migration, to fundamentally, provoke thought to expand this conversation.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The drivers for the shift in global focus towards skilled migration have been dealt with exhaustively (see Czaika 2018), amidst an explosion of literature concerning migration of the skilled in recent decades. Broadly speaking, demographic change and aging populations in the West, coupled with the long perceived economic benefits of prioritising skilled migration (Borjas 1999) have justified pursuit of economic migrants, and the continued forensic study

of the evolution of domestic policy frameworks targeting skilled individuals (see Chand & Tung 2019). Years since it was first articulated though, it remains the case that:

Two types of belief have been particularly influential in migration policy formation. One is the economic belief in market behaviour based on neo-classical theory, according to which people move to maximize their individual utility (usually through higher income), and cease to move, or return home, if the cost-benefit equation changes. The second is the bureaucratic belief that regulations designed to categorize migrants and to regulate their admission and residence effectively shape aggregate behaviour. Together these two beliefs add up to the idea that migration can be turned on and off like a tap by appropriate policy settings (Castles 2004).

In this vein, much continues to be said about forces applied to the tap – but less so about the ‘plumbing’ itself. Recently, however, focus has turned towards the infrastructure that underpins migration policy, in recognition of the fact that technology is increasingly used throughout the migration cycle, and “technical change, even if it is limited in scope, can have effects that ripple throughout the economy” (Stokey 2018). Consequently, there has been a “greater recognition of the role of technology in migration management... [bearing in mind that] it is likely that some of the most effective responses [to migration challenges] can also be found in emerging technology “ (McAuliffe & Ruhs 2018).

The question of what constitutes emerging, old or new technology is itself a vexed matter. Biometric technologies for example, whilst often thought of as cutting-edge, have in truth been contemplated in specialist publications for years, in relation to vehicle border crossings (Franworth 2007), preventing illegal immigration (Mercer 2009), standardisation of EU citizens’ passports, ID and Residence Permit Cards (Houdeau 2009), and face recognition in airports (Gohringer 2012). What has changed, however, has been a rise in detailed technological consciousness in academia pertaining to immigration, as these technologies reach the ‘adaptation stage of technology adoption’ (Al Solami 2018).

Studies which engage the interface between cutting-edge technologies and immigration, thus now exists in several domains, and can broadly be summarised as follows. Firstly, building upon early scholarly investigations into the ‘function creep’ of biometrics in asylum management (Ajana 2013), and the increased use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for border control purposes (Broeders & Hampshire 2013), a growing literature examines biometric bordering. Recent expressions seek to “enhance our understanding of what is at stake in the increasing deployment of ICTs in border control” (Sontowski 2018), and “the challenge to study the design and development of border security

technologies without falling into either technological or socio-political determinism” (Glouftsiou & Scheel 2021).

A second literary tranche investigates digital technologies as tools for migrants’ empowerment and control, digital mediation, and the empowerment-control nexus as “a heuristic lens to a better understanding of the impact of digitalisation processes on migration issues” (Nedelcu & Soysüren 2020). By contrast with earlier appraisals of migrant maximisation of technology (Costa-Pinto 2014; Acharya 2016), this work suggests that whilst new technologies offer opportunities for migrants’ agency, they simultaneously create “new structural constraints to their mobility, actions and mobilizations, as they enhance states’ surveillance and control capacities” (Nedelcu & Soysüren 2020). Likewise, cognisance of technology lies at the heart of cautionary work investigating the relationship between hate speech, social media and immigrants (Müller & Schwarz 2018) and securitization of immigration policies, ‘extreme vetting’ and asylum screening processes in the USA and Europe (Micinski 2019).

A third stream tackles growing use of data analytics for ‘citizen scoring’ – categorisation, assessment and prediction at both individual and population level – and “concerns expressed by different stakeholder groups as a way to elicit the heterogeneity, tensions and negotiations that shape the contemporary landscape of data-driven governance” (Dencik et al 2019). Similar work finds that “solutionistic approaches to compiling and analysing migration statistics... are consolidating policy conceptualisations of migration as risk” (Taylor & Meissner 2019), and contend that the ‘big data approach’ is “ill-suited to understanding the complex dynamics of migration and to offering protection to vulnerable people” (ibid).

Fourthly, literature touching upon much of the above exists within AI-specific studies. Molnar first employs a human rights perspective (Molnar 2019; Molnar & Gill 2018) in considering the implications of automated and algorithmic decision-making in immigration and refugee applications, with calls for greater oversight and accountability to safeguard rights. Subsequent scholarship hypothesises that AI technology can affect international migration management “(1) by deepening the existing asymmetries between states on the international plane; (2) by modernising states’ and international organisations’ traditional practices; and (3) by reinforcing the contemporary calls for more evidence-based migration management and border security” (Beduschi 2021) – ultimately concluding that “policymakers should not succumb to the hype surrounding AI without a comprehensive consideration of its implications” (ibid).

By contrast with all of the aforementioned, academic literature which deeply examines how technological infrastructure might positively facilitate immigration is less prevalent. A rare example is evaluation of The Canadian Express Entry (EE) System (by Hiebert 2019) – the online application management system used to provide that state with the means to rank application intake and invite foreign nationals who are ‘most likely to succeed’ in Canada (IRCC 2019b). This ‘Expression of Interest’ scheme of antipodean ancestry, regarded by some as “the most modern migration policy tool” of its kind (McEvenue 2019), has unquestionably revolutionised Canadian immigration efficiency since its introduction in 2015. Notwithstanding, it is important to recognise EE for what it is (inventory management and ranking), and is not (intelligent technology).

This paper therefore seeks to make progress by overtly contemplating whether states adequately employ technology to give effect to their aspirations to attract and retain migrants of choice. This normative question has been posed before – directly in fact, by Birrell who has written extensively with regard to Australian immigration (Birrell 2000). Its re-examination is nevertheless, overdue for several reasons. Firstly, it is patently not the focus of any of the abovementioned, nor addressed in the abundance of literature regarding skilled migration. Secondly, it is a timely question, in light of exponential growth in technological capacity, and the concomitant accelerated pace of adoption of advanced technology into society. Thirdly, amidst efforts by states to manage migration within limitations of human resources, and forthcoming post-pandemic financial constraints, it is a necessary consideration in both national settings, and the global context. And finally, given economic migration continues to be a fundamental driver and tenet of the global economy – though frequently veiled as an option, rather than recognised as an immutable reality – the need to generate understandings to explain its causes and consequences, but also, communicate sincere scholarship to guide how it might better be managed and regulated, has never been more urgent.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Auditing the breadth of technology employed across the globe in relation to any subject matter is a sizeable task. For this paper we endeavoured to do so by conducting a proxy survey, as a research strategy to provide fast, cost-efficient and accurate data in lieu of self-reports from across the world (per Cobb 2018). The overarching respondent entity acting as a proxy for government officials and/or representatives of individual states, was Fragomen,

Del Rey, Bernsen and Loewy LLP and Fragomen Global LLP (collectively known as ‘Fragomen’) – the world’s largest legal firm with a practice exclusively focused on global immigration law and the provision of immigration services to corporate and individual clients worldwide.

4.1 Survey Design & Implementation

A secure online survey was designed¹, to collect data about current software and hardware technology used in individual countries – information otherwise publically undisclosed anywhere. The survey directed respondents to specify their name, office location, job title, years working on economic migration, and nominated country, before posing twelve questions. These enquired as to what if any technological infrastructure was used by a state, then: how the technology was used in practice, its architectural and/or technical specifications; who developed, designed or built it; whether it was bespoke, customised or configured technology; who maintained the systems and had access to the underlying data; when the technology was last updated, upgraded or significantly modified; whether it integrated with other government IT platforms; and finally, overall views regarding whether the technology was easy to use, well designed, outdated, effective, and/or fit for purpose. Three further questions were posed thereafter, regarding future technological systems: whether respondents knew of plans for future research and development, supported the use of AI in immigration systems, or could share other information pertinent to the study. Respondents were encouraged to provide as much detail as possible and provided two key definitions; for the purposes of the survey, ‘software’ could non-exhaustively include programs for immigrant entry and exit, electronic application filing, automatic correspondence generation, inventory management and databasing; and ‘hardware’ could non-exhaustively include devices/machines for fingerprint, retina, body or biometric scanning, generating biometric cards, chip embedded documents, and general processing and administration.

An Executive Partner of Fragomen initially invited participation from fifty, globally dispersed, senior legal practitioners. Subsequent subjects were acquired via snowball invitations; the only criteria for inclusion was that participants should feel sufficiently familiar with their jurisdiction, to reliably provide meaningful data. Informed consent was obtained via individual declarations confirming the project was institutionally approved but voluntary.

¹ See attached Appendix A: Survey Design Summary.

The declaration also specified that information supplied would be anonymised, and results reported in relation to a country, or in aggregate. Personal information was collected only to verify participant authenticity. Multiple respondents were also sought from each jurisdiction, to enable anonymization, and attribution of answers by country not individual.

In securing approval to proceed, it was agreed that research data collected would not pertain to client work, or be commercial in confidence. Rather, we sought the personal views of individuals based on their subject matter expertise in a given jurisdiction, as a preferred proxy to asking these questions to immigration department officials across the world. Hence this study is not a survey of Fragomen or its work – it is a survey of an elite cohort of legal practitioners, to provide a first empiric (and not just theoretical) basis for discussing the use of technology in economic immigration settings.

Acquiring data of this sort – close dialogue with privileged actors (Clark 1998) – creates a unique data set, distinct from self-reporting from individual government representatives. We acknowledge this specific positionality; the study undoubtedly does not speak for all legal practice, nor state-sanctioned depictions of governmental policies. The research design is conscious, however, intended to facilitate collation of widely dispersed information in a practical and efficient manner, but more importantly, deliberately arms-length assessment of governmental practices, noting there are times when proxy reports can be *more* accurate than self-reports (Cobb 2018). Accordingly, the data supplied is an unique and valid perspective, irrespective of the degree to which it accords with state self-reporting²; the respondents pragmatism and practical knowledge of how immigration systems function, arguably freed them to share views about the state of technological tools without fear or favour, or legitimate constraints to which government officials might be subject.

4.2 Numerical Analysis³

The raw dataset emanating from the survey contains simple categorical variables (for respondent identification information), specific-rating categorical variables consisting of an integer between 1 and 5 or ‘Don’t know’ (for Likert-scale judgements), Boolean variables for ‘Yes/No’ questions, and string variables for free-text elaborations to each of the latter. To

² Research data presented herein has nevertheless been confirmed for accuracy via desk research and consultations with technology vendors and state officials as necessary. We assume responsibility for any residual errors of fact.

³ See attached Appendix D – Paper 4 Numerical Data Analysis Notebook.html for full details of our quantitative analysis process.

enable numerical analysis, we converted the Boolean, specific-rating and string variables into real numbers, as follows.

Boolean variables were assigned values of 1 for 'Yes' and 0 for 'No', to allow their means to represent the fraction of positive responses. Specific-ratings remained as is, with 'Don't know' results being omitted in analysis calculations – the exception being the negative quality of 'Outdated', for which we reversed the order of 1 to 5 so that all numerical values for 'Rating' captured the positivity of the response.⁴ Finally, string variables were assigned a number based on the sentiment of the text, as measured by their Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner (VADER) score (Hutto & Gilbert 2015).⁵ These VADER scores measure both polarity *and* intensity of sentiment by rule-based application of a human-curated lexicon, originally designed for microblog analysis, but applied since to examination of social media, film and product reviews, stock market performance, newspaper opinion pieces, and political debates (Li et al 2017; Andries 2016). We use VADER compound scores, which give normalised, weighted and composite scores for a given text block between -1 and 1, with -1 most negative, 1 most positive and values near 0 (typically within 0.05) considered neutral. To facilitate sentiment comparisons within our data, we transform these scores without reordering, such that a score is the fraction of other sentiments seen in the dataset (noting that where a respondent has left a text block blank, we omit this number from any analysis). Thus the most negative final 'Sentiment' is given numerical value 0, the most positive 1, and the median 0.5.

In forthcoming numerical analysis, we look at differences in statistical aggregates⁶ of our Boolean, Rating, and Sentiment variables between different countries. In order to approach statistical significance in these aggregates (given $n=101$), and aid comparative analysis, we band respondent countries together into five groups – Asia (ASI), Europe (EUR), South America and Africa (SAA), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and Traditional Immigration Recipient (TIR) nations. Although the categorisations are subjective groupings, they are informed by the geographical proximity, geopolitical memberships, and policy

⁴ We deliberately placed one negative quality within four positive ones (in questions six and twelve) to mitigate against response bias in Likert-scale tables.

⁵ VADER is a sentiment analysis tool from Python's Natural Language ToolKit library, fully open-sourced under MIT licence, which utilises Amazon's Mechanical Turk for most of its underlying ratings, and interfaces with a lexicon called SentiWordNet (an extension of the lexical database WordNet). It employs a list of lexical features labelled according to their semantic orientation as either positive or negative, and significantly measures valence, rather than binary polarity alone.

⁶ The predominant aggregates are the count $n = \sum_i 1$ of responses x_i that have values, sample mean $\mu = \sum_i x_i / n$ used as an estimator of population mean, sample standard deviation $\sigma = \sqrt{\sum_i (x_i - \mu)^2 / (n - 1)}$, and standard error of the mean $\text{SE} = \sigma / \sqrt{n}$.

harmonisation of states, and permit presentation of meaningful quantitative findings, alongside the qualitative.

The choice to employ a parsimonious rule-based sentiment analysis tool was guided by the literature; VADER's lexicon-based approach to sentiment analysis outperforms machine-learning in almost all product contexts regardless of text length (Kiani, Al Natour & Turetken 2018), and has been found to perform as well as (and in most cases, better than) other highly regarded sentiment analysis tools (Hutto & Gilbert 2015). But why a natural language processing, data science tool at all? The choice is deliberate, and consistent with the conceptual direction of this research, which values the use of mixed methods, and where possible and appropriate, some degree of quantification. In defence of latter in particular, the work is underpinned by the belief that:

Abstract argument about conceptualization do not make a point well. Far more concrete arguments, backed up by examples and (more often than not) some statistics, are a great deal more convincing (to people with power). They get reported in the press, and can eventually have an impact on policy. Such studies have been more convincing in the past. They remain more convincing now (Dorling & Shaw 2002).

Of course, the results of sentiment analysis can be misleading if presented without reference to the actual passages of text that were analysed (Andries 2016). That is not, therefore, what we do herein. Rather, we use VADER-based sentiment analysis, to supplement, not replace, our qualitative data analysis of respondent comments. Moreover, sentiment analysis is applied in aggregated form in relation to parsimonious objective information, and primarily in relation to where we have sought subjective opinions or speculative information. It is consequently a novel, but equally valid, application of computational treatment of subjectivity in text, and an excellent tool to indicatively measure evaluation, opinion, attitudes and emotion, within a single metric, in tandem with commentary.

5. USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Use of technology (by countries) to manage migration diverges considerably across the globe. Whilst in some jurisdictions processes are completely digitised and workflow extremely streamlined, in others, administration is rudimentary and yet procedures sometimes labyrinthine. Virtually nowhere utilises 'flying cars' yet, so to speak; there are barely electronic forms used in swaths of Western Europe and most of Asia is similarly weak on immigration tech, despite being advanced on domestic technology integration generally. The apparent

mismatch with other domains of public administration is stark – especially given the stakes are human mobility, human capital, and economic growth. Appearances are key to remember here, however; use of technological tools to monitor the movements of people (migrants *and* citizenry) are quite commonplace but clandestine, operating in the realm of national security and intelligence apparatuses – a fact made surer to the public-at-large by state responses to the pandemic. Preceding COVID-19, vanguard academic perspectives on the link between migration and technology were focused more upon use of social media by disruptive non-state actors to nefariously set migration agendas⁷, the impact of technology on the border-control policies, and “growing use of artificial intelligence (AI), big data and machine learning in migration... [as] a new way for states to create different hierarchies of rights between citizens and non-citizens, to exercise control over migrant populations, and to renege on their responsibilities to uphold human rights” (Molnar 2018). Only more recently, has focus shifted to understanding the public-facing *stages* of migration management vis-à-vis technology – as distinct from critique of *classes* of technology, including those involving border crossing, migrant communication, and to a lesser extent, administration itself.

The temporal stages of migration management with respect to technology can thus be characterised as follows (with regard to Bither & Zlebarth 2020): the prediction of movement of people (before people move); the provision of digital identities to refugees and migrants (whilst people move); the management of visa and border processes (tracking movement); the management of asylum processes (handling arrival); the movement of money (migrant remittances and capital movement); and finally, the possibility of work across borders (migrant labour mobility). These stages are not strictly chronological but may be considered as somewhat sequential, and all potentially interwoven with *types* of technology non-exhaustively involving digitization, AI, digital identities, biometrics, and blockchain – all of which will likely change migration management and policy going forward. Importantly, cutting across this characterisation (though somewhat omitted), is consideration of *processing technology* itself, the software and hardware ‘plumbing’ utilised not only by states, but also private intermediaries of migration and a range of non-governmental stakeholders. Indeed, latterly, immigration law, consultancy, and tech firms are actually venturing into creating this

⁷ See, notably, McAuliffe (2018), arguing that “The biggest issue in migration and technology is that newer forms of social media activism are increasingly enabling disrupters to set the migration agenda, based on fear and lies, in a quest for power.”

infrastructure in addition to using state amenities.⁸ There are salient reasons, therefore, for “develop(ing) models for ethical cooperation with the private sector” (Bither & Zlebarth 2020), and, research into current software and hardware technology used in individual countries, as presented herein.

