

# ‘Give me my pathway!’: multinational migration, transnational skills regimes and migrant subjectification

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**Abstract** *In this article, I address the interplay between migration regimes and migrant subjectivities in stepwise multinational migration through a comparative analysis of biographical interviews with migrants in the healthcare and dairy farm work sectors in New Zealand. In both sectors, migrants’ trajectories involve movements from Asia to locations in the Middle East, North Africa or Japan before arrival in New Zealand, and in some cases plans for onward migration. The analysis of these migration patterns and the narratives of migrants, reveal an emergent transnational skills regime that involves connected but uncoordinated systems of skills recognition; negotiating this regime occurs through increased attunement to migration on the part of multinational migrants, as well as adaptation to the expectations of authorities and employers. I conclude the article by suggesting that while multinational migration involves new opportunities for people on the move it also entails greater entanglement in the unequal conditioning of transnational migration.*

**Keywords** ASIA, JAPAN, MIDDLE EAST, MIGRANT SUBJECTIVITIES, MULTINATIONAL MIGRATION, NEW ZEALAND, NORTH AFRICA, TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

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Before I did my final decision, I asked my consultancy agent, name me the options, what will be my pathway going through New Zealand. Because I do not want to be in a place where I am blinded. ... So, I was like, give me options. *Give me my pathway.* Where should I go from here? Then from here? Then what’s next? Stuff like that. I wanted to be ... educated, in a way that I won’t have any regrets, because I don’t want to have any regrets ’cause I’ve spent a lot of money just to be here.

Roxanne<sup>1</sup> is a multinational migrant. I interviewed her in Auckland, New Zealand while she was working as a healthcare assistant after completing a healthcare diploma

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at a private training establishment (PTE).<sup>2</sup> After completing her nursing training and two years of experience in the Philippines, Roxanne had spent five years working as a registered nurse in Saudi Arabia. Her migration to Saudi Arabia was facilitated by relatives who provided support and helped her overcome this initially ‘scary’ move. After five years, during which time she got married, Roxanne desired more personal freedom and a place in which to raise her ‘future kids’. It was while attending an education expo in Manila that she was directed to New Zealand, before which she ‘didn’t know that New Zealand exists’. Roxanne sought a ‘pathway’ along which to transform herself from a temporary (even if long-term) nurse in Saudi Arabia into someone who could permanently settle in New Zealand, or another Western country. Because Filipino nursing degrees are not automatically recognized in New Zealand, the education agent set her on a ‘pathway’ that involved the following steps: (1) completing a costly PTE diploma in healthcare; (2) low-wage work as a healthcare assistant while on a post-study work visa (Roxanne was at this point during the interview); before (3) completing a competency assessment programme (CAP) to secure recognition for nursing skills; (4) passing an English language test; (5) attaining New Zealand nursing registration; which should allow (6) employment as a nurse and good prospects for (7) gaining residence rights.

Roxanne’s pathway has become common among young women and men from the Philippines and India who enter New Zealand with aspirations to become registered nurses and, in many cases, gain residence rights. The multinational character of this migration reflects elements of the patterns observed in Anju Mary Paul’s *Multinational Maids*. Stepwise migration of the kind revealed in Roxanne’s account involves a process of migrants moving between destinations, ordinarily in an incremental fashion up a hierarchy of destinations until they reach a point at which migration reduces (Paul 2017). This pattern often involves ‘path dependency’ because migrant trajectories are not independent of earlier experiences. This is not to suggest that migration is linear or predictable but rather that in multinational terms it can become increasingly focused around a particular outcome that is informed by past experiences. At the same time, stepwise migration is geographically and temporally contingent, involves complex processes and actors, and takes shape through evolving forms of intentionality.

In this article, I extend the focus on multinational migration in two ways. Firstly, I outline how multinational migrations can be embedded in ‘transnational skills regimes’ of assessment and accreditation. Secondly, I focus on how migrant subjectivities emerge through experiences of negotiating these skills regimes. My focus is on migration to New Zealand among people working as nurses and care workers and in the dairy farming sector. The key claims asserted here emerged from an analysis that highlighted patterns of dairy farm workers, nurses and care workers having worked in other countries prior to coming to New Zealand, as well as evidence that prior experience was part of claims to meet work visa skill requirements. This observation draws attention to a ‘transnational skills regime’ that links skills assessment, education provision and migration infrastructure across multiple territories. Migrants’ experiences of negotiating the complexity of these skills regimes reveals a second key claim in this article, namely the manner in which migrant subjectivities take shape

around becoming attuned to migration. Attunement involves both growing aspirations for migration and the way in which migrants orient themselves, particularly in relation to employers. This is a question of migrant subjectification in which I place particular emphasis on how multinational migrations show evidence of both enhanced agency and capacity, as well as awareness of and compliance to the low-status position of migrant work.

### **Migration regimes and migrant subjectivities**

The study of 'multinational migrations' advanced in this special themed section draws attention to the geographical and temporal complexity of contemporary migration. Rather than unidirectional or circular moves, multinational migrations reveal 'stepwise' progressions across multiple territories that often involve the evolution of migration aspirations over durations of time. As Paul and Yeoh (this issue) highlight, the growing attention given to multinational migrations reflects both the increase in evidence about the extent of such patterns as well as recognition of the shortfalls of established analytical frames. A focus on multinational migration also raises questions about the potential for migration regimes to be linked across non-adjacent national borders and their implications for governing migrant mobilities and influencing processes of migrant subjectification. What sorts of migration infrastructures (Xiang and Lindquist 2014) are generating or facilitating onward migration? How do regulatory systems foreclose some opportunities (Boucher 2016) while providing others, and are such systems coordinated? And, how do aspirations and desires (Carling and Collins 2018) take shape around the variegated landscape of opportunity and constraint involved in multinational migrations?

