Escalator London? A Case Study of New Zealand Tertiary Educated Migrants in a Global City

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Escalator London? A Case Study of New Zealand Tertiary Educated Migrants in a Global City

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ABSTRACT In this paper we consider whether London functions as an ‘escalator region’ for international migrants in the same way that has been suggested for domestic migrants. Our case study focuses on New Zealand tertiary educated migrants who move to London for a period of work and travel. We propose a four-fold typology of these movers, seeking to tease out the different motivations and aspirations behind their global mobility, and the different ways in which they make use of London’s opportunities. Our findings have broader ramifications for studies of skilled migrants between global cities.

Introduction

London is by many indicators Europe’s premier global city (Sassen, 2001; Taylor, 2004). It is a city, or more accurately a city region, defined not only by an extraordinarily prosperous economy, but also by a notably dynamic and fluid demographic structure. At the start of the millennium, over 350 thousand people were moving to London every year. And each year nearly as many were leaving.¹ This is a remarkable amount of movement, representing an annual population turnover of over 5%. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of these in- and out-flows are made up of international migrants. Between 1998 and 2002, the last 4 years for which official data are available, international migrants constituted over half of London’s flow of in-migrants. And over the decade 1992–2002, the proportion of international in-migrants in this flow only once fell below 40%, and then just barely (Table 1).

That migration flows constitute an important element in the development of global cities has long been recognised. In their widely cited analysis of the social structure of global cities, Castells and Mollenkopf (1991) argued that migration contributes to distinctively polarised occupational structures in such places (see also Mollenkopf, 1993; Sassen, 1988, 1991). At the peak of the occupational structure, they suggested that the economic command and control functions of global cities generate a range of well remunerated, high status jobs. In turn, the demand for service staff such as cleaners, secretaries and child...
Table 1. London in- and out-migration, 1991–2002 (thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1991/92</th>
<th>92/93</th>
<th>93/94</th>
<th>94/95</th>
<th>95/96</th>
<th>96/97</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>149.9</td>
<td>152.7</td>
<td>166.6</td>
<td>168.8</td>
<td>168.5</td>
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<td>167.6</td>
<td>163.1</td>
<td>163.6</td>
<td>156.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outflow</td>
<td>208.2</td>
<td>200.4</td>
<td>203.4</td>
<td>207.8</td>
<td>208.9</td>
<td>217.7</td>
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<td>-50.5</td>
<td>-50.7</td>
<td>-41.2</td>
<td>-40.1</td>
<td>-48.9</td>
<td>-51.8</td>
<td>-52.5</td>
<td>-69.9</td>
<td>-68.6</td>
<td>-98.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inflow</td>
<td>103.7</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>111.1</td>
<td>130.5</td>
<td>121.2</td>
<td>151.5</td>
<td>197.1</td>
<td>210.4</td>
<td>227.2</td>
<td>208.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outflow</td>
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<td>70.8</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>80.1</td>
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<td>79.6</td>
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<td>101.3</td>
<td>106.4</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>109.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>104.0</td>
<td>117.7</td>
<td>98.7</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Hollis and Bains (2003: 7)
minders to support the employment and lifestyles of this professional class generates a parallel growth in low paid jobs. The result is an ‘hourglass’ occupational structure, defined as much by an ‘absent middle’ as by concentrations at either end of the hierarchy (Smith et al., 2001: 2). International migration is seen as accentuating this pattern of polarisation. At the top of the occupational hierarchy, highly educated migrants—often from affluent, industrialised countries—are seen as supplementing the skills of the local professional elites. At the bottom, an influx of migrants and refugees—largely from the developing world—take up many of the new poorly paid, low status service sector jobs in competition with, and at times to the exclusion of, the existing working class population (see also Fainstein et al., 1992; Sassen, 2001).