6. RESULTS

Survey data was collected in May 2019 from twenty-five cities⁹. A total of 101 responses were completed and form the dataset for analysis; sixty-two further surveys were only partially finished and have been excluded. Views about forty-six different countries are presented in the dataset, which we band together for numerical analysis, into five groups as aforementioned (see Figure 1). Over seventy percent of respondents possessed greater than six years work experience in the field of economic immigration; these practitioners spent the most time providing data, and tended to supply a higher quantum and quality of contribution than less experienced individuals (see Figure 2). We summarise our overall results first, then focus on the two groups (TIR and GCC) which supplied the richest information regarding technological systems being used to address current and future immigration challenges.¹⁰

⁸ On 3 June 2021, Fragomen announced its acquisition of Nomadic, a provider of software solutions for short-term travel compliance, to enhance its business traveller management, from pre-travel assessment through to visa applications, including compliance filings in the travel destination, if necessary. See Fragomen: Insights. (2021) *Fragomen Acquires Nomadic to Deliver Innovative Business Visa Solution to Clients*. <https://www.fragomen.com/insights/fragomen-acquires-nomadic-to-deliver-innovative-business-visa-solution-to-clients.html>.

⁹ Data was collected from Abu Dhabi, Auckland, Bengaluru, Bogota, Brussels, Caracas, Doha, Dubai, Dublin, Frankfurt, Hong King, Johannesburg, Kochi, Kuala Lumpur, Lima, London, Mexico City, Perth, San Francisco, San Jose, Shanghai, Singapore, Sydney, Toronto, and Zurich.

¹⁰ Data from ASI, EUR, and SAA are not presented in detail in this paper to allow for full reporting of qualitative results from TIR and GCC, and extrapolation of consequences of those results in the Discussion.

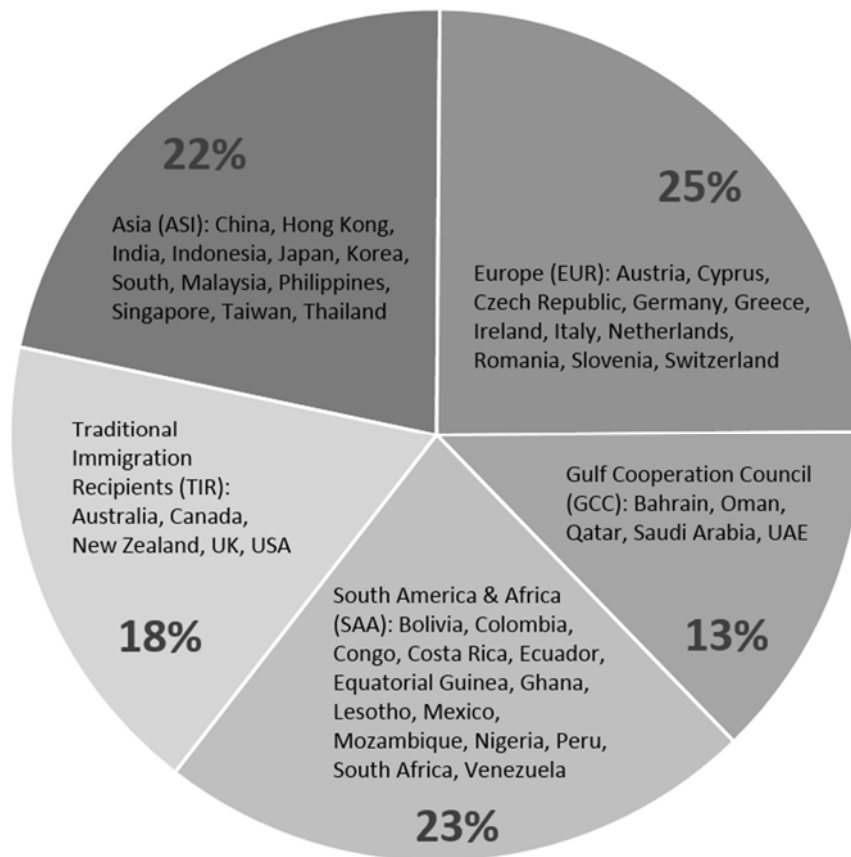


Figure 1. Respondents by Group (5) and Country (46)

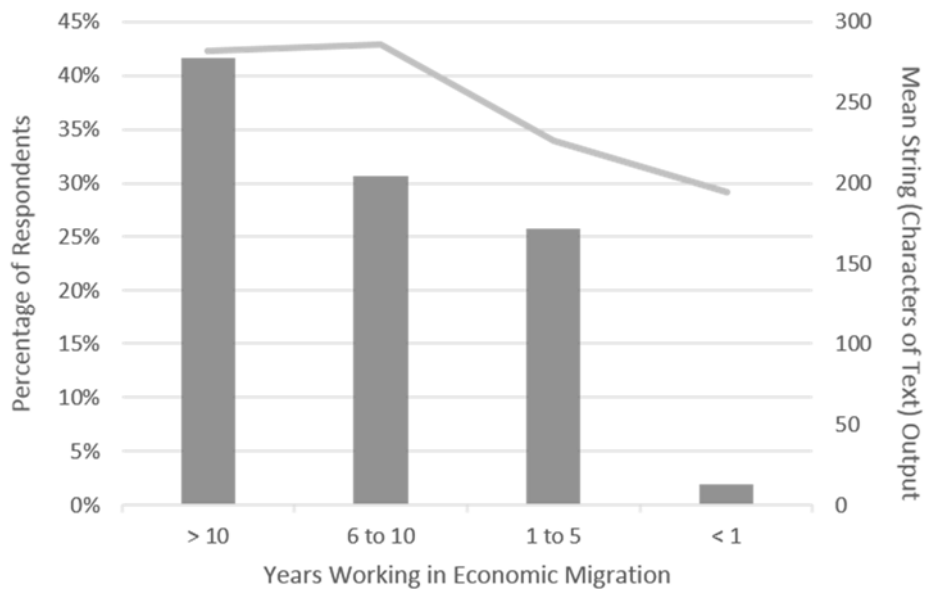


Figure 2. Respondent Experience Level and Mean String Output

6.1 Data Summary

Summary results for each of the primary survey questions are presented in Figure 3. These yes/no percentages, interpreted alongside their corresponding optional free-text responses, revealed that respondents possessed far greater familiarity with the software used in their jurisdictions, than the hardware. Notwithstanding, this pertained to operational, rather than technical knowledge of systems: generally, respondents evidenced little awareness of who developed, designed or built their technology; whether it was bespoke, customised or configured; who maintained the systems or had access to the underlying data; or when the technology was last updated, upgraded or significantly modified. Numerous respondents also conflated software and hardware, despite our attempts to define, and separate responses regarding each. Thus, answers regarding both could often be found in the first part the survey and less qualitative information tended to be supplied in the second part. Integration with other government IT systems was nevertheless reported as being quite poor in relation to both categories.

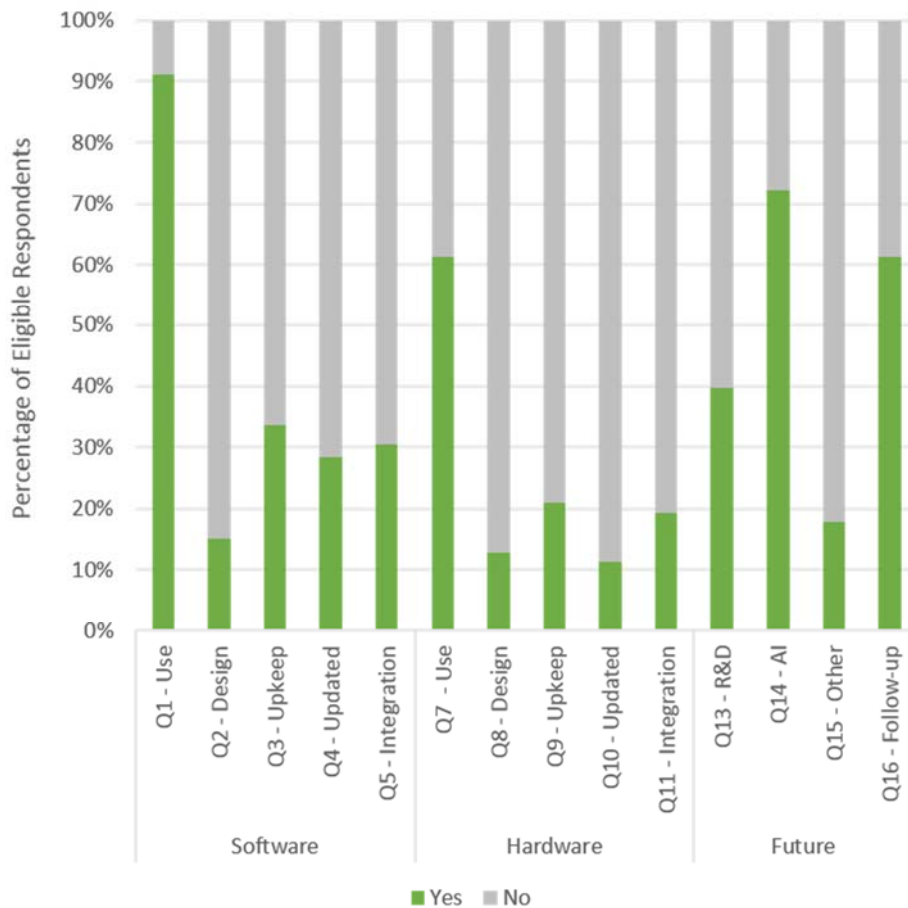


Figure 3. Responses to Primary Survey Questions

In the third part of the survey, regarding future technological systems, we received robust contributions. Plans for future research and development were reported in nineteen countries and support for the use of modern tools and technology was generally evident. Furthermore, seventy-two percent of respondents indicated support for using AI to select and/or manage the administration of economic immigrants – it was in fact the most commented upon question, with eighty-six percent of respondents proffering detailed opinions.

Across the dataset, the mean VADER compound score was slightly positive, 0.24, with sample standard deviation 0.37. This correlated with our reading of the overall qualitative data supplied; legal practitioners used very little figurative speech in their text strings (or emoticons, exclamations or ad hoc capitalisation), and provided balanced language. This general tone of cautious optimism also accorded with aggregated evaluation of current technological systems used across the globe, though software was better understood and regarded more favourably than hardware (see Figure 4).

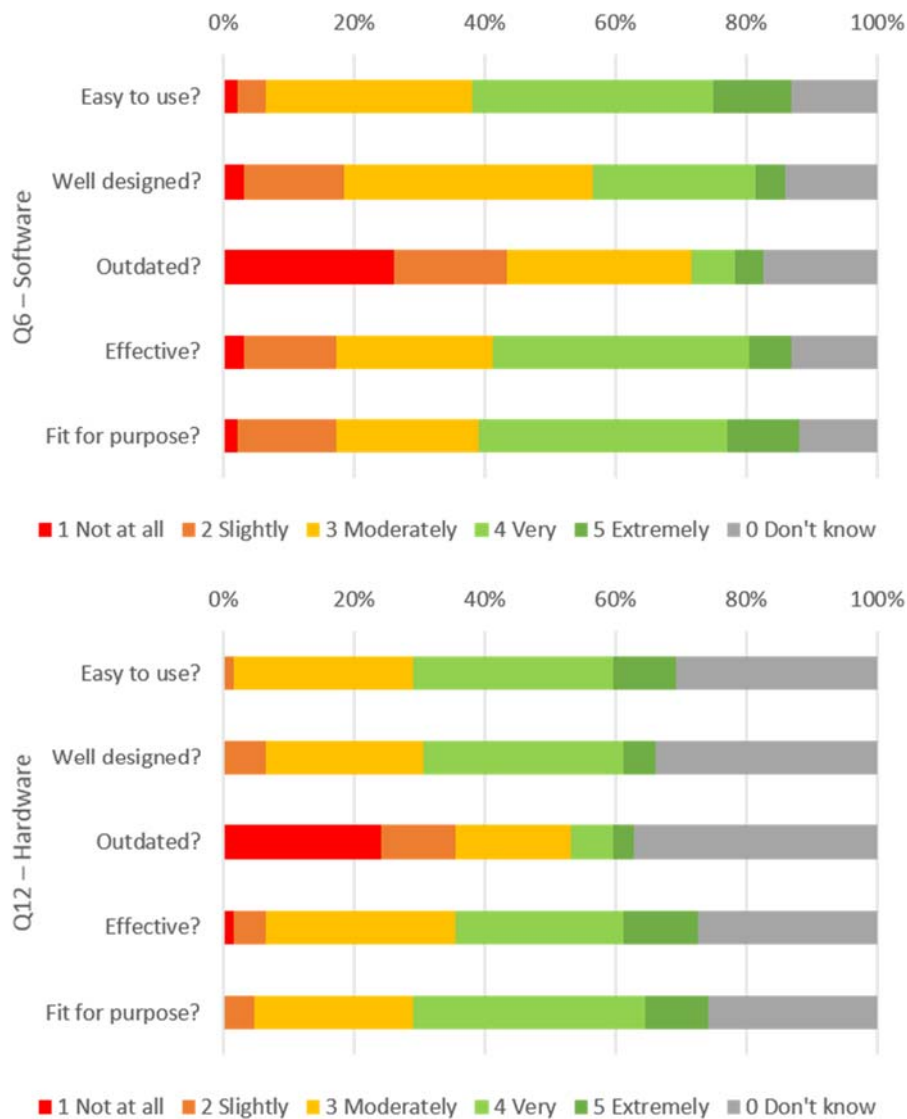


Figure 4. Aggregated Evaluation of Current Systems

6.2 Traditional Immigration Recipient Nations

Traditional Immigration Recipient (TIR) nations, banded together as jurisdictions with large and longstanding immigration apparatuses, exhibited a much more positive mean VADER compound score, 0.32 with sample standard deviation 0.41, than the aggregate or any other group. Overall evaluation of software and hardware systems was more favourable than the aggregate (see Figure 5), and knowledge of immigration technology also better than for ASI, EUR or SAA. This was especially clear from responses regarding Canada and Australia – perhaps unsurprisingly, given the status of both countries as leaders in immigration

innovation. Pertinent current developments in the Canadian context were neatly summarised as follows:

Canada has been working on E-App streamlined processing... an advanced decision-making process by which large groups of low-risk files are identified, triaged, and group approved very quickly. It is more than simply categorizing files at intake and applying group processing at the officer level. It typically replaces the officer review portion altogether with a much faster screening (i.e. triaging) process that uses easily accessible data points external to the file itself... No bank documents or employment letters are ever looked at. Instead, data and statistics provide the basis for decision-making... so far [it] has proven to be a very effective method of moving certain low-risk files very quickly without noticeable increase to adverse outcomes... another efficiency-building initiative under development, 'Advanced Analytics'... may ultimately negate the need for streamlining... [and] in addition, Canada is also looking into applying AI algorithms (84M).

Data received about Australia likewise confirmed it has “been progressively moving, over the last decade, to an online visa application system to facilitate the application, payment, document facilitation, processing and approval of [all] Australian visa applications” (36D). This process of digitisation and away from paper-based processes has generated significant administrative efficiencies, “allowing the Department to move applications anywhere in the world for processing and for some processes to be automated... risk assessed and in some cases auto-granted” (40G). Requests for further information and communication generally, now housed within centralised online systems, were also reported as having improved; as one user noted, “we contribute to and are a key stakeholder in the further development and usability of the online system... which has evolved significantly since conception... centred around functionality additions, additional visa classes added... or legislative updates” (36D).

Immigration technology in Australia was also reported as being very focused on maximising compliance and minimising fraud, and being strongly integrated with border management and security systems and priorities. Predominantly in-house design, development and management of systems, allowed for data matching between government departments, links between immigration and tax office records, and information sharing with the labour department, where skills shortage lists are developed for immigration eligibility purposes. Notwithstanding, it was noted that current IT infrastructure was aging, prompting the state to be “currently exploring partnership with the private sector to build next generation IT platforms to utilise advanced technologies to find efficiencies for government” (40G). Moves in this direction have already begun in Australia, which “has implemented a level of AI for auto approvals of work permits for selected employers and is seeking to expand the same” (3M). Nevertheless, “the current government is looking at plans to [additionally and

potentially also] outsource visa processing and in part those participating in the tenders are required to present technology solutions which include automation/robotics-processing” (35M).

