

The Golden Geese Fly the Internet: Some Research Issues in the Migration of Irish Professionals

JAMES WICKHAM*
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract: A new research agenda is needed for the study of Irish “middle class” emigrants. Globalisation and information technology fragment the identity of the nation state and society. The migration of skilled labour is first and foremost determined by new global economic networks, linked to new hierarchies of knowledge production. However, knowledges vary in the extent to which they are globally applicable. Migration also involves the relationship between knowledge production and the national economy and how local enterprises actually use domestically produced knowledges. Finally, do individual actors’ national identities become self-conscious “product differentiation” in the pursuit of a global career?

I INTRODUCTION

Emigration in Ireland has always been officially understood as a national tragedy. This is somewhat ironic, since it was emigrants’ remittances that maintained the conservative social structure of the newly independent state. Furthermore, children of the Irish middle class have long been educated for emigration (Hanlon, 1994), but it was not polite to discuss the policy implications. Since the 1980s however different emigration discourses have begun to be heard. The odd politician has occasionally been heard to urge that “We should be proud about it [emigration]. After all, we can’t all live on a small island.”¹ Middle class emigration has been discovered

*This paper is part of the research project “Irish Graduates on the Periphery of the European Labour Market” supported by a grant from the Social Science Research Council. I am grateful to three anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

1. The quote is from an interview with the late Brian Lenihan in 1987 (Newsweek, 10 October 1987). But it should be noted that the quote is famous because of its notoriety.

and almost feted: the flight of the new golden geese can be read, at least by the *Independent* newspaper, as an icon of the new self-confident cosmopolitan Ireland. Feminists have been even heard to make the point that some people — women but even the odd male — left not because of economic necessity: “Women emigrants repeatedly stress that the inability of Irish society to tolerate dissent or disagreement and to acknowledge difference were major factors influencing the decision to leave” (Kelly and Nic Giolla Choille, 1990, p. 17). As the President lights up her window, presumably so that the emigrants will want to return, the diaspora has suddenly begun to play a role in Irish politics unknown since the independence struggle. And the diaspora is also seen again (as it was briefly in the 1970s) as a source of skilled manpower to plug skill shortages within Ireland, except that this time it is the World Wide Web that brings the good news of vacancies at home (e.g., McGovern, 1996).

This paper outlines some issues raised by the study of the migration of such Irish professionals in an epoch of “globalisation” and the “information society”. These two fashionable terms are deliberately, if irritatingly, placed in quotation marks. The terms are rapidly becoming part of the new common sense of public commentary, but at the same time they have been utilised within social science discussion. Used critically, they lead to some novel questions about Irish professional migration. The intention is not to produce some new all-embracing explanation, but simply to raise some contemporary questions that will perhaps complement the usual focus on the emigrant tradition itself, the political economy of peripherality (Mac Laughlin, 1994; Shuttleworth, 1993) or the impact of tax and pay differentials (NESC, 1991).

The paper begins by claiming that any analysis of Irish middle class migration must take account of the new debate on globalisation, information technology and the nation state. This leads to the topic in Section III, the particular ways in which economic activities are spatially concentrated in the information society and as such generate migration flows. Section IV shows that knowledge production — and hence the production of skilled professionals — is also spatially concentrated, so migration is interwoven with educational hierarchies. Section V suggests that the extent to which professionals can be globally mobile depends in part on the extent to which their own labour market resources (their skills and qualifications) are themselves global, as opposed to national or local. Against this background the next two sections consider two particular aspects of the Irish situation that shape the migration of Irish professionals: the weakness of the national system of innovation and the slash and burn policies of Irish human resource management, particularly within high technology employment. Finally, theories of post-modern reflexivity raise new questions about migrants’ career

strategies: to what extent do Irish professional migrants plan their careers — and self-consciously merchandise their own “national” identities — as rational members of the new global professional middle class?

II FROM COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGY TO POST-MODERN ECONOMY?

There is now an extensive literature on migration into and within Europe, but nearly all of this is in fact about “immigration”.² Within sociology, this work has moved from a social problem perspective (“race relations” in the UK) to a concern with multi-culturalism and citizenship. However, there is relatively little academic work on the trans-national dimension of “middle class” careers, despite the mounting evidence that professional and managerial occupations include disproportionate numbers of “foreigners”. Thus in the UK some 6 per cent of all professionals and managers were born outside the UK, and these people comprise 40 per cent of all foreign-born residents (Boyle *et al.*, 1994), yet there is not a single full length study of these immigrants. All that exists is a few studies of international recruitment (e.g., Thom, 1992) and a small literature on management migration (e.g., Salt and Ford, 1993).

In Ireland there is a small but growing social science literature about “middle class” emigration (for overview see Mac Laughlin, 1994). Emigration was central to my study of the careers of Irish electronics engineering graduates in the 1980s (Wickham, 1992) and was at the core of a major study of Irish accountants (Hanlon, 1994); there was also some work by Shuttleworth (King and Shuttleworth, 1988; Shuttleworth, 1993; Shirlow and Shuttleworth, 1994).