To examine the different dimensions of multinational migration, I focus on the interplay of migration regimes and migrant subjectivities. A focus on the regimes that shape different forms of migration (Geiger and Pécoud 2013; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) draws attention to changing manifestations of borders and state-power in migration (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) while also giving space to more supple accounts of the channelling of migrant mobilities and the shaping of conditions of migration (Ho 2014). In turn, focusing on migrant subjectivities, or more specifically on processes of subjectification, is crucial if we are to understand the aspirations, experiences and transformations involved in migrating on multiple occasions across multiple territories. Indeed, as Paul's (2017) account demonstrates, multinational stepwise migration needs to be understood in terms of emerging intentionality, why people move onwards and to what extent those moves are planned in advance and situated in relation to existing experiences. Such intentionality appears to reflect a process of 'learning to migrate' (Findlay et al. 2017) that emerges through the experience of crossing borders, living in culturally unfamiliar contexts and exposure to new imaginations of the world (Thompson 2017). Read in relation to the need to negotiate different migration regimes, these dimensions of subjectification can be understood as a process of orientation or attunement (Ahmed 2014; Shubin 2015) to migration and the life of being a migrant.

In their account of ‘regimes of mobility’, Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) highlight three key issues that are particularly relevant to multinational migration. Firstly, the focus on regimes qualifies scholarly understanding of the growth of migration by recognizing that movement is necessarily stratified by status and rights (Anderson 2010). Such stratification is established in migration policy and takes shape around gendered, classed and racialized patterns of movement (Raghuram 2004). Secondly, the multiple forces involved in producing migration mean that scholars need to examine *multiple* intersecting regimes that govern different populations or cut across territorial borders between nations (Glick Schiller 2015). Such regimes are constituted by nation-states but they also involve other actors, such as migrants, families, intermediaries, educational institutions and employers. Lastly, there is the imaginative generation and sustenance of migration, the imagining of nations as migrant destinations (Thompson 2017) and the varying desirability of different migrants by nation-states, employers and intermediaries (Simon-Kumar 2015).

Because a focus on migration regimes is not limited to state actors and considers an ensemble of practices, this approach also highlights how different actors are involved in the enticement of migrants, or the making of desirable destinations (Tsujimoto 2016). Such enticement and its implications for the conditioning of migrant lives emerges in infrastructures of migration that can be characterized as commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian and social (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). Put otherwise, migration regimes not only control and condition but also contribute to generating migration in the first place (Collins 2018). This is particularly apt in the case of multinational migrations in which the crafting of places as desirable articulates with the fact that some ‘desirable’ places are less accessible because of regulation or the need for economic, cultural or social capital to utilize migration infrastructures (Paul 2017).

In the context of multinational migration, paying attention to migration regimes highlights how differences, similarities and connections between migration governance across countries matter for the geographic and temporal patterning of migration (Schapendonk et al. 2018). Potential migrants may perceive certain destinations as more accessible because of differences in regulation, or they may be advised of a greater likelihood of being accepted for migration. Some countries may require migrants who apply for a visa to have more financial capital, better qualifications or more work experience than others (Paul 2017). Initial migrations, such as Roxanne’s move to Saudi Arabia described earlier, can increase the migrants awareness of their likely eligibility for different destinations as their knowledge of changing rules, capital requirements, qualifications, or work experiences accumulate. In the Asia Pacific context, it is also important to recognize that many nations prohibit long-term settlement (Lai et al. 2013), so some migrants may seek opportunities where residence and citizenship for themselves and their families are possible.

The focus on regimes of mobility and the manner in which migrants come to navigate these arrangements is starting to become a significant feature of critical migration research. Schapendonk et al. (2018), for example, highlight the importance of exploring the way in which regimes intersect with the ‘trajectories’ undertaken by migrants, the variable ‘twists and turns’ of moving in the world. In contrast to a linear emphasis on

origins and destinations, a focus on trajectories highlights ambiguity, and recognizes that migration entails 'continuous adjustments and navigations' (Schapendonk et al. 2018: 2) that can not only be agentive on the part of migrants but also often curated by migration intermediaries. Focusing on clandestine migration, Mainwaring and Brigden (2016: 247) propose that an emphasis on the 'migrant journey' is necessary if migration researchers are to get beyond only studying migration in-place, for it is necessary to recognize journeys as 'a social process that shapes migrants and societies alike'. In both approaches, a strong emphasis is placed on seeing interactions between regimes and migrant lives, which recognizes that migration does not only involve subjection to rules, regulations, borders, detention, deportation, and so forth, but also takes shape through negotiation and navigating migration governance. Moreover, a focus on trajectories and journeys entails shifts in 'personal identities, aspirations and perspectives' (Schapendonk 2018: 2) and 'affects migrants' world views, attitudes and even their bodies' (Mainwaring and Brigden 2016: 247).

Exploring regimes that seek to corral migration alongside the trajectories/journeys of migrants is particularly relevant to understanding the significance of subjectification in multinational migration – the formation of identities and orientations including through potential subjection to the exercise of power (Squire 2017). Indeed, Paul (2017: 14) argues that there is significant change in multinational migrant subjectivity (although she does not use this term): 'while their initial departure from their home country may not always display much agency on the part of migrant domestic workers, often seeming more like "force choice", by their second and subsequent journeys, they begin to display more and more intentional decision-making.' Zhang (2018) addresses a similar question in her critique of decision-making as a distinct event in migration, arguing that movement should be comprehended through a relational lens wherein 'migration always remains open to change, as attachments wax and wane, truncate or extend'. In previous work (Collins 2018), have similarly traced subjectification subjectification through expressions of desiring migration. This approach highlights the significance of encountering barriers as part of processes of reconfiguring desire, taking opportunities when they emerge and the process of accumulating skills and techniques for migration. In each perspective, migration involves attunement, or discord, influenced by the experiences that migrants have, skills they develop, people they meet and information they gather.