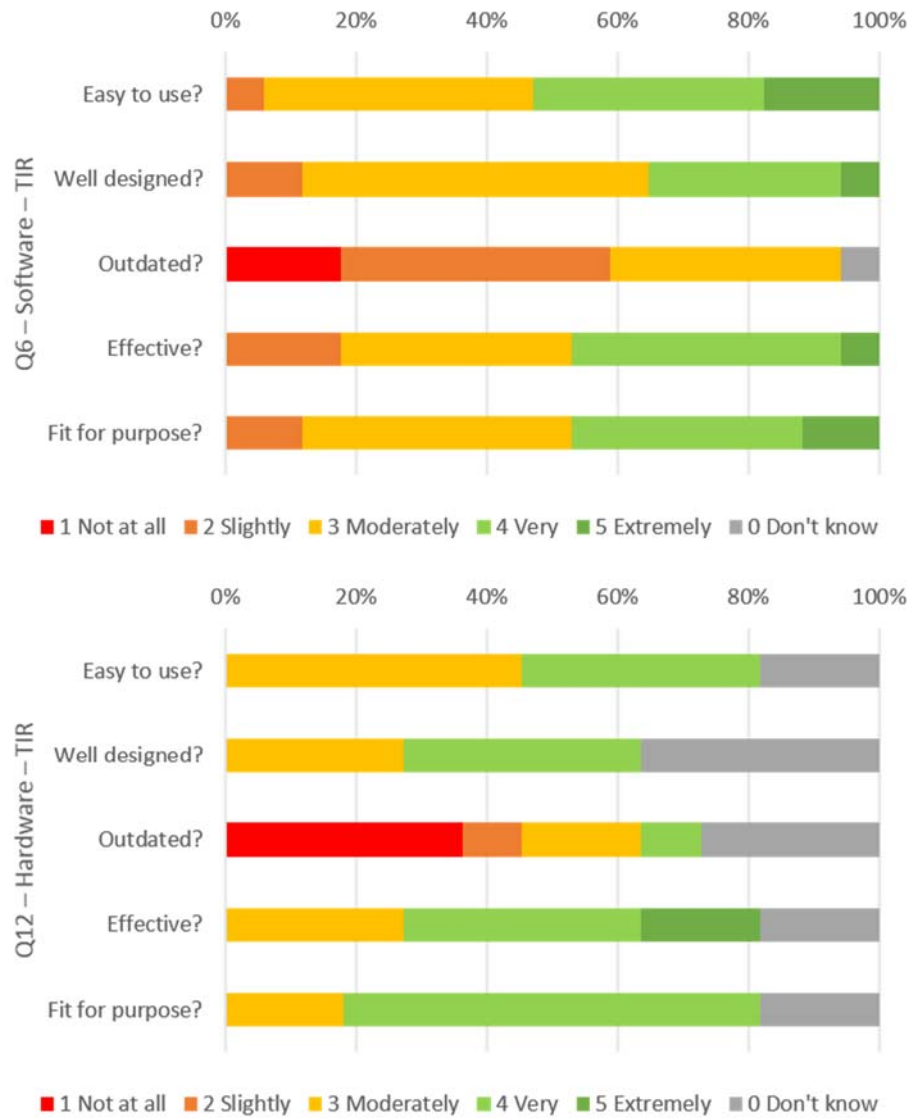


Figure 5. TIR Evaluation of Current Systems

5.2.1 Case A: United Kingdom

In recent history, the UK has been less of an immigration policy leader, and more a notable follower of initiatives by other states such as Australia and Canada. Numerous administrative efforts attempting to emulate programs to attract the highly-skilled have come and gone, complicated by EU freedom of movement and its associated politics. Consequently, it was

surprising to find the converse of this trend (perhaps provoked by nebulous and uncertain futures vis-à-vis the EU) in relation to immigration technology. In short, the UK is ahead of many of its contemporaries in Europe in this arena:

[The] majority of the UK visa application process is completed online. The visa application forms are drafted via a website and the system auto-generates to the relevant visa payment websites (for the government fee and the Immigration Health Surcharge). The Home Office are making a vigorous effort to move applications to electronic submissions, therefore they no longer require original documents and instead there is now a facility available to scan and upload the application supporting documents. This means that we no longer have to handle originals... clients retain the[m] whilst their applications are being processed, eliminating the risk of lost/damaged important documents. For in-country applications, there is an online booking system that populates appointment availability across all of the application service points across the UK. We are prompted to input a post code and the nearest service points appear as a list... colour coded so we can identify whether a fee is required to make an appointment... The Sponsor Management System is also a vital tool that allows us to assign Certificate of Sponsorships and make changes to a Sponsor Licence in real time (6M).

Perhaps the most innovative recent step taken by the UK in relation to immigration technology, however, has been the deployment of its 'EU Exit: ID Document Check' app, to manage applications for the EU Settlement Scheme. As described in the data:

Although it is for verifying a person's identity only, it eliminates a burden for the EU nationals and their family members (in certain circumstances) to have to submit their original passports. The app scans the biometric passports/biometric residence permits and pre-populates the personal information. Applicants hold the device in front of them to scan their face for a biometric scan and a photograph is taken. This simplifies the settled status application... and only takes 10 minutes (6M).

It is clear that "the UK government is increasingly leaning towards digital systems to manage the entire immigration process for individuals and employers, with an emphasis on data-sharing between government departments" (8G). This has been facilitated by considerable openness to new ideas and external entities, and a tendency to "engage lots of smaller contractors as well as larger firms... [for example] the settled status app [which] was built by Deloitte, Accenture, and WorldReach" (9R).

6.3 Gulf Cooperation Council Nations

One of the most surprising finds of the study was the level of activity it revealed within Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations. This region, which is not typically associated with immigration innovation, was the clear outlier in positive self-assessment of its own systems, deeming both its software and hardware in even more favourable terms than the TIR group

(see Figure 6). The GCC also evidenced an unique trait in evaluating its software more positively than its hardware – the opposite of the trend for all other groups and the aggregate – in our calculations for Combined Mean Ratings (see Figure 7). Notably, this high level of approval for their current systems, correlated with Future Sentiment; thus the GCC, of all groups, was found to both regard its immigration technology most favourably, and indicate the most optimism for its future prospects (see Figure 8).

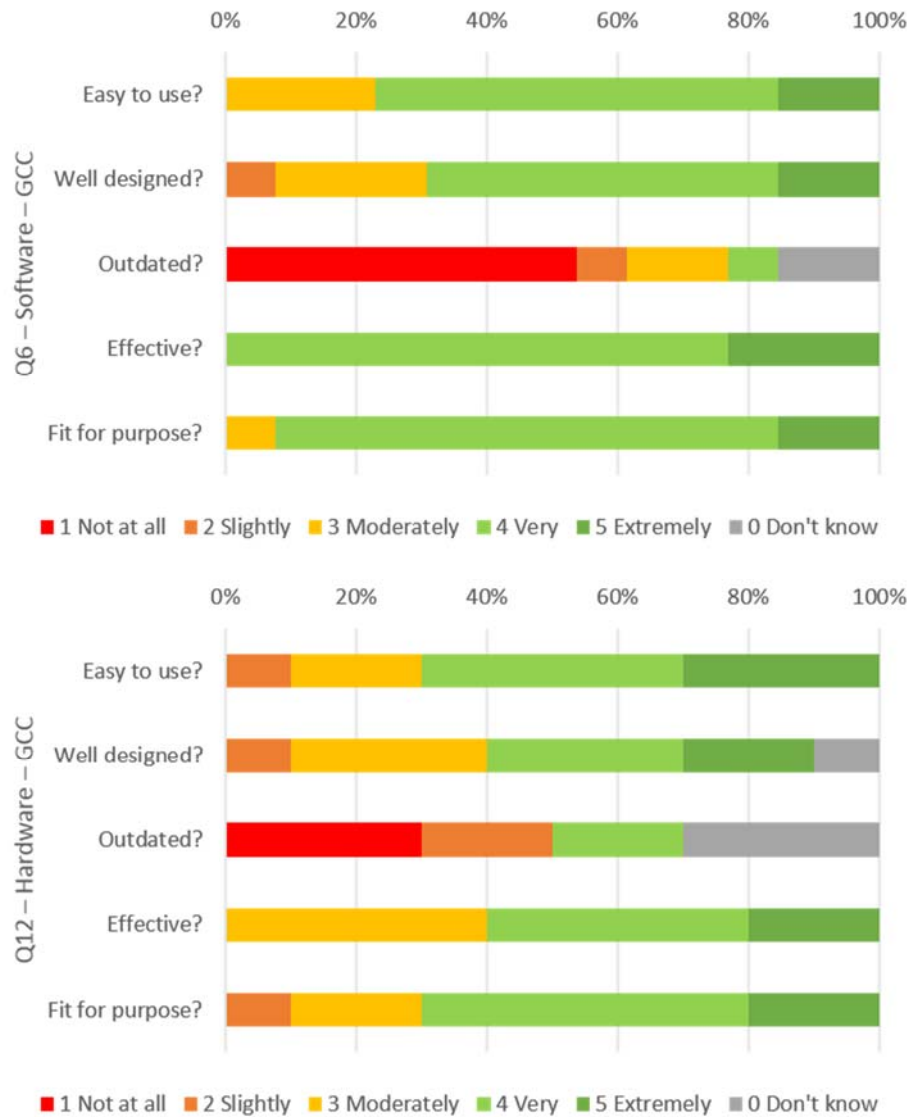


Figure 6. GCC Evaluation of Current Systems

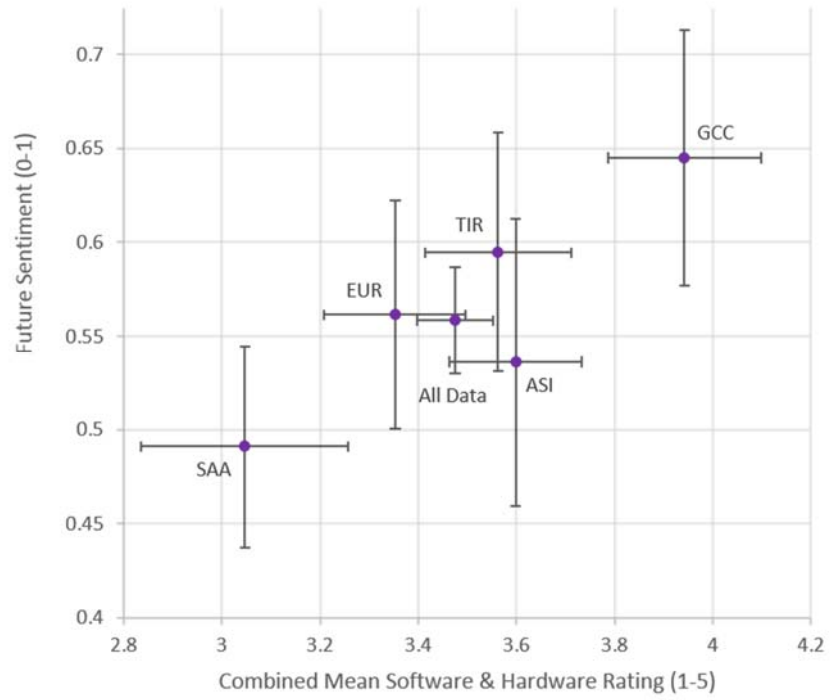


Figure 7. Combined Mean Ratings by Group

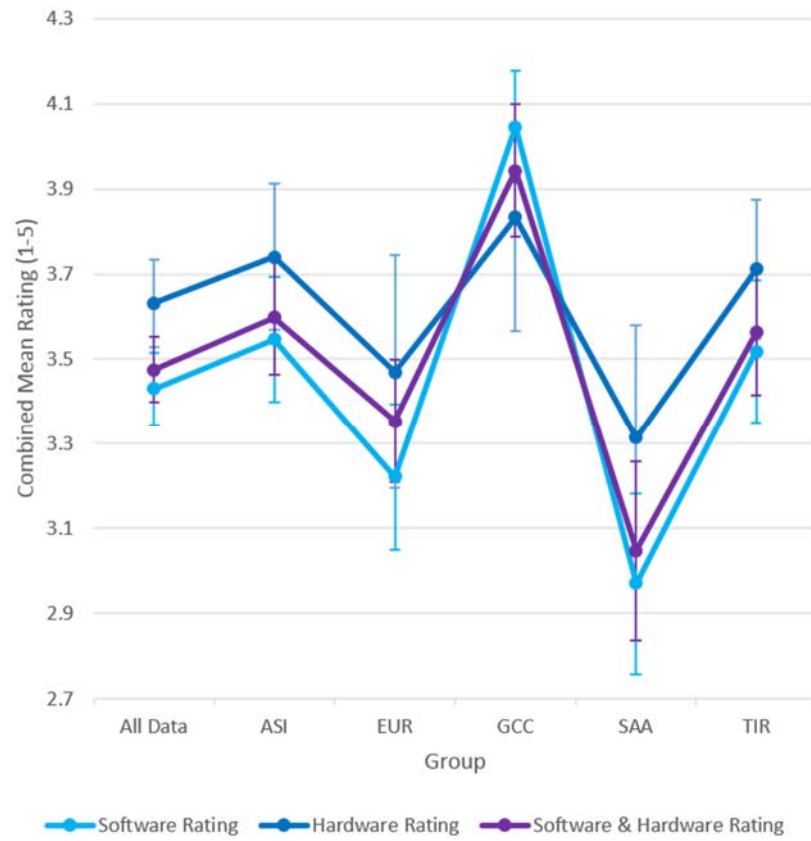


Figure 8. Future Sentiment by Combined Mean Current Systems Rating

This positive outlook is perhaps attributable to the fact that the interface between immigration and technology appears to be embedded in the public policy agenda for the region. As one respondent noted for example, “Qatar uses technology in a number of ways to manage and allow sponsoring companies to manage economic migration to the country... [and] the authorities are continuously looking for ways to improve the design and functionality of the technology it uses” (25M). Likewise, in relation to Saudi Arabia, “entities have been formed within Saudi Ministries or public/semi-government companies that are leading technological initiatives across the Kingdom... [including] the use of blockchain in identity management and solutions around attestation of skills and qualifications” (56K). Indeed, even “Vision 2030 [the KSA’s transformation blueprint]... state[s] the government’s intention to improve its tech... [and] talks about various immigration-related matters” (38H).

Present-day technology, however, is the foundation for these aspirations, and was found to be remarkable in scope and operation across the region. In Qatar, the “government has several online portals that are used for various services from immigration and labour to traffic department matters” (23J), to be used in conjunction with an individual’s “unique QID... associated with all services within the country... [and] the Residence Permit Identity Card [which] is integrated with all platforms” (24S). These tools allow the state “to offer the residents of Qatar an easy way to access Ministry of Interior services” (45S), including via “Metrash2... a mobile application... developed by the Qatar MOI... to submit various [immigration] applications, monitor their status, complete payments of approved applications and issue visas” (23J). In fact, user options abound: web, app, and most recently even “self-service kiosks dotted around the city... can be used by Qatar ID holders to process immigration and other government related services” – including applications for permanent residency (23J).

Saudi Arabia has a similarly “aggressive approach towards technology as they are working towards... improvement in technology and digitization in each and every ministry” (91H). Software platforms to manage economic migration traverse departments and sub-departments, facilitating “applications for work permits, quotas, renewals, work visas, exit-entry visas, [and] residency permits... [plus] compliance monitoring such that expiry of visas/permits leads to immediate system-generated fines or other sanctions” (56K). Nevertheless, whilst “utilisation of technology inside KSA is extremely progressive and ahead of many countries... when compared to the UAE, they are still much behind... something

that the authorities have been working towards [remedying, via investment in]... cloud computing, AI and similar initiatives” (91H).

5.3.1 Case B: United Arab Emirates

A variety of advanced and well-integrated technological solutions exist to manage the entry, residence and departure of foreign nationals to the UAE. Arguably, “taking into account the overall population structure of the country, which consists of over ninety-six percent of foreign nationals (mostly economic migrants), it is necessary that such tools are in place” (28K). Technology used includes numerous electronic portals for end-to-end workflow management:

...tracking entry to, and departure from the UAE (including the operation of electronic gates); submission, tracking and approval of labour applications, including work permits, employment contracts and others; labour market testing, including the database for monitoring unemployment and job opportunities for Emirati nationals; submission, tracking and approval of visa applications and residence identity cards; and... for scheduling appointments for [the] entry visa process (28K).

Online platforms are accessible remotely to individuals and company representatives via login credentials, though some require in-person attendance at government ‘Amer’ centres (recently-introduced one-stop shops for visa and residence transactions). Commonly, however, systems have been designed, customised or configured by ‘Emaratech’, a local firm owned by the Investment Corporation of Dubai. This hybrid public-private entity has developed web-based solutions for the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA), Amer, the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship (ICA/EIDA) and Noqodi (the UAE’s preferred digital wallet provider for payment of government services) in addition to building and operating “border control solutions such as [the] Smart Gates used on all major UAE airports” (42S).

GDFRA’s central immigration portal (eDNRD) communicates with “the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Federal Authority of Identification, airport control, police department... and business partners such as insurance companies and banks” – even triggering medical appointments and courier services for users as part of its functionality (61H). The portal is in this regard, near to peerless. Even so, lack of proper system integration can sometimes be observed, for example, where “entry and departure [dates] of foreign nationals who use electronic gates... may not be reflected in the main immigration system... [or] whenever biometrics scanning must be repeatedly done by foreign nationals” (28K).