In the decade since the publication of Castells and Mollenkopf’s argument, it has been shown that the occupational structures of most global cities are a good deal more complicated than the polarisation thesis suggests (Hamnett, 1994, 2003; Samers, 2002). Processes of global integration may in some instances also create middle-income jobs (Waldinger, 1996; Lohde-Reiff, 2003) and, in any case, many of the transformations taking place in global cities are rooted in regional or national dynamics that connect only loosely to broader processes of economic globalisation (Buck et al., 2002; Wharf, 2004). Similarly, it appears that international migration flows to global cities are often less bifurcated than the polarisation thesis would suggest. This is certainly the case in London. While in-flows from underdeveloped countries continue to constitute a significant proportion of London’s international migration, individuals from affluent industrialised countries comprise the majority of new migrants (White, 1998; Economist, 2003). Many of these migrants from high-income countries clearly work in London’s thriving financial and producer service industry, earning incomes that place them firmly within the global professional elite. Significant numbers, however, also do not. There are sizeable groups working in health, education and media, undertaking jobs that attract much more moderate levels of remuneration.

With the exception of a small group of studies (e.g., White, 1998, 2003; Favell, 2003; Sakai, 2003; Scott, 2004; Clarke, 2005), relatively little has been written about these more ‘middling’ migrants in global cities (Conradson & Latham, 2005a). Following the arguments of Castells and Mollenkopf, and other influential writers like Sassen (2001), it would seem that there remains a tendency to see international migrant flows as being highly polarised. As part of a growing effort to address this situation, this paper examines a group of tertiary educated New Zealand migrants in the city of London. Our aim is to contribute to the literature on educated and professional international migrants, examining how a particular social group makes use of London’s economic and cultural opportunities. Before we examine these New Zealanders, however, it is useful to first step back and consider in a little more detail how London’s migrant system functions.

**London as an Escalator Region**

With its thick, overlapping labour markets and concentration of high order managerial and professional functions, the London-South East region today offers possibilities for economic and social advancement that no other area in the United Kingdom can match. In the suggestive metaphor of Anthony Fielding (1992: 1), London and the South East function as an ‘escalator region’, a place ‘where young middle-class employees tend to congregate, are formed, and are then exported elsewhere’ (Savage et al., 2003: 495).
Fielding’s argument is that young people are drawn to the London-South East region at the start of their working lives. Because of the variety and quality of local employment opportunities they find it possible to progress up their chosen career structure relatively quickly. Nearing the end of their careers, or at the point of retirement, the former in-migrants leave the London-South East region, cashing in on economic gains such as property equity and strong salaries. Thus, to summarise the argument, there are three distinct stages to the escalator: ‘stepping on the escalator, being taken up to a higher level by the escalator, and stepping off the escalator’ (Fielding 1995: 176).

Fielding’s work focused on London’s geographic position within Britain’s internal migration system, and this has been mirrored in other work that employs the escalator metaphor (Butler with Robson, 2003; Hamnett, 2003; Champion, 2004). But as Fielding (1992) himself stressed, much of the in-migration into the London-South East region comes from beyond the United Kingdom. Data constraints make it difficult to determine whether the London-South East region operates as an escalator for international migrants in the same way as it does for intra-national ones, but the volume of movement from some countries, along with the relatively high levels of counter flows, certainly point in that direction (Dobson et al., 2001).

In considering how international migrants make use of a global city like London, however, it is important to note that increasing numbers of these individuals are moving for reasons other than those of straightforward economic advancement (Urry, 2000; King, 2001). It follows that we need to recognise that international movement into London is shaped not just by its global city functions but also, and in several cases more importantly, by its world city attributes. We are thinking here of the presence of internationally connected cultural and social institutions, a certain cosmopolitan milieu, and national-level business and public sector functions. In addition, the way in which an international migrant makes use of a global city may differ from that of a national migrant because of factors such as visa regulations, relatively internationalised opportunity horizons, and pension rules in their countries of origin.

Drawing upon existing research on migration streams between developed countries and our own work with New Zealanders in London, we wish to suggest a provisional typology of middling international migrants to global cities. This typology distinguishes individuals on the basis of what they are seeking to obtain from migration to such places. It builds on the recognition within the escalator metaphor that places offer different things to individuals and those in their social networks (spouses/partners, family and friends), the value of which varies greatly depending on the life-stage of the persons involved. Drawing on the work of visual biologist James Gibson (1979: 127), we could in fact say that areas like the London-South East region offer people distinctive sets of ecological ‘affordances’, in sense of the particular possibilities for action and development.4 In this regard, we propose four categories of movers:

**Global City Escalator Movers (GCEMs)**

GCEMs are typically highly skilled individuals who move in order to access the career progression opportunities afforded by a global city. Some are moving within established international corporate networks, where a certain amount of international mobility is an expected and necessary part of the process of advancing up the career ladder (Beaverstock & Boardwell, 2000; Beaverstock, 2005). Other individuals may not be transferring within
a multinational firm structure, but are nevertheless attracted by the exemplary professional opportunities that a global city offers someone in their position.