These changes are part and parcel of the subjectification involved in migration, which entails both the empowering possibilities of moving in the world, alongside the restrictive effects of migration controls, forced immobility and unfavourable conditions of labour and life. As Rodriguez and Schwenken (2013: 376) explain, subjectification is multidirectional and distributed: 'private business actors such as recruiters, employers or money lenders, state agencies, non-governmental organisations, and ... migrants themselves engage in a wide array of disciplinary and regulatory techniques of forming ideal migrants for different ends.' Feminist scholarship has long made these points, demonstrating that subject positions produced through migration are racialized, gendered and classed to legitimize work, life and legal status arrangements (McDowell 2008; Raghuram 2004; Silvey 2004). To give one relevant example,

subjectification is manifested in the framing of women (rather than men) from particular countries (especially the Philippines and Indonesia in Asia), with particular personal attributes (servility, caring) as ideal migrant domestic workers (Huang et al. 2012). Processes of subjectification, then, relate very closely to the components of migration regimes that migrants negotiate – initial experiences with migration regulation, or with the intermediaries who facilitate migration, can provide awareness of how migration occurs (Cranston 2016); the skills that migrants demonstrate are not static but rather developed through experiences and legitimized through producing documentation and other practices (Erel 2010); and experiences in migration, such as in workplaces, can generate the knowledge and capacity needed to position oneself as an ideal worker (Ali 2007).

Three dimensions to becoming oriented towards or attuned to migration are particularly relevant for this article. The first relates to the will or desire to migrate, a question of self-identity as a migrant and the associated impetus to explore the world and pursue opportunities for migration and life elsewhere. The generation of migration needs to be read in relation to cultures of migration and the broader social formations that instigate movements and cultivate imaginations of what is possible in the world (Ali 2007; Collins 2018). The second related dimension is becoming familiar with and adept at migration, an affective condition that gives shape to what people can do, the knowledge of how to migrate, to whom to talk, and a willingness to take risks that then influences how individuals encounter places and people and how they apprehend the future. ‘Migration is informed by risk/uncertainty’ (Williams and Baláz 2012: 167) and knowledge and social connections are fundamental to the differential capacity individuals have to navigate and negotiate such risks. Third, there is embodied knowledge of how to operate in migration spaces, particularly workplaces where labouring migrants take on particular social positions. Initial migrations, and specific sets of experiences in workplaces provide the foundation for this embodied knowledge – people develop valuable skills and knowledge, learn how to relate to employers, and develop techniques for responding to challenges in work or social life (Constable 2007). As I demonstrate below, in the context of current multinational migration to New Zealand, the shifting capacities of and opportunities available to migrants also relate to the regimes that govern migration, particularly in terms of the assessment of skills.

### **Transnational skills regime: dairy farming and nursing/healthcare in New Zealand**

In this article, I draw on empirical material from research exploring patterns of migration in the dairy farming, healthcare, and construction sectors in New Zealand. Each of these sectors has become increasingly reliant on the recruitment of people holding work visas while also being the focus of government interventions that fine-tune migrant selection. The empirical material encompasses key informant interviews with 30 individuals (government, community and business representatives), and biographical interviews with 84 people holding work visas (30 trades, 30 dairy farm and 24 nursing/care workers). The biographical interviews, which constitute the primary material for this article, focused on exploring the migration and life narratives

of participants, paying particular attention to their rationales for migration, the emotional contours of migration, and situating present actions in relation to past experiences and future possibilities. This approach is particularly appropriate for exploring patterns of migration and the development of migrant subjectivities, matters that are central to understanding multinational migration. Interviews were followed by four short online surveys 3, 9, 15, and 21 months respectively after the interview: each survey asked participants about their location, migration status and future aspirations.

In this article, I focus only on dairy farming and nursing/healthcare, for these two areas are more suitable for analysing the relationship between skills assessment and migration. In the dairy farm sector in New Zealand, the number of work visas issued annually has increased from 1827 in 2009 (591 dairy farm workers and 1236 dairy farmers) to 4260 in 2018 (3390 workers and 873 farmers), which is 10 per cent of all on-farm labour. In nursing/healthcare the number of visas issued has been more volatile, 2893 in 2009 (1782 care workers and 1113 registered nurses), declining to 1851 in 2013 before growing again to 2943 in 2018 (1896 care workers and 1047 registered nurses). These figures are for annual visa approvals rather than the population of visa holders at any particular point in time, which would be much larger; some work visa holders will be on visas for longer than one year, especially nurses and dairy farm managers; others will have multiple visas in one year, and some will transition from work to residence-class visas (Immigration New Zealand 2016).

The allocation of essential skills work visas (ESWVs) for dairy farming and nursing/healthcare involves a complex and shifting assemblage of evaluations and institutions. Each ESWV is issued with an occupation name and code from within the Australian and New Zealand standard classification of occupations (ANZSCO).<sup>3</sup> Occupation codes align with skill levels ranging from Level 1 (highest skill) to Level 5 (lowest skill), which reflect the required level of education or work experience and which must be demonstrated in an application for a work visa. Another part of the process relates to skill shortages and labour market testing: if an occupation is in an area of identified skill shortage as listed on Immigration New Zealand's essential skills in demand list<sup>4</sup> then an employer and worker can generally acquire an ESWV relatively easily; in other cases a 'labour market test' must be carried out, which usually involves job advertisements or taking referrals from Work and Income, the New Zealand social welfare agency. There are two dairy farming occupations within ANZSCO – dairy farm worker, a Level 5 or lowest-skill position, and dairy farmer, a Level 1 or highest-skill position. Since 2015, Immigration New Zealand has been more stringent about assessing eligibility for the farmer role, which has led to considerable shifts in the proportion of dairy farmers/workers (as indicated in the numbers presented in the preceding paragraph). There is a much wider range of healthcare/nursing roles, although a similar split in terms of skill level. The 'care worker' role to which I refer in this article includes aged and disabled carer, personal care assistant, and nursing support worker, all Level 4 low-skill occupations. The 'registered nurse' role includes a range of specializations, all of which are Level 1 or highest skill.

Immigration New Zealand uses these admission procedures to allocate work visas according to evaluations of labour market gaps and to select individuals deemed

qualified according to their education and work experience. Skill levels are also associated with different sets of rights accorded to migrants in each category. Within current arrangements, Level 4/5 work visa holders are granted one-year visas with a maximum duration of three years, may not access social resources and cannot be accompanied by family. Level 1/2/3 occupations are granted three- or five-year visas, which can be renewed indefinitely, grant access to social resources and permit sponsorship of spouses and children; higher skill visas provide clearer progression to residence visas. These procedures, then, help to shape the populations able to gain work visas and the conditions of their migration. Such assessments are overlaid with calculations concerning both language ability, which relate to nationality and the inequitable evaluation of experience and education from different countries. In addition, these are influenced by the ability of migrants to access visa waivers or open visas like working holidays (Anderson 2010; Boucher 2016).