Extensive and compulsory biometric data collection and use, however, is what underpins the high levels of integration between manifold government and business systems in the region. In summary, state authorities capture biometric and personal information for residents and subsequently issue them with a chip embedded EID (Emirates ID Card), which is used to manage personal and professional requirements, and entry and exit from the country. Use of the cards is pervasive – banks and government offices scan and read embedded information to auto-populate online systems, and even health insurance policy details can be contained on an EID. Thus a key differentiator in the UAE is hardware; everyday use of passport, fingerprint and retina scanning devices, identity card readers, and barcode readers is more common than virtually anywhere else globally.

Perhaps the most conspicuous recent example of the aforementioned has been the introduction of ‘Smart Tunnels’ at UAE airports, by which passengers can “simply walk through the biometric recognition system without having to stamp their passports... [and] complete the passport control procedure within fifteen seconds and without the need for human intervention” (37H). Initially a pilot program, these have proved immensely popular – as both as a novelty, and time-saving technology. Consequently:

There are ongoing tests for implementing a ‘contactless’ immigration process on departure from the UAE... Electronic gates for entry and departure continue to be improved, with the majority of gates now using iris-scanning, rather than a document-scanning technology... [and] plans [have even been] announced for replacing humans with an AI technology for the application and approval processes for select visit[or] visa categories (28K).

7. DISCUSSION

The results presented above uniquely evidence current practice and thinking for vanguard jurisdictions, and intimate possibilities for states currently employing more basic apparatus (including many rich, state-of-the-art countries). Whether governments should consider aggressively harnessing technological tools and methods to improve immigration policy outcomes, is notwithstanding, a vexed question – there are indubitably issues of privacy, ethics, and human rights to balance. In the context of the ‘war for talent’, however, the logic is hard to deny; since ascription of the term, modern thinking from the same standpoint suggests that “technology will be the game changer” (Keller & Meaney 2017) in attracting and retaining economic migrants. From this vantage, we now consider three avenues for advancement – harnessing biometric data, AI, and geolocation technologies.

7.1 Biometric Data

This study indicates that use of technology in relation to immigration is still in its infancy in most of the world – including in otherwise tech-savvy Western European and Asian countries. Collection of biometric data¹¹, however, is becoming ubiquitous worldwide – irrespective of whether a jurisdiction actively uses it to manage immigration with software. The most common forms (from finger, ocular and facial scans) appear to be collected in the first instance, because they now can be, efficiently and relatively cheaply; the entry costs for advanced scanning hardware are much lower than they once were, and some governments “contract with [common] service delivery partners (i.e. VFS) to undertake processes such as taking of biometrics... and [have] agreement with [each other]... to utilise their equipment to manage biometrics” (40G). This is explicitly the case for parties to the ‘Five Country Conference’¹², but equally applicable to numerous other states who collect biometrics ostensibly for border security purposes. If this is becoming the norm, it begs the question: should we be harnessing biometric data in the wider immigration and/or multilateral-mobility landscape?

The ‘EU Exit: ID Document Check’ app evidences a first public foray towards this direction in the UK, with our data further suggesting that “[The Home Office] also want to use more mobile phone apps for biometric capture” (9R). The possibilities are significant, especially when considered in a global context; normalising decentralised and/or remote biometric data collection as part of visa application procedures, could fundamentally change how readily, and from where people are able to pursue migration options. This would be particularly pertinent to populous regions of the world, increasingly liberated from tyrannies of geography by dramatic improvements in global internet and mobile phone access.¹³

Widespread adoption of biometric technologies is, however, hampered in at least two regards. Firstly, the technology itself is imperfect. Currently, “there is no ‘gold-standard’ biometric trait and... some biometric traits seem to present advantages that counterbalance other trait’s

¹¹ ‘Biometrics’ are biological measurements used to uniquely identify an individual, non-exhaustively including hand, earlobe, voice, eye, periocular, thermal, vein, anthropometric, and gait patterns. ‘Biometric data’ is any computer data created during a biometric capture process, usually via optical scanning, depth-sensing, audio or video recording. The terms are often used interchangeably.

¹² The Five Country Conference (FCC) is an alliance between the immigration authorities of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and USA, for cooperation on migration and border security issues.

¹³ Notwithstanding the unevenness of global connectivity, the IOM reports that from 1995 to 2014, global internet users have risen from less than five users per hundred people to over forty, mobile cellular subscriptions from less than five to more than ninety, and smartphones now account for fifty-five percent of all mobile subscriptions (McAuliffe & Ruhs 2018).

disadvantages” (Sequeira et al 2018). Thus, whilst some “such as 3D Face, lead to very promising recognition... others such as thermal face or visible iris (acquired with a mobile device) lead to poor recognition results” (ibid). In fact, research acknowledges that “despite its promises... performing accurate iris recognition in mobile devices is still considered a challenge” (Hofbauer et al 2019) – a problem compounded by the fact that the technology is not impervious to deliberate obfuscation or even benign spoofing (Rowe 2018).

The second, and greater challenge with biometric adoption, involves privacy concerns and anxieties about surveillance – matters receiving heightened scrutiny with regards to Automatic Facial Recognition (AFR). Facial scanning has become increasingly common in public; where it was once only noticeably deployed in airport security zones, it is now being used in retail spaces, street cameras, sporting events, and even to handle bar service. Concerns extend beyond the normalisation of benign mass surveillance too – AFR has been used for racial profiling to facilitate discriminatory persecution and human rights abuses in China (per McNeill et al 2019, to say nothing of Uyghurs). Equally, in a world-first judgement regarding AFR, the UK High Court has ruled that use by the police can be legitimate under current laws.¹⁴

Multinational efforts to explore using biometric technologies in the immigration sphere have accordingly, taken place discreetly, bearing in mind the sensitivities. The PROTECT¹⁵ initiative exemplifies this: a three-year, five-million-euro joint-initiative coordinated by the UK, in partnership with actors in Austria, Germany, Poland, Belgium and France, which recently ended with little fanfare or publicity – despite portending the possibility of using an advanced multimodal biometric-based person identification system, to allow both people and vehicles to seamlessly operate across land, sea and air borders (something one might assume would be of interest vis-à-vis Brexit and continuing questions surrounding the Irish border). Yet similar plans are forecast for Canada, who in partnership with WorldReach (the aforementioned build partner on the EU Exit app), will likely pilot a ‘chain-of-trust air-border proof-of-concept’. This initiative will combine app solutions for NFC chip-enabled devices and biometric tunnels, rendering ‘Smart Gates’ obsolete; travellers will use apps to securely submit biographic and biometric data prior to travel, then be guided through data-collection

¹⁴ See *R (Bridges) v Chief Constable of South Wales Police and Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2019] EWHC 2341 (Admin).

¹⁵ Pervasive and User Focused Biometrics Border Project (PROTECT) was a European Commission Horizon 2020 project (No 700259), exploring new modalities in biometric-based border checks.

corridors for check-in or triaging, depending on their risk profile as determined by border security.

These developments will be of Orwellian concern for some. Consequently, it is worth confronting another reality – “your biometric data, which is the most personal data you own, is [already] increasingly being used by private companies for commercial purposes” (Murgia, 2019). Indeed, both “companies and governments can... create facial-recognition technologies that turn any camera into a surveillance machine. Google has pledged not to sell a ‘general-purpose facial recognition’ product until the ethical issues with the technology have been resolved, but Amazon Rekognition is available now, as is Microsoft’s Face API, to say nothing of Chinese internet companies’ even more extensive efforts” (Madrigal 2018). The question is thus, one of whom to entrust with your biometric data – states notionally accountable to citizenry, or corporations accountable to shareholders?

7.2 Artificial Intelligence

Dystopian fears for the future are nowhere more pronounced than in discussions involving AI – a useful starting point when considering its possible intersections with immigration. Partly, this is because AI is “just a suitcase word enclosing a foggy constellation of ‘things’... [whereas] machine learning, deep learning, neural networks... are much more precise names for the various scientific, mathematical, and engineering methods that people employ within the field of AI” (Pavlus 2017). Indeed, ‘AI’ is often an unhelpfully undefined aspirational expression reflecting a goal – rather than bounded in terms of what it could help with technologically, in concert with a desire to scrupulously and ethically employ data science.

Bearing this in mind, in our study we provided respondents with a clear definitional sentence – ‘AI is an area of computer science focused on creating intelligent machines to work and react like humans’ – to guide the question of whether it should be employed to select and/or manage the administration of economic immigrants. As detailed in the Data Summary, the question elicited high levels of support (see also, Figure 3, Q14). Equally notable though, was the remarkably positive Sentiment expressed in the beliefs subsequently volunteered; respondents were in fact, more positive in what they had to say about AI, across all groups and the aggregate, than for either hardware or software presently used (see Figure 9).

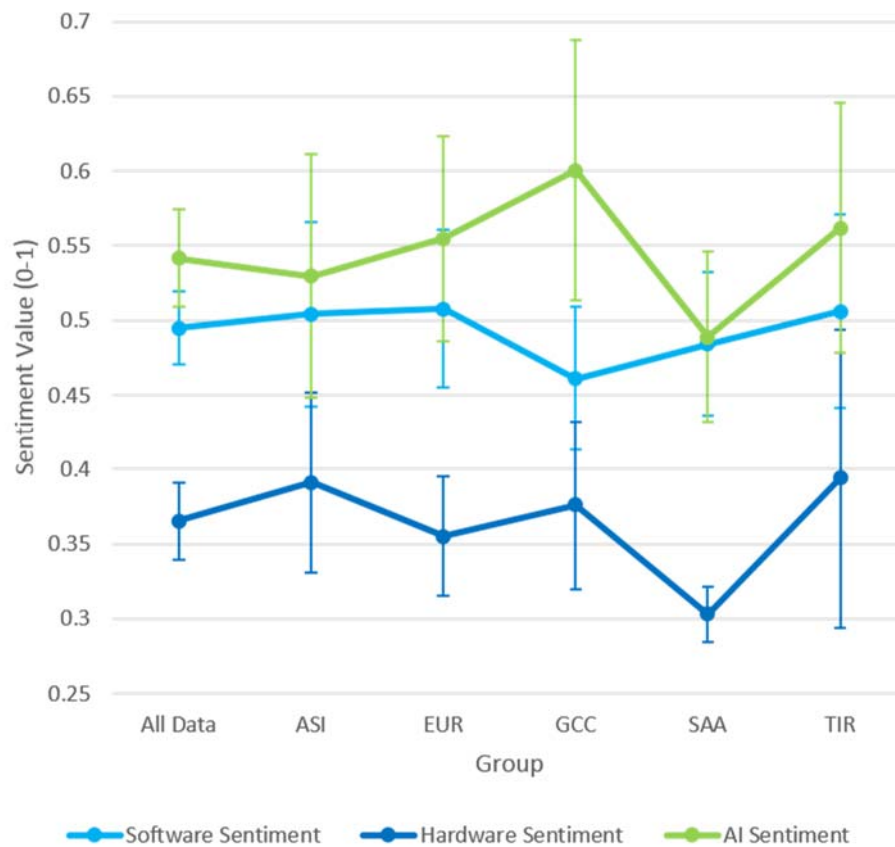


Figure 9. Software, Hardware and AI Sentiment by Group

This overarching positive sentiment broadly centred around AI’s potential for improving efficiency and consistency in immigration management. In summary, it was commonly felt that AI could “help in lowering processing times by clearing out labour intensive processes (e.g. data entry and information collation)” (2K), and “certainly play a part in decision trees for immigration, factoring in legislation and policy documents” (82P). Likewise, it was hoped that employing AI might actually “mitigate bias in application review” (39S), and reduce instances of “information mismatch... human errors in data analysing... [and] chances of discrimination” (37H). The virtues of the latter were brought into sharp focus by respondents who reported occasions of human bias in decision making, from countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. These included examples of “seeing strong cases that are rejected or subject to scrutiny without apparent reason” (5B) through to more grievous concerns insinuating “potential for corruption within immigration” (48W). In this regard, it was hoped that AI might work to improve objective decision making and reduce subjectivity in immigration determinations.

Support was not universal, however, and commonly qualified with general cautiousness, irrespective of the state of current technology within a jurisdiction. To begin with, some argued that AI should only be “a welcome approach... once [an] immigration system has matured... [to encompass] a clearly defined set of procedures and outcomes” (25M). Others went further, contending that: “Although AI is a fantastic step into the future... completely replacing the human element is not feasible. Applications are not all black and white and we need to consider an element of empathy and understanding when assessing work permit applications or making decisions” (99A).

This highlights an important distinction – differentiating between technologies used to *select* versus *manage* economic immigrants. Indeed even from elite intermediaries, little support was exhibited for ‘picking winners’, or for “AI being the final decision-maker, given the sensitive issues at play, including security and matters of a sovereign nature but also the level of discretion involved in many areas of immigration” (82P). Some suggested that the “use of AI should be restricted in those cases where the law allows for freer discretion of the authorities and where social responsibility is of higher importance (for example in relation to people seeking asylum protection)” (73C). Outright opposition was nevertheless, in the minority; the general position was one of qualified support, including for the use of “advanced data analytics to attract and enable the immigration system to be more agile” (40G).

These findings reflect an understanding of the fact that automation, augmentation and machine-learning are encroaching on immigration, as elsewhere. These developments are moreover, already a reality in places, such as Canada where the federal government has experimented with use of AI and machine-learning in the immigration context since at least 2014. Recently for example, IRCC has been using advanced analytics and machine-learning technology to “automate a portion of the temporary residence (TR) business process, focusing on on-line applications (e-Apps) from China and India... [via a] machine then automatically triages applications and identifies applications that should be approved” (IRCC 2019a). Within this TR model “positive eligibility decisions are made automatically, based on a set of rules derived from thousands of past officer decisions... [and] when an application meets certain criteria, it is approved for eligibility without officer review” (ibid).

Whether these avenues for advancement in immigration administration are justifiable or desirable, is a matter of perspective. For IRCC, given ongoing and significant volume growth

with TR applications (visitors, students and workers), they are¹⁶ – and consequently rationalised as necessary to “reduce application processing times, improve service delivery... and enhance system efficiency... since traditional means to deal with pressures do not suffice” (ibid). This position is further supported by the fact that the pilot underpinning the system has “demonstrated that the model’s outputs were remarkably consistent with human decision-making... [and] able to process positive eligibility decisions eighty-seven percent faster [than manual processes]” (ibid). To summarise, then:

If used appropriately, AI and machine-learning could enhance efficiency and reduce case backlogs. By automating mundane tasks, these technologies would allow employees to focus on complex tasks. A reduced reliance on manual legal research could also lead to better identification of complex and incomplete applications... [But] thoughtful and specific selection criteria must be built into all [government] technological tools. Those criteria need to be proactively updated to reflect changes in legislation and regulations, court decisions, ministerial instructions and evolving social values. AI and machine-learning may inform a human decision-maker but should not fetter a decision-maker’s discretion (84M).

7.3 Geolocation Technologies

A third avenue for advancement in economic immigration could be the incorporation of geolocation technologies, to help better ‘match people to jobs’ in a time-sensitive manner. This is a curiously under-explored realm, given GPS technology is well-established, to say nothing of the ubiquity of mobile and app technology. To date, few have considered the interface, save State, Weber and Zaghenni, who utilised an innovative method to estimate the pendularity of global flows of migrants and tourists using geolocation data (from IP addresses), specifically to geo-located logins into Yahoo! Web services (State et al 2013). More recent studies have endeavoured to analyse refugee migration patterns using geo-tagged tweets, and suggested “another aspect to explore in future work is the use of mobile phone tracking data to obtain a more complete picture of refugee movements, possibly in combination with tweets” (Hubl et al 2017). Still, by contrast with biometrics and AI, there has been far less attention in this area. Possibly, this is because of ‘strategic ignorance’, as has been the charge regarding national migration data (Scheel & Ustek-Spilda 2019); there is a parallel with the assertion that the IOM’s Global Migration Flows Interactive App (GMFIA), “enacts migration as a single, coherent, and measurable reality by producing strategic

¹⁶ IRCC also makes explicit, that it is not currently attempting to utilise AI to automate decisions in ‘high-stakes business lines’ (such as asylum, humanitarian and compassionate, or pre-removal risk assessment), use ‘black box’ algorithms to make determinations, or displace the central role of officers in decision-making (IRCC 2019a).

ignorance about the known limits of quantifying migration through four different practices: omission, compression, deflection, and sanitizing” (ibid).