**Speculative Career Movers (SCMs)**

SCMs are people seeking to progress their career in a direction not previously explored. There is an element of experimentation and openness to their relocation, in that it may involve a temporary move down the career ladder before the possibilities of a new destination’s labour markets can be realised. For SCMs, the pull factors of a city like London are likely to be multi-faceted and may include its position in global economic networks (allowing the migrant to become part of a global organisational elite), but also its various world city functions (opening opportunities for work in elite cultural institutions, creative industries and universities).

**Career Tending Experiential Movers (CTEMs)**

CTEMs are people who wish to experience a different social and cultural milieu whilst continuing to work in a particular profession, but who are not seeking to develop their careers in any strong sense. What is interesting about the destination city for these migrants revolves much more around its social and cultural vibrancy—what Butler (with Robson, 2003: 2) calls its ‘metropolitan habitus’—than its place with the global economic hierarchy. Nonetheless, the host city’s labour markets must provide CTEMs with sufficient opportunities to enable them to maintain their existing lifestyles and skill sets, so they are not materially disadvantaged upon return to a country of origin.

**Experiential Movers (EMs)**

EMs are people moving to a place for the experience of living within a different culture and/or different social milieu. Their migration is explicitly understood to be temporary, and to involve a direct break from career considerations. The opportunity for experimentation, travel and creative individualisation is generally more important than the type of work they engage in.

Drawing on this typology and the idea of the London-South East escalator, the discussion will now turn to the case of tertiary educated New Zealanders in London. We present a brief socio-economic profile of the New Zealand born population in London, after which we examine how a sample of these individuals use the employment and lifestyle opportunities the city offers. In doing so, we note that while residence in London may permit a certain measure of ‘escalation’ in personal and economic terms, property prices and lifestyle considerations often lead New Zealand migrants to question its longer term attractiveness.

**New Zealanders in London: A Brief Profile**

In many ways the New Zealand population in London is a good exemplar of the city’s growing middle-class international migrant groups. According to the 2001 United Kingdom census, 27,494 people of New Zealand birth lived in London. Like other prominent high to middle-income country migrant groups in the United Kingdom, such as
the Americans, Australians and French, the New Zealand-born population is highly concentrated in London (cf. White, 1998). Fully 47.2% of the total New Zealand-born population in England and Wales are resident in the city, with the proportion rising to 71.8% for the Greater London-South East region (Greater London, the South East and Eastern England). Indeed, while people born in New Zealand make up only a tiny 0.1% of the total population of England and Wales, in London the proportion is 0.4%, and for inner London this rises further to 0.6%. Furthermore, the total population of New Zealand born individuals in London increased by a quite remarkable 260% between 1981 and 2001 (see Table 2). This is not the fastest growth of any high or middle income country source of migrants to London—France managed an increase of 273%—but it is substantial nonetheless.

New Zealand migrants also appear to fit the occupational profile for developed world immigration to London quite closely. Here we have to rely on data from the United Kingdom Labour Force Survey (LFS), which in some cases considers Australasia (Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands) in aggregate terms or Australia and New Zealand together.6 This limitation notwithstanding, according to Dobson et al. (2001: 174–182), the occupations of New Zealanders and Australians who migrate to the United Kingdom are predominantly professional. Over the 5 years between 1996 and 2000, 42.0% of all migrants from New Zealand and Australia were categorised as professionals, while another 38.5% worked in non-professional but non-manual occupations. This picture of a professionalised immigrant stream is further confirmed when the industries these individuals work in are considered. New Zealanders and Australians in the United Kingdom work predominantly in finance and business services (26.6%) and in transport, communications and other services (36.7%). The popular image of antipodeans undertaking temporary work in bars needs be set against this data; we would argue that the public visibility of such bar staff, along with a tendency for New Zealanders and Australians to be conflated into a single group, contributes to an inflated perception of their numerical significance. In addition, Australasian migrants have the highest employment rate of any group in the United Kingdom: 81% are in work, compared to a figure of 74.6% for the UK-born population, and an average of 63.6% for all foreign born UK residents (Kempton, 2002: 13).7