Skills assessments are not bound to objective evaluations, then, but rather need to be understood as intersecting with imaginations of gender, class and nationality (constructed and circulated among bureaucrats, employers and intermediaries) that take shape in the creation and application of these skills regimes (Schapendonk et al. 2018). For example, applicants from the UK can gain nursing registration through the submission of qualification and work experience documents, whereas those from the Philippines must undertake an expensive competency assessment programme (CAP)<sup>5</sup> to have their skills evaluated. Similarly, work experience on small family-owned farms that predominate in the Philippines or India is not considered equivalent work experience, whereas working in large factory farms in the Middle East is. In interviews with employers and intermediaries, these national regulatory settings were interlaced with ideas about nationality and international experience determining the workplace abilities of the ideal migrant worker (Shubin and Findlay 2014). Healthcare employers, for example, spoke about how people from Asia, notably the Philippines, ‘just have an affinity for looking after older people; it’s part of their culture, it’s part of their makeup’. In dairy farming, intermediaries and employers emphasized notions of hard work, loyalty and temperance as characteristics of Filipino workers; however, they also implied that, because of corruption in the Philippines, it was only possible to rely on people who had international experience. One large agency was clear that it only recruited Filipino workers from the Middle East because direct recruits were unsuited to New Zealand farms.

Skills assessments and procedures articulate with multinational migration in important ways. Their use within visa allocation appears at first glance to be nationally-oriented, focused on the management of border crossings and migrant lives. They become transnational, however, because of the way in which they articulate with education systems and labour markets in other countries and the manner in which such connections are stitched together by migrants and intermediaries who facilitate their movement. In this research the transnational extension of skills assessment regimes was particularly apparent through histories of earlier migration to other countries and/or different migrant statuses (especially international study) that considerable numbers of work visa holders reported. Participants reported a range of ‘migration pathways’, a

term I use to refer to the geographical and temporal staging and directionality of migration. These migration pathways, which occur across multiple territories and/or through multiple migration statuses, relate to the assessment of skills needed for different occupations and the ways that skills can be legitimated through qualifications and international work experience. While they varied at an individual level, for both nurses/care workers and dairy farmers a set of consistent pathways were identified.

Interviews with nurses/care workers revealed three distinct pathways that related to multinational migration, the timing of training, visas and employment:

**Pathway 1:** The most prominent migration ( $n=11$ ) pathway emerged among participants who had qualified as nurses in India ( $n=2$ ) or the Philippines ( $n=9$ ). Five of these participants were multinational migrants who either had work experience in third countries or in one case had unsuccessfully attempted to become a nurse in the USA. In New Zealand, participants gained a student visa to enrol in a healthcare diploma at a PTE, acquiring a post-study work visa to secure employment as a healthcare worker while acquiring the language and skills needed to sit the CAP to become a registered nurse.

**Pathway 2:** Six participants (China=2; Fiji=1; India=3) who were not qualified as nurses came to New Zealand for care worker roles. Participants in this group completed a healthcare diploma to secure a job. The majority (five out of six) undertook study before progressing to healthcare employment; one participant had worked in Singapore for a number of years before migrating to New Zealand.

**Pathway 3:** Seven participants gained registered employment shortly after migrating to New Zealand. Three participants (two nurses and one midwife) from Canada and the UK entered on working holiday visas and were registered through the nursing and midwifery councils. Four participants came from the Philippines – three entered on visitor visas and one was an Australian permanent resident (and registered nurse) with rights to work in New Zealand; he immediately secured a registered nurse position. Three of the seven participants in Pathway 3 were multinational migrants.

There was evidence of multinational migration among participants in all three pathways, although the relationship between multinational steps, and multiple status steps, and the nursing/healthcare skills regime was most apparent in Pathways 1 and 3. Pre-New Zealand migration had taken place to Australia (1), Guyana (1), Central African Republic (1), Dubai (1), Kuwait (1), Libya (1), Saudi Arabia (2), Singapore (1) and the USA (2) with some participants spending time in two or even three countries. Of those in Pathway 1 who had migrated to the Middle East, work was described as acceptable in terms of remuneration and costs but limiting in terms of social freedoms and family formation. Few participants knew about opportunities to migrate to New Zealand initially and either found this out from friends and family, or were directed by agents, sometimes following unsuccessful attempts to migrate to other western

countries. Participants educated in India and the Philippines, apart from the one individual who had Australian nursing registration, were not eligible to become registered nurses because the New Zealand Nursing Council does not immediately recognize education or registration from these countries. Instead, participants had to take a circuitous and costly route to access nursing employment that sometimes involved multinational steps but in other cases involved steps through multiple migration statuses. Migration agents (and sometimes friends) suggested that nurses study for a diploma at a PTE, develop English language skills to pass the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) language test, gain work experience as care workers with a post-study work visa, undertake the six- to eight-week CAP, gain nursing registration and then seek employment and eventually apply for residence rights. This process could take several years given the various stages involved but was also limited to a maximum of five years because the nursing council requires CAP applicants to have two years' work experience as a nurse in the previous five years. This is an expensive pathway, including costs for initial migration, agent and visa fees for migration to New Zealand, substantial tuition fees for a diploma (\$15–20,000) and CAP (about \$9000), periods of deskilled low-wage employment and time off work to complete the CAP. As the later discussion demonstrates, this multinational migration pathway can lead to considerable path dependency and precarity.

The migration of participants working on dairy farms also involved a variety of visa arrangements, employment conditions and stages that coalesced around four pathways:

**Pathway 1:** 13/30 participants (Philippines  $n=12$ ; Nepal  $n=1$ ) migrated to work on New Zealand dairy farms following farm work experience in the Middle East and/or Japan. Individuals in this group had farm training/education in their home countries, ranging from experience on local (usually family owned) farms to bachelor's degrees in agricultural science, before undertaking migration and work overseas.