Alternatively, resistance may be related to anxieties vis-à-vis ‘data-driven deportation’ and high-tech immigration enforcement using GPS tools (see Bedoya 2017) – a plausible case in the USA certainly, given Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is soliciting for a cloud-based systems to geolocate the exact locations of cellphones, laptops and other connected devices using multiple sources, currently, but also historically (Boyd 2019). Even accounting for valid concerns regarding state surveillance of IMEIs, imagine if you will, ‘iMigrate’ mobile apps, that might positively and purposeful employ geolocation technologies, to allow the immigration and employment wants of individuals to connect with the labour-market needs of states. Might this not be desirable given constant cries by governments around the world regarding time-sensitive shortages for skilled people? The technology already exists – as with much that is touted in the realm of AI – to facilitate such processes; an individual could theoretically, learn about a time-sensitive work vacancy, tender for the position, and submit a biometric visa application using nothing more than a smartphone enabled with a camera and NFC chip. Consider as a serious parallel, modern dating apps, where innumerate applications exist globally to help people traverse space and connect, for long and short term transactions, for mutual benefit. Thus, it is no longer plausible for the state to claim that skilled occupation demand lists cannot be maintained, suitable applicants connected to them in a timely fashion, or visa processes expedited – especially for temporary work and economic migration. Rather, the constraints pertain to a lack of imagination, will, or desire.

8. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have consciously considered whether states adequately employ technological solutions to immigration challenges, bearing in mind tools already at our disposal in the modern world. We conclude that governments seeking to maintain competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants and also cope with immigration workloads should consider more actively harnessing technological tools and methods, to improve their policy outcomes – but with care and caution. Four points bear mentioning, as a consequence, and in conclusion.

Firstly, this study is a novel examination, and limited in scope. It could be replicated and advanced in a broader review coordinated by a supranational entity. The merits in doing so

could be significant – multilateral efforts to better coordinate global migration would benefit from wider knowledge of the technological systems underpinning management mechanisms. As a parallel, one is reminded of a time before SOPEMI¹⁷ migration data was broken down by skill level, and the impact that providing that specificity has had on facilitating an explosion in skilled migration research in subsequent years.

Secondly, new legal and regulatory frameworks are overdue, and immediately necessary to deal with the growing collection and use, of biometric data and technologies. We have passed the point of reasonableness in trying “to implement [biometric] technology within existing laws rather than requiring new ones” (Rowe, 2018), given that “once collected, [biometric data] points to you and you alone; once lost or stolen, it is open to permanent abuse” (Murgia, 2019). This is nowhere more the case, than in relation to AFR; unlike DNA and fingerprints, facial biometrics are not protected under law almost anywhere and data regulators are uniting in calls for change (Hare 2019). Creating new laws and regulations would undoubtedly help the public to be more receptive to attempts by the state to make us embrace biometric technologies domestically. But legislation and agreements must also extend beyond borders – biometrics are clearly an issue for global consideration, and international coordination and management. Use cases in human trafficking, immigration fraud, involving children and in security situations are growing – indeed, mobile biometrics are even used cross-jurisdictionally to aid soldiers to differentiate militants from civilians (Bedoya 2017).

Thirdly, returning to our qualitative findings and quantitative results, we suggest governments should embrace new technologies in economic immigration, noting practitioner support for improving inefficiency. While some countries utilise (or are trying to shift towards using) online, paperless and user-friendly application processes, requirements and complexities simultaneously grow. In Australia for example, it was suggested that “the time required to prepare and submit a visa application has effectively doubled throughout the course of the last decade” (36D). Consequently, “further technological initiatives to either streamline and/or automate the visa application process would be greatly welcomed” (ibid). Likewise, empirical evidence presented demonstrates strong support for also using AI in immigration management – though we acknowledge “success in human-imitative AI has in fact been

¹⁷ SOPEMI, The Continuous Reporting System on Migration (Système d’observation permanente des migrations) was established in 1973 to facilitate information sharing on international migration, the collection of comparable migration statistics, and creation of the annual OECD International Migration Outlook.

limited... [and] even limited progress on human-imitative AI gives rise to levels of over-exuberance” (Jordan 2019).

Fourthly then, we reiterate caution, as commonly expressed by respondents: notwithstanding overall support for the use of technology in immigration, “meaningful oversight and transparency is needed to manage the associated risks, as well as privacy and data concerns” (84M). Moreover, “care must be taken not to ‘teach’ AI to have human biases” (56K), and as algorithmic decision making becomes ever more likely, “there must also be an appeals process to this that then feeds back incorrect decisions for the AI to learn further” (ibid). That is, “we do not want to build systems... only to find out after the fact that these systems don’t really work, [or] that they make errors that take their toll in terms of human lives and happiness” (Jordan 2019). In this regard, Canada is worth highlighting, as one country which has begun the process of creating an oversight regime, under its Treasury Board Secretariat’s new government-wide Directive on Automated Decision-Making. Subsidiary to this, IRCC has a dedicated Digital Policy arm concerned with technology and ethics, and has created documentation to “give IRCC a coherent basis for strategic choices about whether and how to make use of new tools and techniques [in immigration]” (IRCC 2019a).¹⁸ These are commendable first steps. Ultimately, however, they may require the complementary establishment of “independent, arms-length bod[ies] with the power and expertise to engage in oversight and review of all use of automated decision systems” (84M). Certainly, these are conversations worthy of continuation in migration policy, practice and research circles alike – the march of technology is as inevitable as immigration itself, and the link between the two equally inexorable. ■

¹⁸ See *Automated Decision Support: Policy Playbook* v2.2 April 2019, Strategic Policy and Planning, IRCC (unpublished).

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CONCLUSION

International migration in the 21st century is beset by fundamental misconceptions and remains a public relations challenge for policy makers and politicians alike. Opinions on how it should proceed are at once, ubiquitous, and yet often superficially informed – certainly in representations by the media. The extent to which wisdom from guardians of migration scholarship reaches the public domain, meanwhile, remains uncertain; the extent to which it is fully understood, even more questionable. All the while, international migration continues to be a fundamental driver and tenet of the global economy – though veiled as an option, rather than presented as an immutable reality. Arguably then, the need to generate deeper understandings to explain its causes and consequences, and to create and communicate sincere scholarship to guide how it might best be managed and regulated, has never been more urgent. This philosophy, has been the guiding force behind this research endeavour.

The central research question addressed within this thesis, has been how states can maintain competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants, in theory and practice, based on examination of migration narratives presented from Canada, Australia, the USA and India, and consideration of the practical apparatuses and technological systems which facilitate migration management across the globe. The central argument of the thesis in sum has been that international immigration in the post-pandemic era should be reconceived of as a long-game endeavour, given the stylised fact that it cannot satisfy time-sensitive domestic labour market demand, but may, nevertheless, be able to satisfy long-term labour, and demographic demand of individual states.

Accordingly, at the outset of this study, the original question forecast for consideration at this juncture was, to what degree states might continue to subscribe to the purportedly axiomatic idea of competing for the ‘best and brightest’, amidst global political and ideological shifts to the right and resistance to globalisation and neo-liberalism generally. Now, however, in the midst of a pandemic, adjunct questions have arisen, non-exhaustively including: whether global hypermobility will ever return, the extent to which countries might be able to fulfil their labour market needs without migrant workers, and if in fact, there is a viable business case for economic migration in the post COVID world. Before directing attention to these questions, we begin by summarily reviewing the thesis presented to this point. Thereafter,

this chapter reflects upon the future of global competition for skilled immigration with respect to contemporary considerations, and seeks to situate the relevance of the work presented within geography as a discipline, whilst acknowledging its limitations and shortcomings. Finally, the work concludes with closing remarks regarding the dialectical nature of migration scholarship, and suggestions for future research and public policy pertaining to economic migration.

1. THE THESIS IN REVIEW

The Introduction for this thesis endeavoured to position and contextualise the empirical work to follow, by firstly acknowledging heightened interest across the world in skilled migration over the preceding two decades. The root cause of this trend is generally said to be the perceived economic benefit for recipient states – though this remains an area of contention in and of itself. Indeed, as neatly summarised almost fifteen years ago:

...the most sophisticated economic models are equivocal about whether immigrants will have an adverse effect on the real earnings of native workers, and a growing body of empirical research shows that the actual effects of immigration flows on income, employment, and unemployment are quite small (Hainmueller & Hiscox 2007).

Bearing in mind undeniable interest in, and growth of economic migration flows, however, the thesis then proceeded to situate its overall research question within the realm of policy, and consider the issue of ‘migration management’, with respect to migration scholarship which has questioned the extent to which immigration is a ‘manageable’ process. This overarching query was then further examined in subdivisions exploring the role of the state, temporal preferences for migration mechanisms, administrative methods of migrant assessment, and the various pull factors and incentives utilised by states to affect choice of destination. These discussions highlighted and foreshadowed areas of recurrent concern for research on international competition for skilled migrant labour generally, and the thesis specifically. Intersections with financialisation, mobilities, and political geography scholarship were likewise highlighted, presaging thoughts on migrant choice, immigration inertia, and policy discursivity. The overarching research design and methodology governing original research conducted for the thesis was presented thereafter in three parts, considering: firstly, the conceptual direction of the study with respect to Geography as a discipline; secondly, appropriate, practical and sensible methods for data collection in the context of researching immigration phenomena specifically; and finally, methodological justifications for the research design, with respect to its robustness and underlying logic.

Chapter 2 (Paper 1) then makes the case for reframing how we think about, and organise economic migration. ‘Economic, family and humanitarian’ are argued to be outdated baskets misaligned with reality – and consequently, the chapter suggests that it is time to start recognising that all migration is economic migration, in that it affects the socio-economic disposition of the receiving society. This includes inflows of refugees, asylum seekers, foreign students, seasonal workers, and chain migration of family members; these migrants make discernible socio-economic contributions and can no longer honestly be conceived of as welfare or ‘non-economic’ migrants alone – not least because host societies expect much more of these classes of migrant now than say, in post-War reconstruction periods. ‘Emigrational, transitional, educational and preferential’ are therefore, advanced as better conceptual, ‘constructed categories’, by which to understand, and progress economic migration policy; of course there are practical reasons for differentiating between migration types, but relying upon status quo false distinctions and dichotomies is unhelpful, and perpetuates disingenuousness.

Chapter 3 (Paper 2) evidences some of these disingenuous narratives first-hand – the differences between the rhetoric and reality of immigration policy – directly from the sources from which they are created and implemented. It confirms that policymakers aren’t wilfully blind or ignorant. Rather, they are simply constrained by the narrow parameters within which immigration is allowed to be explained to the public at large, given there has been little positive political capital in being anything but anti-immigration for decades. Simultaneously then, this chapter demonstrates the real, active and aggressive efforts of the traditional immigration recipient (TIR) nations to compete for skilled labour in the last twenty years in particular. Whilst the data presented represents pre-GFC thinking, significantly, it is also the thinking TIR nations returned to in the last decade, in recognition of the economic (and arguably also social) necessity of migrant inflows. It is the thinking, moreover, that the chapter contends TIR nations will essentially default to again, in post-pandemic futures. That is, states will continue to pursue optimised immigration outcomes, aligned to satisfying the demands of their local labour market, whilst attempting to manage migration polemics – albeit in place-specific, divergent ways, aligned to domestic societal conditions.

Chapter 4 (Paper 3) next elucidates the significance of permanent residency as an attractive force, in a way that has seldom been directly attempted empirically. Migration history is littered with examples of attempts to curtail transitions to permanency – and the folly of pursuing these plans, both at a practical and policy level. Of course, open and unregulated

borders are not necessarily the answer, and nor is it feasible to allow permanent settlement for everyone everywhere – but that is not what this thesis advocates. Rather, again, we return to the proposition of the necessity for a more open and honest discourse on immigration; the public by-and-large intuitively understand that society needs migrants (for innumerate, noble and ignoble reasons), and many (though not all) ‘temporary’ foreign workers across the skill gamut want to settle. Widespread political recognition of this reality – a truism dormant for fifty-odd years – is now overdue. Thus, the chapter is more than an examination of destination preferences for a cohort of Indian applicants, the machinations of consultant intermediaries in facilitating international migration, sending-state narratives, or the study-migration pathway. Instead, in the context of the thesis, it also functions as evidence towards the broader contention that host societies would be better served by trying to overcome the ‘discursive gap’ evidenced in migration policies (Czaika & de Haas 2013).

Finally, Chapter 5 (Paper 4) is a novel first foray into investigating how technology (which is always problematic, challenging and disruptive, as well as potentially frightening), could and arguably should be part of the solution to migration challenges, in the decades ahead. The dataset and findings presented validate the importance of simply improving speed and efficiency of immigration administration and processing – as flagged at the outset and also reaffirmed by TIR government narratives presented hitherto. Opportunities exist beyond simply digitisation though; artificial intelligence, biometric and geolocation technologies have notably, been exactly what has underpinned some of the most successful responses to COVID (*vis-à-vis* contact tracing), and similar openings exist in the context of the ongoing management of human mobility. The chapter recognises that resistance to technology is not asinine, and nor are privacy concerns unwarranted. Nevertheless, whilst not acquiescing to change as a *fait accompli*, it argues that we must find a way to move beyond relentlessly decrying new technologies without investigating positive possibilities also. A suggestion in this regard is to work to ensure migration technologies become an issue more squarely engaged on the multilateral agenda.

2. CONTEMPORARY CONSIDERATIONS

Situating the work presented thus far in the light of contemporary political and policy developments is fundamentally meaningless absent any consideration of COVID, which is a different order of magnitude of problem than the GFC ever was. The pandemic does nevertheless, re-raise many common challenges – which themselves are better understood in

the light of present, *and past* events. For this reason, three basic points bear mentioning, prior to further discussion of skilled migration futures in the jurisdictions empirically examined in this thesis.

Firstly, returning to the questions posed at the outset of this chapter, in sum, it is argued herein that states will (for better or worse) continue competing for the ‘best and brightest’, in pursuit of ‘the right migrant’. A viable business case for economic migration will persist in years to follow, because, put simply, labour demand is unpredictable in its specificity, but assuredly constant in aggregate, elapsed over time. Indeed, even a rudimentary knowledge of global histories supports the claim for the doggedness of demand. That is, all that has happened has happened before, including *en vogue* mobility provisions in trade agreements, desire for non-local labour and skills, and skilled immigration policy predilections also. It is easy to forget, for example, 17th and 18th century efforts of the USA to poach cotton and textile experts from the mills of Lancashire, or the British pursuit of French stained-glass artisans. A measure of historical perspective which extends beyond mere decades is therefore, useful in considering where migration may go, in theory and practice (footnoting also, that this is not the world’s first pandemic).

Secondly then, to the issue of mobility, which is undoubtedly curtailed at present: history again suggests, that hypermobility itself may continue to experience frictional constraints for a time – but is equally unlikely to be arrested to a point of immobility, indefinitely. Even airline travel may yet recover, or reconfigure, or frankly, cede to other forms of mobility difficult to as yet practically envisage. What is less likely to persist is inertia. A related and third point, is that self-sufficiency in the post-globalisation era seems equally unlikely, for any state, anytime soon. The ‘right humus for more migration’ has not simply evaporated; rather:

...remember that – in the long run – economic globalization is closely connected with human globalisation. Traditional classifications of migrants describe less and less well the processes of human international mobility that at present is formed not only by people looking for a permanent or seasonal job, or reuniting with a partner, or old style rentiers and new style investors. There is also an increasing number of people who move around as technicians of multinational firms; members of international organisations and NGOs; scholars, researchers and technicians visiting or collaborating with their peers; business people; visitors moved by parental ties, or friendship, or sentimental reasons and tourists of all denominations... The world is shrinking and travel is faster and cheaper (Livi-Bacci 2018).

The abovementioned three points in sum make it reasonable to contend that countries *will not* be able to satisfy their labour market – let alone demographic, economic, or even social – needs and desires without migrants, absent a fundamental reorganisation of the world order

(which COVID is not). This thesis therefore, seeks to offer a modest stylised prescription for a path forward for immigration beginning with an evidentiary claim; proposing, that is: Countries can most effectively compete in the global market for skilled migrants by looking beyond servicing their immediate domestic labour-market demands, facilitating transitions from temporary to permanent residence, centralising immigration administrative mechanisms, and removing barriers to social and economic integration.

The extent to which the jurisdictions examined empirically in this thesis, have pursued *any* of these avenues in recent times, is negligible. Indeed, if anything, in some regards they have mostly tended towards opposing directions. The reasons why are not elaborated upon exhaustively again; suffice to say, decision-makers remain guided, and clearly, compelled by, the logic of prioritising the acquisition of youthful migrants with advanced English language ability, degree qualifications, a lack of dependents, extensive work experience and ideally employer sponsorship – to neatly fit into time-sensitive labour vacancies. By contrast, now more than ever, this thesis encourages the utilisation of immigration for ‘nation building’ vis-à-vis developing a deeper national permanent skills base, arguing that it is impracticable to be truly responsive to short-term fluctuations in skills demand, and therefore, investing in human capital more broadly may be a better investment for economic and social growth. Time-space convergence aside, immigration should be reaffirmed, as a long-game endeavour.

What then, of the states examined heretofore? The USA, firstly, has experienced tumult under the Trump presidency which (as with COVID) is impossible to ignore. Its leadership in recent years has challenged assumptions, norms, and customary law across all areas of public policy, with immigration being no exception. None of the above prescriptions are, therefore, particularly consequential in the context of the fracturing and extreme polarisation of the body politic. Notwithstanding, at the time of writing, change is afoot – at least in management. Whether this translates to directional change remains to be seen – though it is difficult to conceive of what will be required to dislodge the stalemate of immigration reform, or fundamentally disrupt irregular labour migration via the southern border. What can be said with respect to this work, is that the twin attractions of economy and the American dream, were finally exposed and tested in recent years. The vision of the USA as a Shangri-La in the eyes of aspirational emigrants (and even many high-end workers), has undoubtedly been tarnished, as evidenced not only anecdotally, but also empirically in declining STEM numbers and foreign student enrolments.