Table 2. London migrant population by country of birth, 1981–2001

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<tbody>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>22,003</td>
<td>32,667</td>
<td>44,622</td>
<td>+202.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>16,409</td>
<td>23,315</td>
<td>41,488</td>
<td>+252.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>13,978</td>
<td>20,923</td>
<td>38,130</td>
<td>+272.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>10,573</td>
<td>18,379</td>
<td>27,494</td>
<td>+260.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>13,125</td>
<td>21,741</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7,120</td>
<td>12,380</td>
<td>+204.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>4,643</td>
<td>5,974</td>
<td>8,671</td>
<td>+186.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals*</td>
<td>241,408</td>
<td>278,715</td>
<td>359,324</td>
<td>+148.8</td>
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Note: Totals are for all migrants to London from North America, Australasia, and Europe (excluding the Republic of Ireland and the former Communist Bloc countries).
Work, Career and the ‘Overseas Experience’

Now this migration flow from New Zealand to London is not a recent phenomenon. New Zealanders have long seen London as a place to pursue ambitions difficult to realise within their country’s small and relatively unspecialised economy (see Harris, 1971; McCarter, 2001). What is interesting about the current pattern of movement is not simply the volume of people involved, however, but the fact that so many of these individuals clearly treat migration to London as a temporally bounded activity. Thousands of New Zealanders have come to London over the past decade, but the figures show that almost as many have returned (ONS, 2004). Despite their ability to obtain well remunerated jobs and the opportunities for obtaining residence status, these individuals continue to organise their lives around an opportunity horizon that remains focused on ‘home’.

The complex ways in which New Zealanders appear to be making use of Britain’s capital city can be explored with reference to a sample of those who currently work and live in London. Here we draw on interviews with 30 individuals that explored their employment history, professional aspirations and what they sought to achieve by relocating to London. Respondents were recruited on a non-random basis, snowballing outwards from a small number of New Zealanders known to the authors, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. The resulting material is thus not suitable as a basis for statistical generalisation to the larger New Zealand born population in London. In line with an intensive research strategy, it is instead used to obtain insight into the interplay between mobility, work and career for a selection of young New Zealanders in London.

With an average age of 30, the respondents all came to London with a tertiary qualification (e.g., a university degree or polytechnic diploma), and over 90% had some form of post-qualification work experience. The sample was evenly split between male and female respondents. Figure 1 summarises their employment situations at time of interview, showing concentrations in education, health care and IT, and a particular clustering in Financial Services and Law. The sample did not include any younger southern hemisphere migrants to London who, given their relative lack of professional experience, are more likely to undertake casualised work in the hotel and restaurant sector, as bar workers, labourers or home assistants. Its professional composition is in keeping with the macro-level LFS data discussed earlier, however, and as such we consider these individuals to be illustrative of elements of the wider New Zealand born population in London.

Figure 1. New Zealand Professionals in London by Employment Category (n = 30)
Although all the respondents were professionally employed, there was considerable variation in terms of how this employment featured in their decision to move to London. On the one hand, there were those for whom migration was an intentional and deliberate element of a career advancement strategy. In part this was about obtaining professional experience that would be difficult to come by in the smaller context of the New Zealand economy, but it also often had to do with the potential for higher earnings. On the other hand, there were respondents for whom economic motivations were far less important as reasons for moving. This included some of the teachers and health workers, but also some business employees. As a group, these individuals were generally seeking to maintain rather than progress their careers; often they made this choice so as to allow time for travel and other lifestyle opportunities afforded by London.