**Pathway 2:** The second pathway ( $n=9$ : Philippines  $n=8$ , Sri Lanka  $n=1$ ) involved participants recruited directly to positions on New Zealand dairy farms from their home countries. These participants often had some dairy farm experience, although on smaller farms in the Philippines and Sri Lanka. All these participants arrived prior to 2015 when Immigration New Zealand shifted its assessment practices related to dairy farm experience.

**Pathway 3:** A third pathway included participants who did not have any specific farm-based experience prior to migration and arrived as students at a PTE to study for a diploma in agricultural skills. These participants ( $n=6$ : India  $n=5$ ; Colombia  $n=1$ ) had studied with a view to gaining subsequent work opportunities with a post-study work visa and then planned to apply in the future for a residence visa.

**Pathway 4:** Two Argentinian participants sought employment directly on New Zealand dairy farms. Unlike all other nationalities in this case, Argentinians can

enter New Zealand through the visa waiver programme after which it is possible to transfer to a work visa after being offered employment.

Pathway 1 is a form of multinational migration, though having moved initially as international students before taking up post-study work visas and then transitioning to ESWV, those on Pathway 3 also move through multiple stages. In contrast to nurses, several research participants in dairy farming had prominent imaginaries of New Zealand as a global leader in dairy farming through earlier farm experience. Although there are no registration requirements for dairy farming, the work visa applicants must demonstrate skills outlined in ANZSCO and employers must carry out labour market tests. To be approved by Immigration New Zealand, dairy farm workers also need to demonstrate that they have had experience in a comparable labour market. While there are dairy farms in the Philippines and Nepal, they are generally small-scale family operations and lack the modes of production that are common in New Zealand. Middle Eastern or Japanese work experience was considered a more reliable credential than working for relatives and/or informal employment in the Philippines. Some of those on Pathway 1 had undertaken migration to the Middle East or Japan with a view to seeking opportunities in New Zealand; in other cases, a pattern similar to that of the nurses emerged wherein participants became aware of opportunities for onward migration to New Zealand in the dairy farming workplaces of the Middle East.

The stepwise migration pathways of nurses/healthcare workers and dairy farm workers highlight the bureaucratic complexity of contemporary migration regimes and the wide range of actors and institutions involved in arranging specific patterns of migration. In regulatory terms, the work of New Zealand-based as well as Australasian institutions and systems is significant, for it includes the control and processing of nursing registration by the nursing council, skills classifications by ANZSCO, and labour market tests for worker availability and for defining comparable labour markets. These bureaucratic institutions are stretched internationally when they are called upon to assess education and work experience in different countries, and to demarcate accessibility to work visas principally by nationality. These evaluations are then applied to the existing skills and experiences of potential migrants at home and in initial migration destinations, the marketing and facilitating activities of intermediaries such as migration agents, the delivery of for-profit international education models, and assessments of language through IELTS. Another layer of bureaucratic complexity relates to passing medical tests and getting police certificates from the countries in which the migrants have lived during the previous ten years, which is more challenging for multinational migrants. Viewed from the perspective of the nation-state and institutions, these arrangements are neither necessarily coordinated nor internally coherent or stable. Rather, the transnational connectivity of these arrangements, the links between IELTS, Immigration New Zealand, ANZSCO, the New Zealand Nursing Council, and workplaces in the Middle East, emerges through the mobilities of migrants themselves who, along with support from intermediaries and social contacts, stitch together the possibilities of migration in ways that the authorities had not necessarily intended. As demonstrated in the next two sections, the negotiation of this

transnationally stretched skills regime occurs alongside processes of subjectification evident in attunement to migration and in the kinds of path dependencies and possibilities that emerge for dairy farm and nurses/healthcare workers.

### **Attunement to migration**

Roxanne provides a good example of how multinational migration involves ongoing attunement. She described being ‘scared’ of going to Saudi Arabia, because she had never travelled abroad, was unfamiliar with the cultural environment and was apprehensive about how migration would work out. The presence of family was important for her adjustment and she described being surprised at the quality of life, particularly in relation to income and the relatively low cost of living. Life abroad, however, also generated other aspirations:

Money-wise, it’s not difficult in Saudi, because everything is paid by your employer. Like, the housing, the transportation, the food allowances, everything, they are all given ... for free. ... But, I wanted to have a more ... [a] brighter future for our future kids someday. I told my husband that I don’t, I don’t feel free in that country [Saudi Arabia] because there are so many restrictions, especially for women. I mean, I can’t drive, and I can’t go anywhere without my husband, and so I don’t want my kids to grow up in that kind of environment. ... I wanted to have more liberty. To do things on my own, and to prepare [for] a better future.

Roxanne’s account points towards the development of aspirations or desires for migration as a transformation of livelihood and lifestyle (Carling and Collins 2018). While her initial foray into Saudi Arabia was directed to addressing a lack of work and limited pay as a nurse in the Philippines, a circumstance of ‘forced choice’ (Paul 2017), the next step emerged from a more speculative pursuit of ‘a brighter future’. Her experience had helped her develop capacities and enough confidence to navigate such challenges, a point that her demand to an agent to ‘give me a pathway’ for onward migration reinforced. Attunement is evident in such expressions – rather than feeling thrown into the world of migration, Roxanne demonstrates familiarity with the intricacies of migration and an ability to move confidently towards uncertain futures.