Developments in neighbouring Canada, have been, and continue to be rather more predictable. Dialogue on immigration continues in the public sphere with gusto, with broad support offered across the political spectrum, and engagement from a kaleidoscopic array of stakeholders. And yet, despite decision-makers access to and dialogue with business, academia, settlement services, and immigration lawyers even, policy directions are eerily reminiscent of Australian manoeuvres of the past. Canadian focus has turned to dramatic and cavalier escalation of the study-migration pathway, with scant regard for who is coming to study, what, where, or, to what labour-market end. The extent to which underemployment and skill-wastage will be tolerated remains to be seen – though it must be said that Canada has proved itself time and again as the most patient recipient of migrants amongst the OECD. Noteworthy also, is Canada’s progressive thinking in respect of adopting technological solutions to immigration problems, and outright success in achieving a genuine measure of dispersing migrant populations regionally, enduringly rather than just temporarily. The latter is arguably buttressed by an ongoing commitment to multiculturalism, proportionate funding of migrant settlement services alongside border-policing, and narratives by the state which seek to avoid explicit demonization of immigration. Still, the balance of support for immigration remains delicate, tenuous, and at times tested.

No sooner had Canada (and the world at large) caught up to the antipodean orthodoxy of harvesting the best and brightest though, than to find it had moved on – the ‘Lucky Country’s focus on prioritising the skilled is now even more targeted, via systems of pre-selection and expressions of interest, which essentially do away with the last vestiges of offering hospitality to those ‘dropping by unannounced’. These measures have again, been subsequently mirrored (and refined) in other jurisdictions, creating dramatic administrative efficiencies, by partly, removing access to judicial review under administrative law. The hotly-contested question of whether migration policies are becoming more or less restrictive across the world is thus, something of a red herring; some states outwardly evidence trends towards tighter controls and restrictiveness – but others, such as Australia, are subtly redefining what it is to even *apply* to migrate. Gaining access to Australia is certainly becoming more difficult for all classes of migrants – students, workers, and settlers, to say nothing of asylum seekers. Whether this evidences progression towards attainment of policy-perfection, or short-termism with longer-term consequences for the socio-economic fabric, remains to be seen.¹

¹ There are certainly novel tensions on display at present within Australia pertaining to COVID restrictions, evidenced by citizens invoking Article 13 of the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* 1948, which states: (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of

Whilst there are still ample candidates seeking passage to Australia, it is worth noting supply does not outstrip demand across the board; sectors and regions of the Australian economy remain starved of skilled labour, despite the government's best efforts to optimally game migration. Global perceptions of the country, its relationships with Asian neighbours, and flows of investment also are affected by its hardline stance on immigration – contrasting ever more with New Zealand, too. Moreover, ironically, Australia may remain as reliant upon external inputs of labour and capital, as ever; for all its targeted migration successes, Australia continues to be defined by dependence on commodities and primary industry, and huge expenditures on border security in lieu of, say, expanding the population or skills base via migration.

Winning the immigration policy equation is thus, potentially a misleading end, governed largely by how individual states define the terms of debate. Short-term prescriptions for mobility continue to dominate thinking globally, and the world's relationship with India continues to provide a fine example. Whilst courted persistently for both its low-skilled labourers (by the GCC notably) and high-skilled healthcare practitioners (by the entire world), it remains unable to formalise preferential access to labour markets – most particularly, those of the TIR or OECD nations.² Manifold reasons explain the lack of progress on finalising PTAs and FTAs (including India's own resistance, notably to multilateral accords such as the RCEP); trade negotiations are complex and intricate affairs, not to be oversimplified only in relation to migration. Notwithstanding, in the context of this thesis, the fact remains that India has led the developing world in pushing richer countries for better access to labour markets – and, consistently been denied. Put politely, immigration alters a nation's complexion. When all is said and done, TIRs are widely acknowledged as being resistant to 'opening the floodgates' – even to facilitate high-end skilled labour movement. In fairness, some jurisdictions such as the USA, are not constrained by immigration realpolitik so much as genuinely averse to labour mobility provisions in trade agreements. Others though, including Australia and Canada, have no such excuse; ironically again, the former prides itself on championing labour protections for natives, and the latter leads the world in incorporating non-discrimination clauses against foreign workers into trade agreements.

each state [and] (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

² India currently has preferential and/or free trade agreements signed and in effect with (non-exhaustively) ASEAN, APTA, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Chile, MERCOSUR, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Korea, Nepal, Japan, Malaysia, and SAFTA – and remains in 'negotiations' with (non-exhaustively) the EU, EFTA, Australia, Canada, the USA, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Mauritius, and South Africa.

Finally then, a notable omission in this brief discussion of the modern migration landscape is the UK – a state currently in the market for, a great many markets it will shortly lose unfettered access towards. The UK was originally intended to be a state examined by this thesis but was excluded for a range of pragmatic reasons³ – but also because frustratingly, amongst the OECD, it perhaps best exhibited a tendency for erraticism and short-termism in the quest for the right immigrant (making it a tempestuous study subject). In the time that has elapsed since this research was commenced, so many iterations of skilled migration schemes have come and gone, modelled after (if not cut-and-pasted from) contemporaries without respect to context or place-specificity, that they are barely worth individually itemising. Post-Brexit, the situation is yet further complicated by the pressing necessity for new trading arrangements with innumerate entities, just to maintain past parities. Regardless, comments are made at this juncture, not owing to prior omission or for completeness, but because the present predicament of the UK so neatly supports many of the underlying contentions of this thesis.

Firstly, regarding disingenuous narratives, there can be no better expression than discourse in recent years surrounding the reduction of the UK Net Migration Target – repeatedly set, repeatedly missed, and repeatedly exposed for its absurdity. It is an example of immigration rhetoric being mismatched with immigration reality, par excellence. Secondly and relatedly, comes the UK's pronouncements on taking control of borders, in the context of the Brexit hustings and ending freedom of movement. Again, to be clear, the choice to disengage with EU membership is not argued herein to be the problem, so much as the propagation of the 'discursive gap'. Thirdly, despite a forthcoming iteration of a new points-based immigration system which gives the impression of having a longer-range view of satisfying labour-market demand, the UK is again avoiding creation of a regular route for low-skilled labour – at a time replete with consideration for the importance of 'keyworkers' no less. Finally then, facing the twin challenge of offsetting the end of free movement and COVID-19 simultaneously, the UK is already enacting workarounds⁴, still either in denial of immigration realities, and/or

³ See Appendix A, page X, which evidences the original study design intended for the thesis, involving data collection in both London and Dublin. Both cities were excluded following North American fieldwork in 2007, owing to a combination of the onset of the GFC, collapse of the 'Celtic Tiger', and internalisation of myriad other complications associated with investigating both jurisdictions (including notably, access to, and quality of, migration flow data, as well as impact of migration policies, in the context of free movement within the EU, relative to Australia, Canada and the USA).

⁴ Note for example: "The government has quietly reduced the £35,800 minimum salary for migrants to settle in the UK by almost 30%, it has emerged. Workers from overseas on salaries of £20,480 and with enough points will be able to settle in the UK after six years. Busby, M. (2020) 'Government reduces minimum salary for migrants to settle in UK', *The Guardian*, 24 Oct 2020.

unwilling to test its public with truths. Surely, there could be no better time for the British to consider openly promoting preferential migration to privilege sectors and professions as required; whilst people are less open to immigration in times of economic downturn, even real xenophobia might be offset by the necessity for economic recovery on the doorstep of a deep recession.

3. CONCEPTUAL REFLECTIONS

From the outset, efforts have been made to explain the conceptual orientation of this thesis – the work has aspired to advance geographical scholarship of public policy relevance, grounded by mixed-methods empiricism and guided by “the macro-level structural factors that shape human mobility in a specific historical situation” (Castles 2012). The work has not purported to provide a contribution towards grand unifying theories of migration, and is not a reflexive theoretical treatise. Nevertheless, within the bounds of its narrow self-selected parameters, it provides a contribution towards understanding global competition for skilled migration, historically, and one hopes, offers some insights for future thinking regarding economic migration policy in particular.

With respect to the petitions of Martin (2001) and Dorling (2019), this thesis has made modest forays towards exerting a direct influence on policy-making processes, with the aim of stimulating change. Two examples are notable and worthy of highlighting. Firstly, the ideas advanced in Paper 1 of the thesis have been presented, in something akin to serialised form, at numerous *Metropolis* forums, directly to policy-makers. Presentation of papers at conferences is of course, neither ground-breaking nor any indicator of instigating revolution. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of such efforts, particularly to repeat audiences of senior policymakers from TIR nations, may bear fruit, with time. Evidence of the latter, is more concrete in the context of a second example then, pertaining to Paper 4; work on technological solutions to immigration problems, was by invitation, presented in 2020 to the twelfth summit of the *Global Forum for Migration and Development* (GFMD), the voluntary, inter-governmental, non-binding and informal consultative process open to all states members and observers of the United Nations. This contribution represents a starting gambit at the GFMD, recognising the potential of technology to improve immigration outcomes; its

forthcoming summit will, for the first time, be considering ‘Leveraging New Technologies to Empower Migrants’ as a core theme.⁵

Turning away from two triumphs and instead towards limitations of the work at hand, multiple points bear mentioning. Firstly, a major omission throughout, has been recognition of the importance of issues of race, class, and gender, and their intersections with global competition for skilled migrants. These are considerations which have framed a large body of allied scholarship, but which have been largely unaddressed herein. The reason bears explicit explanation: the lenses of race, class and gender – individually and collectively – were deemed too significant to simply be glossed over in passing, or noted summarily for the sake of completeness. They are modes for immigration research deserving of standalone enquiry; debates about skilled migration are, for example, undoubtedly and overwhelmingly presented in gender-blinded fashion – even in the recent context of need for COVID keyworkers. Likewise, empirical studies on student migration, and even temporary workers, too often still largely present elitist perspectives, based on datasets derived from subjects at the pointy-end of socioeconomic bell-curves. Much more could be said to reinforce the point, but is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

A second shortcoming of the thesis is the paucity of data it has been able to present, relative to that which was collected. Of course, this is the fate of social science research often, and doctoral studies perhaps even more frequently. Regrettably, some work which was time-sensitive has lost currency with the passage of time, and no longer warrants presentation (where once, it was hoped it might actually inform future policy missteps). Other data has been superfluous to needs for the purposes of substantiating the core arguments of each paper presented, though may yet find an outlet to be aired. An example might be information pertaining to the inner workings of immigration departments globally; some are chronically underfunded and with poor morale amongst staff, because of social/political stigma surrounding their work – but others, quite the opposite. The contrasting characters of just Canada’s IRCC, Australia’s DHA, America’s USCIS, and Britain’s Home Office would make a fascinating ethnographic study – and one suspects offer insight into the immediate downstream consequences of migration policy formation and application.

⁵ Focus on the issue is of course, serendipitous, rather than the consequence of any work produced herein, and likewise, in line with an impending flood of scholarship, including McAuliffe, M. (ed). (forthcoming) *Handbook on Migration and Technology*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, which will feature contributions from almost fifty academic writers on matters salient to the increasing interdependence between migration and technology.

A third and more substantive deficiency, pertains to the dearth of engagement with huge bodies of scholarship in geography about interregional, internal, and urban-rural migrations. Studies in this vein recognise, for example, that people migrate to labour markets, as well as between and within cities and countries. Again, exclusion of these literatures was deliberate, to prevent diffusing the thesis' focus on international migration – although efforts were made to engage with the intersection of direct international migration to regional areas via dispersion schemes used in both Australia and Canada, as noted in Paper 2.

A related, fourth weakness of the work present herein, was its inability to expound upon migration as an expression of labour market dynamics, and in relation to employment turnover, for instance. Indeed in this regard, it must be confessed that this thesis, like some other immigration studies, has possibly ended up in no-man's land: not geographic enough to constitute scholarship that progresses geography, not theoretical enough to satisfy anthropology or sociology, nor mathematical enough to be of worth to orthodox economics let alone econometrics. In spite of this, regarding the theoretical orientation of the research, the thesis stands by the choice to not attempt to situate the work within a singular dialectic. However, with the benefit of hindsight and given time again, it might have chosen to instead situate the project within a single disciplinary framework – not least to benefit from the protections afforded within a discipline. The obvious candidate, in this regard, would be economic geography, as a space within which to conduct the investigation, noting that:

The challenge, politically speaking, is to carry forward into the world of politics and policy a sense of difference (as suggested by close dialogue) and a sense of commitment to collective welfare that may only be possible through codified, even stylized, facts about the world. Resuscitating commitment to collective intellectual enquiry is an essential task for economic geography. It is a task we share with others similarly concerned with overcoming the debilitating effects of fragmented identities and separate loyalties (Clark 1998).

External to reflections on this thesis, one must recognise of course that “migration studies is becoming a distinctive and integrated field of scholarship, with its own approaches and institutions” (Gamlen et al 2013), and furthermore acknowledge, “a wider flourishing in the field of migration studies, involving the founding of several... new migration-related periodicals and the publication of a large number of new books, reference works, and other ‘new media’ resources” (Gamlen 2013). Notwithstanding proliferation of fora, to contribute to most, “the basic expectation is serious theoretical engagement” (ibid). Thus, whilst migration theorisation may have finally found a home, it is difficult to say where other less-theoretical perspectives belong, might be heard, or what if any, responsibilities they shoulder.

Perspectives from human geographers perhaps still offer the most hope in this regard, given persistent refrains which argue that:

As interviewers, we cannot and should not evade the academic and political responsibility of speaking for/on behalf of others through interpretations of the world that start, if not end, with the personal interactions that take place in interviews and the ways in which we interpret these through the lens of our philosophical, theoretical and political frameworks.... In the shift from accepting interviews as a supposedly objective method to the acceptance of their interpretative status, the responsibilities of researchers for their work has greatly increased, as has the significance of their own positionality. While we are no longer able to hide behind a veil of invisibility and objectivity, we are now able to assert and take responsibility for claims for change and greater social justice (McDowell 2011).

Given the totality of these conceptual reflections, it is difficult to know how and whether to prescribe future lines of enquiry pursuant to the work conducted herein; it is possible that global completion for skilled immigration – indeed immigration full stop – may be less within the purview of geography in the 21st century, and more in the wheelhouse of other disciplines. Notwithstanding, based on the findings and conclusions of the anthology of papers presented, the following areas are cautiously forwarded as potential candidate directions for future research, and future public policy (noting the often porous boundary between them).

Firstly, separate to research on (negative) attitudes towards immigration, this thesis suggests that future attention could be devoted towards explicitly articulating the positive case for immigration in the modern world. In modern public discourse, immigration is arguably at best tolerated as a necessary evil; rarely is it forwarded as an indispensable necessity, economically and socially. The rare occasions of junior researchers raising the spectre are subject to predictably harsh treatment; such work, would therefore be welcome from established and eminent scholars offering gravity and gravitas to the idea.

A second, related suggestion would be to recouple immigration research, with population policy, explicitly – not least to transition away from blunt policy responses to immigration challenges, such as tinkering with category quotas. Immigration can be managed, but less gainfully micromanaged, by states. A first step for superior future management, requires changing the false perception of it being fleeting and optional, and disconnected from ongoing nation-building and demographic necessity. State dialogues have trended in the extreme towards ‘maintaining sovereignty’, supported tacitly by academic presentation of immigration as discretionary rather than an inevitable human phenomena. The plea for transcendence of the ‘discursive gap’ on all things immigration policy-related is by now well-established herein, and bears no further mention. To simply reiterate: “Governments

concerned about migration must therefore go beyond mere gate-keeping and integrate migration policy into mainstream planning” (ILO 2004).

Given the necessity for some gates though, a third direction for future research and policy is preferential migration, which offers significant promise, given entrenched anti-immigration hostility across the globe (which could be shifted, and has not always been a given, to the extent it is currently). In the short to mid-term horizon, preferential pathways could be employed more, and to greater economic effect; evidence exists to support the usefulness of articulating sector-specific bilateral labour channels (nursing being the obvious example), and likewise, even finessing definitional specificity of professionals under existing multilateral arrangements can be fruitful. The trade-mobility nexus, and labour mobility provisions within trade agreements specifically, are surprisingly under-researched compared to other areas of skilled migration competition and policy. Such arrangements should be mindful though, that geography still matters, and mega-regionalism has limits in respect of migration – that is, regional proximity to markets matters, notwithstanding degrees of economic integration, especially when considering acquisition of temporary workers who may be less concerned with settlement.

Fourth and finally, and somewhat counterintuitively, it is suggested that future directions for research and public policy regarding skilled immigration, should be less preoccupied with using ‘skill’ as a bedrock construct around which to organise and validate migration plans. In sum, the functional utility of ‘skill’ has passed, and is now instead, trending towards futility. The alternative proposed here is to reposition future narratives on skilled migration, as dialogues on economic migration more holistically. Furthermore, by contrast with now historic calls promoting “policy thinking which many governments will have to face as they join in the ‘war’ over skills” (Iredale 2001), the evocation here is instead, to give peaceful promotion of immigration a chance.