It is here that we can return to our earlier ideas about the different ways in which professional migrants make use of London’s global and world city attributes. On the basis of their declared motivations for migrating to London, ten interviewees (33%) could be considered as Global City Escalator Movers. These were individuals whose decision to migrate to London had been strongly shaped by the opportunities they perceived it offered for professional and career development, largely in association with its global city functions. They included IT consultants, an architect, management consultants, solicitors and a group working in financial services. Some individuals were employed within global companies such as Merrill Lynch, whilst others worked independently as contractors, particularly in IT, or in the London head offices of European firms. The great majority earned more than £40K per year, with a few taking home over £80,000 per annum before performance bonuses, a figure more than three times in excess of the median UK household income (£21,700 in February 2005).

In addition to their earnings, the ability to obtain novel work experience was often highly valued by these individuals. Several respondents mentioned the attractiveness of working on larger or more complex projects than would typically have been possible in New Zealand. Acknowledging the relatively small size of the New Zealand economy, they perceived London as a place in which one could accumulate professional experience which might then be deployed productively in other contexts. It might, for example, allow a person to return to New Zealand in a more senior position, effectively bypassing intermediate career progression steps by virtue of their ‘London experience’. For these individuals, London was in part about the acquisition of personal capital that could be mobilised to facilitate an accelerated career progression, whether back in New Zealand or elsewhere.

The second major group of individuals in the sample were the Career Tending Experiential Movers (CTEMS). Fourteen respondents (47%) exhibited the characteristics of this group, in the sense that their move to London was driven not primarily by career concerns but rather by a broader desire for ‘overseas experience’ (McCarter, 2001). Most were working in fields in which they had acquired professional experience prior to arriving in London, such as teaching, nursing and publishing. Whilst in London they were not seeking to develop their careers in any strong sense, however, but were instead ‘tending’ their professional lives, maintaining a certain level of competence and activity so as to keep future work possibilities open. At the same time, they were proactively taking advantage of the opportunities for travel, personal development and new cultural experiences that London afforded them. Several respondents spoke of their desire to earn pounds so as to finance travel in Europe and have new experiences, for instance, and this was part of a broader notion of personal development through geographic mobility.
Economic concerns were thus not unimportant for these individuals. While many of the public sector CTEM workers were aware that their incomes were insufficient to purchase a flat or house in London—a material good whose attainability in Anglo-Antipodean cultures is often taken as a proxy for the longer term sustainability of residence in a particular place—they were nevertheless alert to the higher value of their earnings when transferred back to New Zealand. This was not about remitting funds to family members in one’s country of origin, but rather about a strategic use of geographic mobility so as to shore up one’s economic security for the future. Paying off loans from prior university study and saving for a house deposit in New Zealand were particularly common. These monetary dynamics go some way towards explaining the attractiveness of moving to London for the CTEM group, especially as their material quality of life in Britain was, in some cases, not discernibly better than it had been in New Zealand. The calculation of improved opportunity was in fact being made with reference to future financial gain, rather than in relation to more immediate matters such as the quality of accommodation or local amenities.

While the migration of CTEMs thus incorporated a financial logic, it was not driven by a strong desire for professional advancement. Several individuals had in fact actively limited their professional responsibilities in London, and thus their career development potential, so as allow greater scope for travel and cultural experiences. Two teachers had chosen to work on a supply basis for example, thereby earning a solid income but avoiding the administrative commitments typically associated with a permanent position. A physiotherapist and a nurse were working on an agency basis rather than in regular NHS positions, and a selection of the accountants and IT employees had also opted to work on short-term contract basis. For some of these employees there were financial gains associated with contract employment, but it is also important to consider why they were prepared to forego the apparent security of more permanent employment arrangements. Part of the answer has to do with the under-staffed nature of many London schools and hospitals, and the relatively buoyant IT and financial services sector. Work was generally obtainable with relative ease in these areas, such that one was unlikely to be caught short economically by opting for contract or fixed-term positions. But choosing to undertake employment on a casualised basis was also about preserving time and energy for leisure and exploration more broadly. It allowed individuals greater flexibility to undertake European travel when they wished for instance, as well as giving them more time during the week for partners, friendship and family relationships.