Julius provided another example of attunement through the development of migration aspirations. Julius was born in Cavite (Philippines) where his parents were small plot farmers of bananas, pineapples and coffee. He was the oldest of five children and grew up in a family where migration was relatively familiar: his uncle worked in Saudi Arabia, friends had travelled to the Middle East and he had sisters in Taiwan and Dubai. After high school, he worked as a truck driver, mechanic and electrician. It was his younger sister’s interest in studying engineering that led him to follow his uncle to work in a large dairy farm in Saudi Arabia, where he spent six years, though returning to the Philippines on several occasions to get married and see the arrival of his child. He also supported his sister through civil engineering and she is now also a multinational

migrant working in Dubai, after having spent time in Singapore. It was in the Saudi Arabian dairy farms that Julius was introduced to the possibility of New Zealand and from where the legitimacy of his application emerged. Several of his former colleagues had approached agencies in the Philippines about working in New Zealand and those who made the move started posting images on Facebook; Julius enquired about the process and started exploring options. Julius described his time in Saudi Arabia as 'maybe a stepping stone. It's a good stepping stone if you [live] in Saudi Arabia then you work hard there. Then after a year you apply [to] the other one, the good one. That's why all Filipino try to come here in New Zealand.' Indeed, Julius now receives enquiries from friends still in Saudi Arabia about possibilities of coming to New Zealand. 'My friend on Facebook [asked me], oh they are hiring there? They have a hiring there? They have. [I tell them] you need to go to [an] agency in the Philippines.'

Like Roxanne, then, we see here how the possibilities of multinational migration emerge in initial forays and the manner in which people become accustomed or attuned to the processes and challenges of migration. Julius's case also highlights the cultivation of ideas about multinational migration in the sites of initial migration: he had been told about New Zealand by co-workers in his job in Saudi Arabia who themselves knew of people who had moved to New Zealand. He was also exposed through social media and described how he contributed to this circulation of imagery after his arrival.

Subjectification in migration is not limited to becoming multinationally mobile, to seeing the opportunities of further migration and feeling confident in one's capacity to overcome challenges (Rodriguez and Schwenken 2013). Participants also spoke about becoming accustomed or attuned to particular types of work. As is well known, overseas workers are regularly stratified not only in legal status but also in their hierarchical position within the workplace where they can be positioned according to nationality, age, education and other factors (McDowell 2008). These conditions can discipline migrants into particular roles and expectations as migrant workers, such as being docile, having an affinity with care work, or being loyal and hard working.

Albert, for example, described how the 'the work in Saudi Arabia is quite pressured'; 'the discipline is like really tough there. You are like in a military camp.' In part this related to their relationships with managers or employers, 'they're all strict. Even if you got a mistake. Some of my friends driving the tractor hit the post. The tyres broken. "Bastard", they [managers] said, ohh cut salary.' Albert heard similar comments about New Zealand's dairy farm employers, but noted that 'hard work' could enhance one's value: 'some [employers] they look at you very small. They don't respect you but eventually when you showed your dedication and your hard work, they are changing.' While direct comparisons between working contexts were rarely discussed in the interviews, the notion of developing skills and discipline over time and working hard to demonstrate value was common, particularly among dairy farm workers. Earlier migration experiences, then, can shape migrants' expectations of their social position in the workplace hierarchies of any future jobs in New Zealand. Such expectations also reflected a sense of the general position of migrants in workplace hierarchies. Sunil, for example, who had worked in Dubai as head nurse for a multinational firm operating in central Africa, understood that he had to start at 'zero':

I was a bit depressed also when I came to New Zealand initially because [until then] I have seen two countries and ... it's like slowly, slowly the conditions are becoming worse because in Dubai it was little bit of depression, but in Central Africa [it was like] hell. You don't get food, you don't have anything. ... So, in New Zealand I was mentally ready a bit that might be, that this might turn out positive or this might turn negative. Though I know that I have a skill and knowledge and everything but I know that I have to start from scratch. So mentally I was ready actually, when I entered into New Zealand I was 100 per cent sure that I have to start with the zero. Again my value is zero.

For Sunil and almost all other Filipino and Indian nurses, migration to New Zealand involved a process of deskilling, in which they undertook expensive training courses below that of a nursing qualification, and then worked as healthcare workers under registered nurses while they progressed towards their own registration. The devaluing of skill and work are a common pattern for nurses, but some dairy farm workers with tertiary qualifications in veterinary or agricultural science also felt they were undervalued in the workplace. While frustration was evident in some cases, there was also a level of acceptance of low-status work as part of migration, which entailed losing status to achieve their migration aspirations and gain status in the future.

### **Path dependency and reconfiguration**

One of the key features observed in multinational migration is the emergence of path dependency – the manner that the trajectories of people moving between multiple locations are linked into past experiences and become focused on particular long-term migration aspirations (Paul 2017). Similar to its usage in organizational studies, path dependence in multinational migration involves a ‘tapering process, which dramatically narrows the scope of action over time’ (Schreyögg and Sydow 2011: 323). A basic condition of path dependence in multinational migration is a notion of ‘destination hierarchy’, ‘the personal, subjective ranking of different destinations in terms of each location’s attractiveness as a place in which to live and/or work’ (Paul 2017: 10). While such hierarchies vary individually, geographically and by migration type, and can shift through migration experiences, path dependence emerges because of the extent to which individuals become financially or personally invested in attaining status in a particular destination. In migration, path dependency is also influenced by the channelling effects of migration infrastructures and the ways in which individuals become directed towards certain opportunities over others (Cranston et al. 2018). Often such dependency emerges in relation to the costs of migration or debt-financing in particular (O’Connell-Davidson 2013), once significant cost has been incurred it becomes difficult to pursue alternative plans that forego existing investments. Path dependency can also emerge around feelings of shame generated in less successful migration (McKay 2005).

For many participants in this research, migration to New Zealand was oriented around aspirations to gain residence rights – 51 of the 54 participants indicated that they

planned to apply for residence or were considering it; *all* of the multinational migrants came to New Zealand to apply for residence. While this aspiration, often tied to notions of a 'better future', enables and directs migration, it can also position migrants disadvantageously as they invest time and money in the uncertainty of gaining residence. There is considerable unevenness in transitions to residence and the process has significantly tightened in recent years. While transition data are no longer published by Immigration New Zealand, statistics on people first arriving in 2012/13 are indicative: over a three-year time horizon, registered nurses have transition rates over 90 per cent, aged or disabled carers around 40 per cent (many would be registered nurses when gaining residence), dairy farmers 10 per cent and farm workers 2 per cent. In other words, for nursing/healthcare, considerable weight is placed on whether migrants can successfully gain registration. For farm workers or managers the chances of gaining residence are limited despite the pervasiveness of this aspiration. In this context, dairy farming migration oriented to residence involves considerable 'risk', as Jenny put it:

To get out of Saudi I told my mother I wanna take this risk. Cause this is my line, this is my career. I cannot go on. ... I pay 200 dollars and send it, like online and then they [agency] accept my résumé so they told me I need to pay another I think it's 1500 US dollar for me to have an interview on an employer. So I told them once the employer did not take me so where's my money again go. They said that's the system, so I take that risk as well. After I take the risk the employer took me ... after they did a phone interview. And then after that I paid another I think two grand for them to process my visa. ... OK so that's, that's a big investment. ... I think I spend like six grand. Just to come here. Without the plane ticket. And it's all risk.