This research supports the general view that skilled migratory movements from developing to developed countries, as well as between OECD nations will continue to be a priority on the immigration policy agenda. As it draws towards finality, however, it questions the *usefulness* as much as the extent, to which states should continue to compete for, let alone wage war, for the best and brightest. The world has no shortage of potential migrants, a perpetually geographically imbalanced demand for labour, and mounting proof that all immigration flows require time to mature economically. What is in actual short supply, is the political will to propagate honest discourse on migration, for global betterment, beginning at local scales.

The challenge of creating electoral gains from being pro-immigration are not insignificant – but neither is this an insurmountable objective, arguably, so much as a function of time, courage and circumstance. In this respect, the unexpected intervention of COVID may ironically, seed positive change. The pandemic has certainly catalysed voluminous output from policy quarters⁶ intersecting with immigration, and is forcing everyone, including scholars, to rethink foundational precepts. A study from the IOM examining migrants' vulnerability for example, concludes with the thought that:

Many countries have responded to COVID-19 with increased closure, tighter immigration regulations and further marginalization of migrants. The centrality of migrants in the social, cultural and economic fabric of our globalized world, instead, suggests that only inclusive approaches help protect and promote everybody's rights, health and well-being, can allow communities and societies to respond more effectively to this crisis, and reduce the risk of future ones (Gudagno 2020).

Of even more specific relevance to this thesis, are academic contributions by Anderson et al (2020) on systemic resilience and essential services, and Yeoh (2020) on the sustainability of temporary migration regimes in the wake of COVID – which also, both encourage rethinking of migration as a long-game endeavour. The possibility of 'longer stays, less churn' (ibid) may thus, be but one realisation incorporated by policymakers in the years ahead.

A final perspective from yet another eminent scholar, has argued that in the face of COVID creating rising costs for agricultural labour in the USA, the practical options for harvesting fresh produce are threefold: better use of mechanisation, more H2A visas, or importing more foreign fruit and vegetables.⁷ The point is made to draw a parallel: the options for satisfying future skilled (economic) immigration labour needs, in general, are similarly, technological advancement, legalisation/regularisation, and/or economic diversification/structural reorganisation. Of the three, the second is the easiest to practically effect, the third the most challenging, and the first the least guaranteed. Then again, technology is also the least predictable – the right COVID vaccine could as yet precipitate overcorrection and a massive resurgence of international migration flows across the globe.

⁶ A single recent issue of *Migration Policy Practice* [10(2): 1-72] for example, non-exhaustively examines the interface of COVID-19 with migration policy in an age of immobility, real-time analysis, human rights protections, displaced children, USA immigration reform, big data innovation, travel restrictions, location data, and migration statistics.

⁷ Martin, P. (2020) *Farm Labor 2020.pptx*. Metropolis International Webinar Presentation, 22 May 2020 <https://acs-aec.ca/en/events/is-covid-19-reshaping-north-america-an-online-conference-on-the-borders-boundaries-and-mobility-in-the-united-states-canada-and-mexico/>.

4. CLOSING REMARKS

From the limited vantage of this thesis, it is difficult to prescribe what the as yet, nebulous, forthcoming ‘age of migration’ will look like. The best that can be said with certainty is that it is unlikely to be as predictable as the preceding fifty years, given the variables at play at the time of writing. Whatever futures lay ahead for immigration, however, will no doubt be the subject of scrutiny by commentators and scholars of assorted disposition. Bearing this in mind, a penultimate point to be made is that dialectic – the art of investigating or discussing the truth of opinions – matters, to migration scholarship. The iterative relationship between close dialogue and stylised facts, ethnographic narratives and broad tendencies ignoring individual aberrations, and the interplay between empiricism and theory, likewise, does matter. In this regard, migration studies will arguably be richer ongoing, if it is more able to reconcile dismissing as naïve empiricism, work which engages the real world of immigration decision making, but is not necessarily rooted in sociological, anthropological, critical, and postmodern theories. There are sound reasons for compartmentalising practice, from policy, from theory, in forums assigned for introspection. Notwithstanding, whilst theory has its place and is far from the last refuge of the unimaginative – it too is constructed, by and of itself, with limitations in its capacity to inform practical progress which might improve the material conditions of existence for immigrants, citizens and states.

As a final thought, whilst it is hoped that the rationale, focus and purpose of this study are by now clear, what inspired it may still warrant explicit clarification. Please permit a brief personal reflection, therefore, in closing. I have been a student of music for more than twice the time I have been a student of migration. The sum total of my accumulated wisdom on my study of music thus far, has been this: Musicology absent of music-making renders the enterprise hollow. My hope for migration scholarship is that it doesn’t become musicology without music. My hope is that its voice, expressed through all and any disciplinary instrument, be more audible, and resonate more loudly in the minds of policymakers, academics and decision-makers, whose decisions affect migrant lives and shape host societies. Politics is not the only domain with a responsibility to the polity. It is incumbent on all servants of the public, to also demonstrate leadership, honestly, for the greater good. ■

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SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

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APPENDIX A – PAPER 2 DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS

The following instruments were utilised to support data collection for Paper 2:

- Project Information Statement (CAN & USA)
- Project Information Statement (AUS)
- Focus Questions for Interviewees (CAN & USA)
- Focus Questions for Interviewees (AUS)
- Authorisation for Participation Form (CAN – CIC)
- Authorisation for Participation Form (AUS – DIAC)
- Participant Consent Form G (Government)
- Participant Consent Form F (Firm)
- Participant Consent Form P (Public Figure)



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PROJECT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

<http://www.ouce.ox.ac.uk/graduate/research/trahman.php>

This research project is being carried out by Tanzil Rahman, a doctoral student at the School of Geography, University of Oxford, towards fulfillment of his Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) degree. Mr Rahman's research is being supervised by Professor Ceri Peach, Professor of Social Geography, and Professor Stephen Castles, Professor of Migration and Refugee Studies at the University of Oxford. The project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Competition for skilled migrants between OECD countries is not new, but increasingly fierce – being almost analogous to similar competition for foreign direct investment in decades past. Growing numbers of educated, able and mobile individuals effectively traverse the world looking for places to settle and build within. The challenge for national governments then, is to find ways to attract and retain these top flight people in a highly competitive and lucrative international marketplace. This challenge is especially significant for traditional immigration nations given the relatively recent emergence of new countries to the global skilled migration market. Bearing this in mind, this research specifically seeks to examine the relative competitiveness of four nations in the global market for skilled migrants: Canada, Australia, the UK and Ireland. These states have been selected for two key reasons – accessibility of quality data, and their aggressive operation of contemporaneous skilled-specific migration policies.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research project is to better understand and explain the dynamics of skilled migration – the role of the state, migration policy mechanisms, processing and assessment methods, and which 'pull factors' most influence the volume, frequency, duration, and direction of skilled migrant movements. To address these aims qualitative data will be gathered in the form of interviews with key migration stakeholders, including: immigration processing staff and migration policy-makers in government; employees of private migration agency firms and professional accreditation bodies; and politicians and academics involved in research on skilled migration and global labour competition. Additionally, quantitative data from the immigration departments of fieldwork jurisdictions, as well as from the OECD, will be analyzed and synthesized to produce policy relevant statistical information enumerating the size and direction of skilled migratory flows.

Fieldwork for this study will be conducted over the coming year in Vancouver, Ottawa, Toronto, Canberra, Sydney, Adelaide, Dublin, London, Paris and Washington DC. It is anticipated that the study will conclude in mid-2007 at which time the research will be published in the form of a thesis, comprised of four academic papers submitted to peer-reviewed journals. This thesis will be held in the University's library and will be available for public inspection. Ultimately, it is hoped that this research will provide insights for policy analysts and lawmakers as to how countries can most effectively compete in the global market for skilled migrants and seek to service their labour-market demands.

YOUR PARTICIPATION

Because of your interest and/or role in facilitating skilled migration, you are being invited to participate in this study. Participation is of course, entirely voluntary; you are not obliged to participate and if you do you can unconditionally withdraw at any time. If you agree to be involved, you will be requested to take part in an interview with Mr Rahman at a time and place of your convenience. The interview should take approximately forty minutes. Interview data will be recorded through hand-written notes which, when transcribed, may be forwarded to you for your confirmation. All aspects of the study, including interview data, will be *strictly confidential* and only the investigators mentioned will have access to information on participants. Reports or journal papers arising from the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in any such publication.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Accompanying this Project Information Statement is a Consent Form and list of Focus Questions for your consideration, should you wish to be involved in the study. The former outlines the exact conditions by which your views will be reported in the thesis and the latter provides the broad subject matter to be discussed in interviews. If you would like further details regarding this study at any stage, please feel free to contact Tanzil Rahman on +44 (0)7887 747 134 or tanzil.rahman@geog.ox.ac.uk. Alternatively, you may wish to contact the Principal Investigator overseeing the project, Professor Ceri Peach on +44 (0)1865 275 999 or ceri.peach@geog.ox.ac.uk. Thank you for your time and consideration of this research project. This information sheet is for you to keep.



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PROJECT INFORMATION STATEMENT

<http://www.ouce.ox.ac.uk/graduate/research/trahman.php>

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

This research project is being carried out by Tanzil Rahman, a Commonwealth Scholar and doctoral student at the School of Geography, University of Oxford, towards fulfillment of his Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) degree. Mr Rahman's research is being supervised by Professor Ceri Peach, Professor of Social Geography, and Professor Stephen Castles, Professor of Migration and Refugee Studies at the University of Oxford. The project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee. It is anticipated that the study will conclude in 2008 at which time the research will be published in the form of a thesis to be held in the University's library.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Competition for skilled migrants between OECD countries is not new, but increasingly fierce – being almost analogous to similar competition for foreign direct investment in decades past. Growing numbers of educated, able and mobile individuals effectively traverse the world looking for places to settle and build within. The challenge for national governments then, is to find ways to attract and retain these top flight people in a highly competitive and lucrative international marketplace. This challenge is especially significant for traditional immigration nations given the relatively recent emergence of new countries to the global skilled migration market. Bearing this in mind, this research seeks to examine the relative competitiveness of four traditional immigration nations in the global market for skilled migrants: Australia, Canada the UK and USA.

PURPOSE

Specifically, this research project aims to better understand and explain the dynamics of skilled migration – the role of the state, migration policy mechanisms, processing and assessment methods, and which 'pull factors' most influence the volume, frequency, duration, and direction of skilled migrant movements. To address these aims data is being gathered in multiple forms from the aforementioned 'destination' countries as well as selected 'source' countries. Ultimately, it is hoped that the research will provide insights for policy analysts and lawmakers as to how countries can most effectively compete in the global market for skilled migrants and seek to service their labour-market demands.

DATA COLLECTION (DESTINATION COUNTRIES)

Fieldwork for this study has already been conducted in Vancouver, Ottawa, Toronto, and Washington DC with further data collection scheduled to take place in Adelaide, Canberra, Sydney, and London over the coming year. In each of these cities qualitative data has/will be gathered in the form of interviews with key migration stakeholders, including: immigration processing staff and migration policy-makers in government; employees of private migration agency firms and professional accreditation bodies; and politicians and academics involved in research on skilled migration and global labour competition. Additionally, quantitative data from the immigration departments of these jurisdictions, as well as from the OECD, will be analyzed and synthesized to produce statistical information enumerating the size and direction of skilled migratory flows.

DATA COLLECTION (SOURCE COUNTRY)

Fieldwork for this study has also been conducted in New Delhi and Chandigarh, examining and the impact of competition for skilled migrants on Indian national development. Additionally large-scale surveys and interviews have been conducted with skilled Indian nationals and students, exploring why they seek to migrate to one destination country in preference to another, and the role of immigration consultants in facilitating these processes.

YOUR PARTICIPATION

Because of your interest and/or role in facilitating skilled migration, you are being invited to participate in this study. Participation is entirely voluntary; you are not obliged to participate and if you do you can unconditionally withdraw at any time. If you agree to be involved, you will be requested to take part in a semi-structured interview with Mr Rahman at a time and place of your convenience. The interview should take approximately forty minutes. Interview data will be recorded through hand-written notes which, when transcribed, may be forwarded to you for your confirmation. All aspects of the study, including interview data, will be *strictly confidential* and only the investigators mentioned will have access to information on participants. Reports or journal papers arising from the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in any such publication.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you would like further details regarding this study at any stage, please feel free to contact Tanzil Rahman on +61 (0)424 999 033, +91 981 881 4795 / +44 (0)7887 747 134 or tanzil.rahman@hertford.ox.ac.uk. Alternatively, you may wish to contact the Principal Investigator overseeing the project, Professor Ceri Peach on +44 (0)1865 275 999 or ceri.peach@ouce.ox.ac.uk. Thank you for your time and consideration of this research project. This information sheet is for you to keep.



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FOCUS QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWEES

*(to be read in conjunction with the Project Information Statement
and Consent Form for this study)*

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

1. To what degree are you aware of a competitive global market for skilled migrants?
2. Who is a 'skilled' migrant in your opinion? Are existing government definitions of 'skilled' appropriate?
3. How does Canada market itself locally and internationally to potential skilled migrants?
4. What do you believe are the most significant attributes skilled overseas workers take into consideration when choosing a potential migration destination?
5. What social services are skilled migrants (and their families) able to access post-arrival, particularly in relation to public healthcare, housing, education, and welfare?
6. What fiscal incentives and taxation regimes are skilled migrants subject to post-arrival?
7. Do you believe Canada has any unique competitive advantages over other OECD nations also trying to attract skilled immigrants?

Labour Markets

8. Are current methods of determining Canadian domestic labour market shortfalls adequate?
9. Are current skilled immigrant selection methods capable of fulfilling Canadian labour market needs?
10. How does Canada facilitate the entry of skilled migrants into the labour market, and/or remove barriers to recognition of overseas qualifications?
11. Does Canada conduct post-arrival follow-ups of migrant employment outcomes?
12. To what degree if any has information from previous longitudinal studies of immigrants contributed to current skilled immigration policy in Canada?

Migrant Selection

13. What strengths and weaknesses do you think existing methods of skilled migrant selection possess?
14. How quickly and efficiently are skilled migration applications processed from the time of application lodgement to final grant of visa?

Consequences of Migration

15. To what degree are region-specific migration mechanisms successful in dispersing the skilled migrant population?
16. Does Canadian skilled immigration policy account for impacts on sending countries?
17. Historically, the largest and most significant stream of skilled migration has flown from developing to developed countries. Do you expect this trend to continue? How significant might intra-OECD flows become over the coming decades?



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FOCUS QUESTIONS FOR DIAC (AUS) INTERVIEWEES

(to be read in conjunction with the Project Information Statement and Consent Form for this study)

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

1. To what degree are you aware of a competitive global market for skilled migrants?
2. Who is a 'skilled' migrant in your opinion? Are existing government definitions of 'skilled' appropriate?
3. Is enough done to market Australia as a potential skilled migration **[study]** destination?
4. What do you believe are the most significant attributes skilled overseas workers **[students]** take into consideration when choosing a potential migration **[study]** destination?
5. Are skilled migrants (and their families) **[students]** provided with appropriate post-arrival social services, particularly in relation to public healthcare, housing and education?
6. Are skilled migrants (and their families) subject to appropriate fiscal incentives and taxation regimes post-arrival?
7. Do you believe Australia has any unique competitive advantages over other OECD nations also trying to attract skilled immigrants **[students]**?
 - *Why do you believe students might choose to study in Australia in preference to another country?*

Labour Markets

8. Are current methods of determining Australian domestic labour market shortfalls adequate?
9. Are current skilled immigrant selection methods capable of fulfilling Australia's labour market needs?
- 10. To what degree if any do offshore students help to satisfy Australia's labour shortages?**
11. Is long-term retention of skilled workers a priority for skilled immigration policy?
12. Does Australia adequately facilitate the entry of skilled migrants into the labour market, and/or remove barriers to recognition of overseas qualifications?

Selection & Processing

13. What strengths and weaknesses do you think existing methods of skilled migrant selection possess?
 - *Are there any problems which arise as a consequence of students increasingly using migration agents?*
14. How quickly and efficiently are skilled migration **[offshore student]** applications processed from the time of application lodgement to final grant of visa?
15. To what degree if any has information from previous longitudinal studies of immigrants contributed to current skilled immigration policy in Australia?

Broader Issues

16. To what degree are region-specific migration mechanisms successful in dispersing the skilled migrant population?
17. Does Australian skilled immigration policy account for impacts on sending countries?
18. Historically, the largest and most significant stream of skilled migration has flown from developing to developed countries. Do you expect this trend to continue? How significant might intra-OECD flows become over the coming decades?



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AUTHORISATION FOR PARTICIPATION FORM

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

I, _____

[print name in BLOCK letters]

[print official title in BLOCK letters]

of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), have read and understood the information provided to me on the above named research study and have discussed it with the researcher, Mr Tanzil Rahman, to my satisfaction.