There were four respondents who might be described as Speculative Career Movers (SCMs). These were individuals whose migration incorporated a clear experimental dimension, in the sense that they had been prompted to relocate by a sense of dissatisfaction with their jobs in New Zealand. Unable to find ‘the next thing’ in a national context, they had chosen to relocate to a global city. Sydney was often a possibility, but London was the chosen destination here. ‘Mike’, for example, had previously worked in education in New Zealand, but was deliberately using his time in the United Kingdom to explore employment in the retail-based IT sector, building on his university degree in statistics and business. This experimentation was undoubtedly made more feasible by virtue of London’s buoyant economy, but Mike also sought to coordinate his short-term contracts so as to maximise European travel possibilities with his partner and friends. While he was exploring new career options, there was thus also a strong interest in cultural exploration and personal development. As with the CTEM group, this is a form of behaviour that differs from that typically associated with skilled migrants.
There was only one respondent who might be described as an Experiential Mover (EM). ‘Suzy’ had finished a degree in New Zealand and then undertaken a series of retail assistant jobs before coming to the United Kingdom. She described herself as having neither set plans for the future nor commitments ‘holding her back in New Zealand’. For Suzy, living and working in London was largely about travelling around the United Kingdom and Europe, in part to ‘find her roots’, as she had grown up between New Zealand and Britain. Her work as a classroom support tutor was loosely linked to previous employment in New Zealand, but this did not appear to be central to her time abroad, and in any case was relatively poorly paid. The focus was rather on engaging with the United Kingdom and continental Europe in terms of social experiences, with career considerations relatively absent by comparison.

Beyond the individual case of Suzy, our view is that the proportion of Experiential Movers within London’s New Zealand born population is higher than that suggested by our sample. We would see this category as encompassing a significant number of those working in bar and hotel settings for instance. While at times tertiary educated, such individuals are not skilled or professional in the conventional sense of a global city migrant from a developed world country. Their migration often has more to do with the cultural and travel opportunities afforded by arrangements such as the Working Holiday programme, itself a legacy of the colonial linkages between commonwealth countries.

Unsustainability and Practices of Return

In line with our earlier suggestions about the temporally-bounded nature of New Zealand migration to London, all of the study respondents confirmed that they anticipated returning to New Zealand at some point in the future. As with the individuals in Fielding’s (1992) nationally-focused study, the GCEM group envisaged a time when they would seek to step off the London-South East escalator. For the other respondents, London was never really seen as an escalator in the same way. They saw New Zealand as a place where owning property and having a family were more manageable and there were significant factors in their desire to return.

The views of both these groups resonated with a broader theme, evident across the interviewees, of the ‘unsustainability’ of London as a place of long-term residence. Although London offered strong opportunities for professional advancement, travel and personal exploration, the associated lifestyle was not seen as being easily reconcilable with notions of raising a family or ‘settling down’. There was an element of geographic nostalgia here, in that New Zealand was often positioned as a bucolic comparator to the demands of working in (say) financial services in a global city. Such views undoubtedly contained elements of realistic appraisal regarding the opportunities in each place however. Few people would dispute that central London is a challenging environment to bring up children, for instance, whether in terms of childcare costs, the possible difficulties of transitioning from a dual to single income, or issues of safety and environmental quality. Indeed, some British professional couples move from London to provincial cities or smaller settlements for these very reasons, whilst other young professionals simply seek to avoid London altogether (Devine et al., 2002).

As mentioned earlier, this desire to return is an integral part of the broader cultural practice of the Overseas Experience (OE). The OE is seen as a journey in which an individual leaves New Zealand and, by virtue of time spent living abroad, undergoes...
a process of personal transformation before, at some point, returning ‘home’. For some individuals it is also something of a rite of passage, a period following education during which there is scope for exploration and experimentation, prior to perhaps settling down to a career and particular relationship commitments. If New Zealand features positively as a ‘place of return’ in such understandings, it is also important to reiterate that London is seen as offering very significant economic and cultural opportunities too. In the longer term, however, London’s expense, population density and variable quality of public infrastructure render it less attractive as a permanent place of residence.

This evaluation of the comparative benefits of London and New Zealand resonates strongly with that of previous generations of Antipodeans in the United Kingdom. As McCarter (2001: 13) notes in his examination of earlier OE travellers, ‘Many said they returned because “[New Zealand] is the finest place to bring up children”; “the school system is good” and “the air and water are free of pollution”’. Whether such claims are accurate is of course debatable, but there can be little doubt about the prevalence of such constructions amongst the contemporary New Zealand born population in London, or of their central place in aspirations and practices of return.