Multinational migration involves considerable risk because of the cost of migration and the uncertainty of its outcomes. Certainly, all engage in some degree of risk (Williams and Baláž 2012), but the research suggests that the movement between initial and subsequent destinations involves an increased appetite and awareness of risk alongside greater confidence to manage uncertainty. Aiming for residence through what is initially only temporary labour migration is a particularly uncertain undertaking, especially in a context of constantly changing skill shortages and policy settings. While transition rates for dairy farm workers like Jenny were much lower, risk is actually higher for nurses/care workers because their multinational migration involves the costs associated with studying for a diploma, getting a post-study work visa and completion of the competency assessment programme (CAP) before registration and residence become a possibility. For Joy, who had completed the diploma but was struggling to find an employer to support her CAP enrolment, this situation created a feeling of being trapped:

Honestly speaking, I thought after having the student visa I can eventually work as a nurse. It was my fault that I did not research or reading deeper about regarding nursing. So what happened was that I was desperate and found it

difficult to compose what I should do because I am already here and it's like, it's a point of no return. It's not easy, it's not practical to just leave New Zealand and go back to the Philippines, which I have the option to do it when I started my school. But then so what happened was that every now and then I would question myself, why did I come here, because life is really difficult.

The distinction that Joy makes between her first arrival in New Zealand and her current status exemplifies the ways in which progression through multinational migration pathways increasingly appears to constrain options. Having taken the step of moving from the Middle East to New Zealand, Joy is now financially and personally invested in this pathway to long-term settlement, even as the prospect of success diminishes. She was at a 'point of no return' in the interview, needing either to find a way to pass the CAP, and meet all other requirements for registration, or face the losses of unsuccessful migration. Joy reported in her second follow-up survey that she was unable to complete this process successfully as her prior nursing experience ended before she had finished the CAP. Having spent tens of thousands of dollars and several years on this pathway she returned to the Philippines and, in her most recent survey, noted that her aspiration was to pursue 'my US application as a nurse; to be a clinical manager.' Similarly, by the time of the second follow-up survey, Roxanne was already back in the Philippines and, 21 months later, reported having moved to the USA but did not provide information on what she was doing there.

The onward migration of Joy and Roxanne reveals how multinational migration and its path dependencies can be disrupted and redirected as a result of blockages or challenges. While the costs of redirection can be significant, when there was less risk participants expressed how attunement to migration fuelled possibilities for further movement. Sunil, who was not in debt because he had accumulated considerable savings from earlier migration, viewed migration as a career:

To be frank, I don't know at present, that, which country I'll be. Still I don't know. ... I might go to Australia or I might transfer somewhere else, not in New Zealand because after some things like if I don't meet out my requirements as a nurse and even if I meet the requirements, I know that I have a greed for money, so I might, so one more chance. ... New Zealand nursing licences can be transferred to Australia, because for me important is my licence, first is my nursing licence, second is my income and the third thing is saving. I don't care about residence. Residency is benefit. That's a secondary benefit I'm getting because I'm aiming for these three.

Sunil's goals reveal a strong understanding of not only what is required to move through different regulatory settings, but also of how New Zealand's stringent assessment requirements position that country in relation to others such as Australia. While New Zealand can be a challenging environment in which to register as a nurse, it was often viewed as an easier pathway than that available in Australia. Because New Zealand's nursing registration is recognized in Australia it is then also a stepping stone

to onward migration. Sunil was also not supporting a family, and so, unlike both Joy and Roxanne, appeared to have more freedom to move. A similar account emerged from many dairy farm workers who were finding it difficult to get residence rights:

[If] I cannot apply here my residency, I'm thinking already the Canada and Australia already because some of my friends already, already asking if you coming here in Canada because most of farm here need a technician. I have no licence; no problem that here. As long as you are, you know how to [be] technician. ... You have a skill already here. ... Maybe if New Zealand will deny my papers, maybe that's my only option because now, I think, I think I'm safe because of my qualification. ... If, if I have a chance I will stay here but if the, if they don't ... give me a chance I will go.

At the time of the interview, Jordan like some other dairy farm workers was considering plans for onward migration beyond New Zealand on the grounds that he was failing to find stability for himself and his family via residence rights. The differences between assessments of skills in destination countries become significant here. While Jordan was at that time uncertain about getting a residence visa, and statistically that was unlikely (given that only one of the 30 dairy-farm respondents had acquired residence by the 21-month follow-up survey, these opportunities do exist in Australia where the pathway to residence appears more certain if migrants can demonstrate a higher skill level. From his experience in New Zealand, Jordan will be considered to have reached local standards and this will allow him to apply for jobs from which his earlier experience in the Middle East would have excluded him.

The onward migration of people like Jordan reflects both the increased restriction on transitions from work to residence visas, as well as the opportunities generated in another stage of multinational migration. Indeed, intermediaries are now targeting dairy farm workers in New Zealand for recruitment in Australia (see Figure 1) and key informant interviewees expressed concern about the loss of skilled workers through this recruitment. It is because New Zealand allows people to gain temporary work visas as farm workers (rather than managers) that Jordan and others can gain this experience. In other words, New Zealand becomes another step in the transnational skills regime that legitimizes and supports multinational migration in the dairy farming sector. While Jordan and others clearly see the personal cost of such moves, their added capacity to migrate *because* of their experience in New Zealand reveals how migrants can reconfigure rather than be fully dependent on previously established migration pathways and aspirations.