In giving my consent for Mr Rahman to interview CIC staff, I acknowledge that any staff who participate in the study must:

- Freely choose to do so and understand that they can withdraw without compromise at any time;
- Have read the Project Information Statement for this study;
- Have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to their questions;
- Be aware of the risks and inconveniences associated with the project;
- Understand that their involvement is strictly confidential and that any information provided will not be used in any way which reveals their personal identity or position of employment; and
- Be made aware that this research has been authorized to proceed by myself; and
- Sign a participant consent form.

In giving my authority for participation I also acknowledge that:

- I understand that only the researcher and the principal investigator will have access to any personal data provided, and that this data will be stored at the University of Oxford until the completion of the study, after which time such data will be destroyed;
- I am aware that this research has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

I have been given a copy of this document and hereby agree to allow staff to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name: _____ (Block Letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____ (Block Letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____



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AUTHORISATION FOR PARTICIPATION FORM

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

I, _____
[print name in BLOCK letters]

[print official title in BLOCK letters]

of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), have read and understood the information provided to me on the above named research study and have discussed it with the researcher, Mr Tanzil Rahman, to my satisfaction.

In giving my consent for Mr Rahman to interview DIAC staff, I acknowledge that any staff who participate in the study must:

- Freely choose to do so and understand that they can withdraw without compromise at any time;
- Understand that their involvement is strictly confidential and that any information provided will not be used in any way which reveals their personal identity or position of employment; and
- Have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to their questions;
- Have read the Project Information Statement for this study;
- Be aware of the risks and inconveniences associated with the project;
- Be made aware that this research has been authorized to proceed by myself; and
- Sign a participant consent form.

In giving my authority for participation I also acknowledge that:

- I understand that only the researcher and the principal investigator will have access to any personal data provided, and that this data will be stored at the University of Oxford until the completion of the study, after which time such data will be destroyed;
- I am aware that this research has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

I have been given a copy of this document and hereby agree to allow staff to participate in this research study.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____



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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (G)

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

I, _____
[print name in BLOCK letters]

employee of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, have read and understood the information provided to me on the above named research study and have discussed it with the researcher, Mr Tanzil Rahman, to my satisfaction.

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

- I freely choose to participate in this study and understand that I can withdraw without penalty at any time by advising the researcher of this decision;
- I have read the Project Information Statement for this study and understand the purpose of the study;
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to my questions;
- I am willing to answer questions provided to me by the researcher regarding the study;
- I am aware of the risks and inconveniences associated with the study;
- I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information I provide will be used in any way which reveals my personal identity or position of employment;
- I understand that only the researcher and the principal investigator will have access to any personal data provided, and that this data will be stored at the University of Oxford until the completion of the study, after which time such data will be destroyed; and
- I am aware that this research has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

I hereby agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name: _____ (Block Letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____ (Block Letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____



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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (F)

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

I, _____
[print name in BLOCK letters]

employee of, _____
[print agency of employment in BLOCK letters]

have read and understood the information provided to me on the above named research study and have discussed it with the researcher, Mr Tanzil Rahman, to my satisfaction.

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

- I freely choose to participate in this study and understand that I can withdraw without penalty at any time by advising the researcher of this decision;
- I have read the Project Information Statement for this study and understand the purpose of the study;
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to my questions;
- I am willing to answer questions provided to me by the researcher regarding the study;
- I am aware of the risks and inconveniences associated with the study;
- I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information I provide will be used in any way which reveals my personal identity, place or position of employment;
- I understand that only the researcher and the principal investigator will have access to any personal data provided, and that this data will be stored at the University of Oxford until the completion of the study, after which time such data will be destroyed; and
- I am aware that this research has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

I hereby agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name: _____ (Block Letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____ (Block Letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____



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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (P)

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

I, _____
[print name in BLOCK letters]

[official title]

have read and understood the information provided to me on the above named research study and have discussed it with the researcher, Mr Tanzil Rahman, to my satisfaction.

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

- I freely choose to participate in this study and understand that I can withdraw without penalty at any time by advising the researcher of this decision;
- I have read the Project Information Statement for this study and understand the purpose of the study;
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to my questions;
- I am willing to answer questions provided to me by the researcher regarding the study;
- I am aware of the risks and inconveniences associated with the study;
- I understand that the information I provide may be used in way which reveals my identity, occupation and place of employment;
- I understand that only the researcher and the principal investigator will have access to any personal data provided, and that this data will be stored at the University of Oxford until the completion of the study, after which time such data will be destroyed; and
- I am aware that this research has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

I hereby agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name: _____ (Block Letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Name: _____ (Block Letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

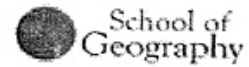
APPENDIX B – PAPER 3 DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS

The following instruments were utilised to support data collection for Paper 3:

- Focus Questions for Chandigarh Consultants
- Participant Consent Form C (Consultants)
- Questionnaire & Focus Questions for Chandigarh Applicants
- Participant Consent Form A (Applicants)
- Focus Questions for Embassy Officials (AUS example)
- Participant Consent Form E (Embassy Officials)
- Project Information Statement (India)



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FOCUS QUESTIONS FOR CHANDIGARH CONSULTANTS

(to be read in conjunction with the Project Information Statement and Consent Form for this study)

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

Firm Background

1. Size of firm
2. Years in operation
3. Preferred destinations
4. Current number of clients
5. Percentage of clients successful
6. Registered migration agent
7. Cost of services
8. Average time taken to process an application

IN-DEPTH ANSWERS

Consultancy

9. Why do you believe your clients choose to emigrate from India?
10. Why do you believe your clients choose to try to migrate to country X in preference to another country?
11. Do your clients consider immigrating to countries other than Australia, Canada, the UK or USA? Which ones and why? What about non-traditional destinations like Germany, Japan, Ireland or Nordic nations?
12. Why do you think your clients choose to use the services of a migration agent? What services does your firm provide to make obtaining immigration easier?
13. How do you secure your clients?
14. What are the major difficulties your clients face in obtaining migration?
15. What do you believe are the most significant attributes your clients take into consideration when choosing a potential migration destination? Personal taxation? Indirect taxation? Availability of welfare, public housing, healthcare or education? Ability to bring other family members quickly? Weather, political environment, cultural tolerance?
16. Do you encourage your clients to migrate to rural areas or small towns rather than major cities?
17. Do you brief successful clients on potential hazards or difficulties they might face after migrating?

Awareness

18. To what degree do you think there is a competitive global market for skilled migrants?
19. To what degree do you feel that India is 'poised' or on the verge of major economic and social change for the better?
20. Are you concerned about whether you are contributing to brain drain for India?

The Future

21. How likely is it that skilled Indians will continue to seek to emigrate from India even if economic conditions continue to improve at present rates?
22. Over the next 10 years, how likely is it that India will become more successful in repatriating citizens who have already emigrated?
23. Over the next 10 years, how likely is it that India will become more successful in attracting workers from OECD countries to work and live in India?



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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (C)

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

I, _____
[print name in BLOCK letters]

[print position / job title in BLOCK letters]

of, _____
[print agency of employment in BLOCK letters]

have read and understood the information provided to me on the above named research study and have discussed it with the researcher, Mr Tanzil Rahman, to my satisfaction.

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

- I freely choose to participate in this study and understand that I can withdraw without penalty at any time by advising the researcher of this decision;
- I have read the Project Information Statement for this study and understand the purpose of the study;
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to my questions;
- I am willing to answer questions provided to me by the researcher regarding the study;
- I am aware of the risks and inconveniences associated with the study;
- I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information I provide will be used in any way which reveals my personal identity or agency of employment;
- I understand that only the researcher and the principal investigator will have access to any personal data provided, and that this data will be stored at the University of Oxford until the completion of the study, after which time such data will be destroyed; and
- I am aware that this research has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

I hereby agree to participate in this research study.

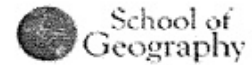
Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

C/



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QUESTIONNAIRE & FOCUS QUESTIONS FOR CHANDIGARH APPLICANTS

(to be read in conjunction with the Project Information Statement and Consent Form for this study)

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

Questionnaire

1. AGE <25 / 26-30 / 31-35 / 36-40 / 41-45 / 46+
2. MARITAL STATUS Single / In a Relationship / Married / Divorced / Widowed
3. CHILDREN 0 / 1+ Primary School Age / 1+ High School Age
4. GENDER Male / Female
5. RELIGION Hindu / Muslim / Christian / Jain / Parsi / Buddhist / Sikh / NA
6. PREFERRED DESTINATION Australia / Canada / UK / USA
7. OTHER DESTINATIONS
8. VISA LENGTH GIVEN/SOUGHT <1 year / 1-2 years / 2-4 years / 5+ years
9. VISA TYPE Student / Temporary / Permanent
10. DESIRED STAY <1 year / 1-2 years / 2-4 years / 5+ years
11. HIGHEST QUALIFICATION High School / Bachelors / Masters / PhD
12. PROFESSION
13. YEARS EMPLOYED <1 year / 1-4 years / 5-10 years / 10+ years


RANK ON A SCALE OF 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely)

Pull Factors

14. Are rates of personal taxation in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
15. Are rates of indirect taxation in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
16. Is the availability of unemployment benefits or welfare payments in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
17. Is the availability of public housing in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
18. Is the quality of healthcare available in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
19. Is the quality of primary or secondary education available for your children in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
20. Is the quality of tertiary education available for your children in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
21. Is the opportunity to quickly bring your spouse and children to join you in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
22. Is the opportunity to bring your parent/s to join you in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
23. If applicable, is the presence of other family members in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?



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24. Is the weather in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
25. Is the political environment in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?
26. Is cultural tolerance in your destination country a significant factor in attracting you to it?

Location

27. How willing would you be to migrate to a rural area or small town rather than a major city in the country you are seeking to migrate to?

Economic Integration

28. How concerned are you about whether you will be able to work in your chosen field in your destination country?
29. If necessary, how likely are you to return to education to see that your foreign credentials are recognized?
30. How willing are you to be 'underemployed' (ie work in a less-skilled profession than you are qualified to do) after migration?
31. How likely are you to return to education to acquire new qualifications?

Awareness

32. To what degree are you aware of a competitive global market for skilled migrants?
33. To what degree do you feel that India is 'poised' or on the verge of major economic and social change for the better?
34. Are you concerned about whether you are contributing to brain drain for India?

The Future

35. How likely is it that skilled Indians will continue to seek to migrate from India even if economic conditions continue to improve at present rates?
36. Over the next 10 years, how likely is it that India will become more successful in repatriating citizens who have already emigrated?
37. Over the next 10 years, how likely is it that India will become more successful in attracting workers from OECD countries to work and live in India?
38. How likely is it that you will return to live in India in the future if you are successful in obtaining migration?

IN-DEPTH ANSWERS

39. Why have you chosen to emigrate from India?
40. Why have you chosen to try to migrate to country X in preference to another country?
41. Would you consider immigrating to a country other than Australia, Canada, the UK or USA? Which ones and why? What about countries like Germany, Japan, Ireland or Nordic nations?
42. Why have you chosen to use the services of a migration agent?
43. How difficult has the process of applying to immigrate been? What have been the major obstacles?
44. How long has the process of seeking migration taken so far? Is this longer or shorter than you expected the process to take?



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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (A)

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

I, _____

[print name in BLOCK letters]

have read and understood the information provided to me on the above named research study and have discussed it with the researcher, Mr Tanzil Rahman, to my satisfaction.

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

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- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to my questions;
- I am willing to answer questions provided to me by the researcher regarding the study;
- I am aware of the risks and inconveniences associated with the study;
- I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information I provide will be used in any way which reveals my personal identity;
- I understand that only the researcher and the principal investigator will have access to any personal data provided, and that this data will be stored at the University of Oxford until the completion of the study, after which time such data will be destroyed; and
- I am aware that this research has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

I hereby agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

A / 



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FOCUS QUESTIONS FOR EMBASSY OFFICIALS (AUS)

(to be read in conjunction with the Project Information Statement and Consent Form for this study)

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

Background

1. Breakdown of applicants from across India (by category/visa class and region and use of consultant)
2. Number of successful applicants (by category/visa class and region and use of consultant)
3. Cost of visa application (check TTS form)
4. Average time taken to process applications

IN-DEPTH ANSWERS

5. Why do you believe Indians choose to emigrate from India?
6. Why do you believe Indians choose to try to migrate to Australia in preference to another country?
7. Why do you believe Indian students choose to study in Australia in preference to another country?
8. Why do you think Indians choose to use the services of a migration agent?
9. Are there any problems which arise as a consequence of Indians increasingly using migration agents?
10. Which (if any) of the following attributes do Indians take into consideration when choosing a potential migration destination? Personal taxation? Indirect taxation? Availability of welfare, public housing, healthcare or education? Ability to bring other family members quickly? Weather, political environment, cultural tolerance?
11. What does the Australian embassy do to market Australia as a potential study/skilled migration destination?
12. Do you believe Australia has any unique competitive advantages over other OECD nations also trying to attract skilled immigrants?
13. To what degree are skilled migrants coming from India able to satisfy Australia's labour market needs (in metropolitan and regional areas)?
14. To what degree do you think there is a competitive global market for skilled migrants?
15. To what degree do you feel that India is 'poised' or on the verge of major economic and social change for the better?
16. How likely is it that skilled Indians will continue to seek to emigrate from India even if economic conditions continue to improve at present rates?
17. Over the next 10 years, how likely is it that India will become more successful in repatriating citizens who have already emigrated?
18. Over the next 10 years, how likely is it that India will become more successful in attracting workers from OECD countries to work and live in India?



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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (E)

Maintaining Competitiveness in the Global Market for Skilled Migrants

I, _____
[print name in BLOCK letters]

[official title]

have read and understood the information provided to me on the above named research study and have discussed it with the researcher, Mr Tanzil Rahman, to my satisfaction.

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- I understand that the information I provide ^{will not TR.} ~~may be~~ used in way which reveals my identity, occupation and place of employment;
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- I am aware that this research has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

I hereby agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

E/ _____

APPENDIX C – PAPER 4 DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS

This template summarises the content of the online survey used to collect data for Paper 4.

SURVEY DESIGN SUMMARY

iMigration? Exploring the use of technology to manage and select economic immigrants

RESPONDENT DATA

Full Name	[Free Text – FT]
Current Office Location	[Drop-Down List (City) – DDL1]
Job Title	[FT]
No of years working on economic immigration	[<1, 1-5, 6-10, >10]
Completing survey representing views about	[Drop-Down List (Country) – DDL2]

QUESTIONS 1-6 (Current Software Technology)

1. Does the government of the country you work within utilise technological *software* to select and/or manage the administration of economic immigrants? [Y, N]
 - 1.1. Please describe how the software operates and is used in practice. If known to you, please note the architectural platform it was built upon, or any similar technical specifications. [FT]
2. Are you aware of who developed, designed or built the *software* you have just described? [Y, N]
 - 2.1. Please elaborate. If known to you, please note if the systems are bespoke technology, or were customised, or configured for government use (e.g. from an existing commercial off-the-shelf product). [FT]
3. Are you aware of whether the *software* you have described is maintained by government or a non-government entity? [Y, N]
 - 3.1. Please elaborate. If known to you, please note who has access to the data stored within these systems. [FT]
4. Are you aware of when the *software* you have described was last updated, upgraded or significantly modified? [Y, N]
 - 4.1. Please elaborate. [FT]
5. Are you aware of the degree to which the *software* you have described, does or does not integrate with other government IT systems? [Y, N]
 - 5.1. Please elaborate. [FT]
6. In your view, to what extent are the *software* systems used to select and/or manage the administration of immigrants in the country in which you operate:

	1 Not at all	2 Slightly	3 Moderately	4 Very	5 Extremely	0 Don't Know
Easy to use?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Well designed?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outdated?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effective?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fit for purpose?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

QUESTIONS 7-12 (Current Hardware Technology)

Repeat of wording for questions 1-6, with italicised 'software' replaced with 'hardware'.

QUESTIONS 13-15 (Future Technological Systems)

13. Are you aware of whether there are any plans for future research and development of technological systems, to select and manage the administration of economic immigration, in the country in which you operate? [Y, N]
 - 13.1. Please elaborate. [FT]
14. Artificial intelligence (AI) is an area of computer science focused on creating intelligent machines to work and react like humans. Do you believe AI should be used to select and/or manage the administration of economic immigrants? [Y, N]
 - 14.1. Please elaborate. [FT]
15. Is there anything else you can share regarding the use of technology to select and/or manage economic immigrants, from the perspective of your nominated country or any other? Or any general comments you would like to make? [Y, N]
 - 15.1. Please elaborate with anything you feel might be a helpful contribution to this study. [FT]
16. Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this study. Would you be willing to be contacted to participate in a follow-up phone interview to anonymously discuss your answers with the researchers, if we require any clarifications? [Y, N]

APPENDIX D – PAPER 4 NUMERICAL DATA ANALYSIS NOTEBOOK

The attached Supplementary Information (in HTML format optimised for Chrome browser) accompanied the submitted manuscript and details the quantitative analysis for Paper 4.