Conclusion
Our aim in this paper has been to contribute to the growing body of work on ‘middling’ or middle-class migrants in global cities. In particular, we have examined the place of tertiary educated migrants in London. As part of a longstanding cultural practice of living and working abroad in their twenties (the so-called ‘Overseas Experience’), these individuals come to London in significant numbers, with the majority staying for several years before returning. Like the Australians and South Africans with whom they have much in common, New Zealanders perform significant roles in the London-South East labour market, helping to address publicly acknowledged shortages in the education, health, financial services and information technology fields among others.

In examining what a sample of these individuals sought to gain from their time in London, we drew on Fielding’s (1992) characterisation of London and the South East as an escalator region. Fielding noted that the British middle classes were attracted to London in part because of its capacity to accelerate their professional development and personal advancement; inter-regional transfer to London and the South East was a route to enhanced social mobility. Our analysis sought to examine the extent to which the escalator metaphor might also describe the practices of international migrants to London. Examination of existing research and our work with New Zealanders led us to propose a fourfold typology of middling migrants to global cities, with individuals distinguished by what they sought to obtain from London economy and society. Here we drew on Gibson’s (1979) idea of ‘affordances’, in the sense of ‘a possibility for action afforded to a perceiver by an object’, with the object in this case being the city of London.

What our research suggests is that existing discussions of highly skilled migrants moving between world cities are only partially applicable to New Zealand tertiary educated migrants in London. There is clearly some overlap between the notion of a highly skilled migrant and our GCEM individuals, in that career is a primary and influential concern for both groups. For the CTEM, SCM and EM categories, where non-professional factors were a significant part of the decision to migrate to London, the employment focus and implicit economism of the highly skilled migrant category serve us less well.
This limitation underlines the importance of a culturally inflected understanding of both global cities and the middle-class migrants. Following the pioneering work of Giddens (1991) and Beck-Gernsheim (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), we would argue that the style of mobility embraced by some New Zealanders in London can be understood as part of a more general process of creative individualisation, a process in which self development is achieved and explored in part through living abroad (Conradson & Latham, 2005b). London is not always approached as an escalator region in professional terms for these individuals, but rather as a dynamic labour market that simultaneously offers the opportunity for travel, experimentation and a spectrum of cultural experiences. In highlighting how these New Zealanders negotiate the economic and cultural affordances of London, we hope this study will also prove valuable for future examinations of middling migrants in global cities.

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Notes

1 For the full statistics from 1991 to 2002 see Table 1. Unless otherwise indicated, here and elsewhere in the paper ‘London’ refers to the ONS definition of Greater London. The London spatial economy undoubtedly stretches wider than this, but for the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to focus primarily on Greater London.
2 We employ the term ‘tertiary educated’ in preference to the somewhat broader notion of skilled or professional migrants. Many young migrants with tertiary qualifications (university degrees and so forth) are not necessary ‘skilled’ in any occupational area. Rather they have the appropriate qualifications to obtain entry to a wide range of professional and managerial occupations.
3 Fielding (1992) uses the phrase ‘the South East’ to refer to the greater London metropolitan region. However as it is also common to speak of the South East region as excluding London, this paper adopts the phrase ‘London-South East region’.
4 As one definition expresses it, an affordance is ‘a possibility for action afforded to a perceiver by an object. The affordances of an object depend upon the perceiver as well as upon the characteristics of the object. For example, a stream affords such actions as jumping and paddling to a person, but to a frog it affords swimming’ (http://www.liden.cc/Visionary/). Its biological origins notwithstanding, we think this term usefully describes the interplay between middle-class migrants and global cities, in that these individuals are in part motivated to relocate to a place like London because of what they perceive it offers them.
5 In all likelihood this is an underestimation of the population who would identify themselves as New Zealanders, but the 2001 Census provides the most reliable data available.
6 The standard United Kingdom population census tables do not report occupational characteristics by country of birth.
7 Evidence from New Zealand corroborates this picture of New Zealand out-migrants being primarily skilled and tertiary educated (see Lidgard, 2001; LEK Consulting, 2001).

References