Such a focus is exclusively national. Yet although Irish migration appears strikingly similar to that of other Southern European countries (Greece, Southern Italy), there is little comparative work. Equally, the policy issues of small European countries and peripheral regions attempting to develop technological education have not been studied on a comparative basis and there is obviously scope for comparison with the new democracies of Eastern Europe which are widely expected to become major sources of emigrants. One research approach would therefore be that of comparative sociology: to study third level education and “skilled” emigration on a comparative basis.

However, at least in the study of Irish emigration the time for conventional comparative sociology may have passed almost before it has arrived. Conventional comparative sociology assumes an equivalence of society and nation state. It poses the question of migration in terms of movement from

2. The domination of a social problem perspective is also shown by the fact that there are virtually no studies of the flows of the emigrants from the UK.

one discrete “society” to another similar “society”. It discusses questions of identity by assuming that normal people have a single national identity. However, these apparently self-evident assumptions are now under challenge from two directions.

First, in different ways theories of globalisation suggest that the nation state is being undermined. Globalisation is, according to its theorists, not to be confused with “internationalisation”. The latter assumes that the societies of the world are becoming more similar. By contrast, globalisation does not necessarily mean that spatial differences are abolished, but it does mean that the basic unit of analysis can no longer always be the nation state. While this is an argument that goes back to dependency theory and its derivatives, such as world system theory, more is involved than just the unit of analysis. It is not a question of whether analysis should start with national society or global society, for some globalisation theorists explicitly agree with Margaret Thatcher: “There is no such thing as society”.

Lash and Urry claim that the emerging post-modern world system *is* the flows of objects, people and signs that criss-cross the globe; “society” is no longer constituted by conventional social relationships. The social structure is replaced with the structure of communication and information, while the national society is replaced with situations that are either global or local (Lash and Urry, 1994, p. 64). More precisely, Beck’s individualisation hypothesis suggests that the expansion of the market breaks down ascriptive social groups, whether the small scale one of the family or the larger ones of social class and nation. Such “labour market individualisation” (Beck, 1986, p. 131) breaks people free from inherited social collectivities and identities. Finally, the new sociology of technology suggests that the growth of machine-mediated communication means that more and more social relationships become interwoven with the technostructure of global communication systems (Rammert, 1995, p. 224).³

Such arguments suggest the dissolution of one of the building blocks of our normal understanding of migration, namely national society itself. Not because social relationships are now on a wider scale (“supra-national”), but because social relationships are no longer primarily face-to-face relationships. The basis of wider social collectivities has therefore been undermined. Collectivities such as the nation (or “the working class”, or even perhaps “women”) involved the creation of a collective identity (Anderson’s “pilgrimage”) to locate the individual’s face-to-face social groups within a wider community in space and time (Anderson’s “imagined community”). The imaginary

3. As all three authors make clear, these arguments also challenge conventional definitions of the subject matter of sociology *per se*; they presage the end of sociology as we know it (Beck, 1986, p. 130).

community referred back to lived interpersonal relationships (Anderson, 1983). Once globalisation, individualisation and technification erode such relationships, then the signs of “class”, “nation” (or “gender”) may well continue, but no longer refer to any concrete and bounded set of relationships. Crook *et al.* go so far as to argue that all social collectivities become like that of Star Trek fans: a voluntary imagined community dependent upon communication technologies and without any reference to any social group (Crook *et al.*, 1992, p. 131).

Within this perspective, emigration can no longer be discussed by reference back to a single *national* identity. After all, in everyday life such unproblematic identities appear to many at best as rather quaint, and at worst, as terrifyingly regressive. The extent to which national identity is both chosen and complex is no longer merely a matter purely for academics. Ordinary people not only know they have “mixed up” identities, but claim the right to difference: in the cacophony of hybridisation and creolisation, “halfies” (Irish-Americans, Mexican-Americans today, Irish-British, Black Irish, Jewish Irish tomorrow) are at last allowed to assert multiple identities (Robertson, 1995). In research terms the most obvious issue is therefore not just the salience or otherwise of a single national identity, but the extent to which such identities are understood as complex, reflexive and even strategic. While the final sections of the paper return to this theme, the more immediate questions are less “subjective”: those raised once the movement of skilled labour is conceptualised as movement between nodes of a globalised system of economic activity and knowledge production. These issues are tackled in the next sections of the paper.

Second and more prosaically, the development of the European Union has major consequences within the individual European states. This is particularly true within the peripheral societies. For example, for several decades Irish vocational education has been shaped by European Community/European Union policies. Irish political institutions cannot be understood just from within Ireland. Furthermore, the mutual recognition of European qualifications now makes more possible a common European labour market for skilled labour (Rainbird, 1993). An immediate research issue is therefore the extent to which this possibility is become reality, and the extent to which European institutions create a specific labour market space within the wider global system. This is not a question of some European super state (‘the United States of Europe’) taking over the role of national states, for the epoch in which the boundaries of the nation state were the boundaries of society has now ended — whatever the size of the state. As Pieterse (1995, p. 63) remarks, “State power remains extremely strategic, but it is no longer the only game in town”.