## **Conclusion**

The multinational migrations revealed in this article and in the special themed section of this issue as a whole are probably much more widespread than has been previously reported, both as a historical phenomenon and as an emergent characteristic of transnational labour markets. What is particularly striking about the contemporary

**Figure 1: Advert targeting New Zealand dairy farmers**

**DAIRY WORKERS FROM NEW ZEALAND**

AUSTRALIA IS CALLING YOU, IF YOU:

- Hold a Bachelor's degree in Agriculture, Animal Science or Veterinary Medicine
- Have worked in a commercial dairy farm for at least 2 years
- Are available to travel to Australia within 3 months

We will contact only those who meet the above requirements, so only those applicants who meet the criteria should apply

Send your resume to [info@gsemployment.com.au](mailto:info@gsemployment.com.au) and make DAIRY NZ the subject

**GSES**  
GLOBAL SKILLS EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

arrangements, however, is the way in which the differences and connections between the skills assessment dimensions of the migration regimes are part of the establishment and extension of multinational migrations. As the logic of management becomes increasingly pervasive in approaches to regulating migrants (Geiger and Pécoud 2013), so too emerges a varied landscape of migration pathways characterized by different employment opportunities, legal statuses, rights and restrictions, and future possibilities.

In the context of New Zealand discussed in this article, then, the unplanned interconnection between skill recognition systems across multiple countries is creating possibilities for and perpetuating multinational migrations. Indeed, read in relation to the skilled migration discussed here, the 'destination hierarchy' that Paul (2017) has described needs to be reassessed in relation to the manner in which governments respond to migration, closing some opportunities while opening others in ways that may bring a conclusion to multinational moves or signal the next departure. In countries like New Zealand (and other settler colonies like Australia and Canada), multinational migrations are then also related to the increasing provisionality of migration, where migrants have to take multiple steps to acquire long-term status (Collins 2020; Robertson 2015). Whatever their particular configurations and outcomes, however, it is clear that much work remains to be done on understanding multinational migration, the different regimes that give it shape, and the desires, experiences and transformations in subjectivity that are involved.

The migration pathways documented here demonstrate the importance of examining the transnational extension of skills assessment, particularly in relation to multinational migration. Transnational skills regimes involve both state and quasi-state institutions, for-profit actors in education, testing and migration intermediation, and social networks through which information about destinations circulates. While evidence suggests that there is only minimal coordination within these regimes, it is the relationships between various components that give them their transnational scope. It is through the circulation of information about New Zealand nursing registration processes (a thoroughly national regime) via transnational social networks and their articulation into an education–migration pathway constructed by agents and education providers that this form of multinational migration becomes possible. Also, the narratives of work on New Zealand dairy farms circulate through social networks to generate aspirations to leave Saudi Arabia for access to New Zealand dairy farms, often oriented towards gaining residence. When any one part of these components shifts, such as a tightening of residence requirements, then the transnational skills regime is also reconfigured, evident in migration agents now recruiting migrants with work experience on New Zealand farms to take a more direct route to residence in Australia that would have previously been inaccessible because of the higher skill requirements.

The narratives presented here point to the ways in which multinational migration is fuelled not only by actual opportunities but also by attunement to migration. Multinational migration is supported by an increase in agency on the part of migrants and their own familiarity with what is required to migrate and what is expected in workplaces. Indeed, individuals who are initially uncertain about their first migration later demonstrate confidence and capacity to explore migration opportunities, take risks and cultivate new aspirations; in other words, *migrants learn to migrate through multinational migration*. Attunement to migration also has ambivalent effects that need to be recognized in future studies, particularly in terms of the ways in which migrant aspirations interface with skills regimes. Initial migrations and workplace conditions can also have the effect of attuning migrants to low status work as an expected part of labour migration. The path dependent character of multinational migration is significant, then, in conditioning migrants to pursue particular aspirations as well as to accept risk and loss. As the above accounts have suggested, pursuit of aspirations often continues until those possibilities are completely untenable, at which point the rupture of path dependency leads to a reworking of aspirations for migration and the future. While the loss from such rupture can be significant, it is also clear that attunement to migration and the capacity to negotiate complex systems can serve migrants well and provide scope for migration pathways to be reconfigured when initial plans are unsuccessful.

Multinational migration is a manifestation of the changing landscape of international migration possibilities, the emergence of more connected (even if not coordinated) systems of assessment and control and the circulation of information about migration transnationally. For migration scholars, the attention given to multinational migration also demands more focus on its functioning and the ways in which transnationally-extended skills regimes articulate with migrant aspirations and abilities. There is a need to consider carefully the directionality and duration of multinational

migration. To do this, scholars need a geographically and temporally extensive analytical lens and methodological orientation that is capable of incorporating the diverse starting, station and destination points of migratory journeys while also linking aspirations across present circumstances, past experiences and future possibilities. It is only through such an extensive approach that we can start to account for the imaginative and material possibilities that are manifested in multinational migrations as well as the way that they involve greater entanglement in the unequal conditioning of present and future-possible migration.

## Notes

1. All the names used in this article are pseudonyms.
2. PTEs are private tertiary educators in New Zealand and are distinct from universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics. PTEs vary extensively but a considerable number receive no government subsidy and only enrol international students, particularly in areas such as English language study, management, IT, hospitality, tourism, and healthcare.
3. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, together with Statistics New Zealand, developed ANZSCO in 2006 'to provide an integrated framework for storing, organising and reporting occupation-related information' that is comparable across the two countries and internationally. It is used extensively in the allocation of work visas and granting points for residence applications in both countries, it was revised in both 2009 and 2013. See [www.abs.gov.au/ANZSCO](http://www.abs.gov.au/ANZSCO).
4. The Essential Skills in Demand Lists include both the Immediate Skills Shortage List and the Long-Term Skills Shortage List, both of which are reviewed and revised annually. See <http://skillshortages.immigration.govt.nz/>.
5. The competency assessment programme (CAP) is used by the Nursing Council of New Zealand to 'prepare overseas registered nurses for the registered nurse role and the healthcare context of New Zealand', it takes between six to eight weeks and costs \$6–9000, depending on the provider.

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