III GLOBALISATION, GLOBAL CITIES AND MIGRATION

While the study of migration starts from a national perspective, many popular versions of the information society thesis assume that the new ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) simply annihilate distance. Legions of policy makers assume that the "information society" will stimulate economic growth in the less favoured regions of Europe (e.g., High Level Group of Experts, 1994). For example in Ireland the recent official study sponsored by Forbairt (McGovern, 1996) claims that the information society, epitomised by the World Wide Web, will reverse the flow of emigration as Irish professionals return home to reinvigorate Irish rural communities as tele-working spreads across the countryside. Equally the report *Information Society Ireland: Strategy for Action* claims that the successful adoption of an "information society" in Ireland will fulfil the promise of "greater regional cohesion" (ISSC, 1997, p. 12). The information society removes, or at least reduces, uneven development and with it, *one* major reason for migration.

This section of the paper challenges such an argument. Transport technologies can open up regions but they can also empty out regions. Here it is instructive to recall the experience of railways in rural areas of 19th century Europe. The railways brought these areas into contact with national and international economic and social life, they enabled rural specialities to reach urban markets (or even to develop as rural specialities for the first time). However, the train also brought new cheaper products into the countryside, destroying the markets for local products and so decimating whole occupations and industries. Furthermore, the trains took the people away as easier transport helped people to leave: in rural Ireland the narrow gauge railways that were promoted to develop the local economy were the starting point of the emigrant's journey (Ferris, 1993, p. 9).

ICTs have broadly similar consequences today, but in terms of services rather than goods. As a technology of service delivery, ICTs allow rural areas access to business and consumer services located in the core areas (from on-line databases to tele-shopping and video on demand). Conversely, ICTs allow service activities located in these areas to service distant markets. This is particularly clear in the case of telephone mediated services (e.g. computer help-lines, tele-marketing etc.). Thus ICTs undoubtedly do allow new jobs to be created in peripheral areas. However, this must be set against the way in which ICTs destroy the need for many services to be physically located in the peripheral regions because they allow remote delivery. Furthermore, because ICTs allow organisations to centralise management control, they can be used to strip out middle level management layers from the regions. Delaying has a regional dimension.

More fundamentally, as a technology ICT is itself spatially distributed. Research cited by Charles *et al.* (1994) shows that usage of ICTs is concentrated in the more economically advanced areas of Europe, where even access to advanced services tends to be greater. If infra-structural provision is market-driven, and if furthermore the regulatory environment has a very conservative definition of "universal service" then it follows that infrastructure will grow fastest in those areas which are most economically advanced, thus creating a cycle of cumulative advantage for them and cumulative disadvantage for the peripheral areas. Here policies at both the level of the EU and the member states can have considerable impact. EU policies have attempted to develop ICT provision in peripheral areas (e.g., the STAR programme). Yet the resources involved in such programmes are trivial compared to the size of the problem, which also involves major regulatory issues (above all the definition of minimum service provision) that the Irish government shows no sign of facing.

In fact much recent research sees "space adjusting technologies" (ICTs, but also air-travel) as part of the process of centralisation. Drawing on the work of Sassen (1991), Lash and Urry (1993) argue that at the core of the new global economy are three global cities: London, New York and Tokyo. Information flows are greatest between these three cities, and at the core of each of them is a small central district with "smart buildings" and highly intensive ICT use.

Such simple core and periphery models are obviously too crude to capture the processes of centralisation and diffusion that are currently underway. For example, there appear to be processes of concentration at an intermediate level. The global cities argument operates by examining employment in financial services, but even here there appears to be substantial new growth in intermediate cities such as Bristol and Dublin, the latter with its new International Financial Services Centre. Looking across Europe, the national capitals of the smaller states have long been centres of "national" financial services. Clearly deregulation of both financial services and telecommunications may undermine this national role, but whether this actually happens must remain an empirical issue.

The way in which economic activities are concentrated has to be related to the different forms of knowledge. Thus producer services involve law and computer applications, and so fit most closely with the existing world city models and the strong centralisation within Europe on London. Electronics engineering involves high technology manufacturing which has a very different spatial distribution. It is much less clearly focused at any one centre, but there are several areas of European concentration, in particular around Munich. Finally, sound engineering involves the culture industries for

which London is probably a European centre.

These concentrations are also not permanent. Although part of the reason for the success of the City of London was its very disarticulation from the rest of the British economy (Hutton, 1995), it is increasingly being challenged within Europe by Paris and especially Frankfurt. One problem for Dublin may well be that it is too tightly linked to London (a recent US investor described it as "an offshore London"). Considering Dublin raises interesting questions of change lower down the hierarchy in other sectors. There is now considerable evidence for growing agglomeration effects within Ireland in both software and electronics hardware manufacture paralleling developments in the Philippines (O'Riain, 1997; Henderson, 1989). At the same time, Dublin has become a minor international centre for sound and film production (Hazelkorn, 1997).

As all academic studies of globalisation stress, the new global system does not end spatial inequalities and spatial differences, even within the developed world. It may well involve changes in the hierarchy of space and the creation of new nodes of production. To the extent that this happens, we should expect not the end of migration, but the creation of new migratory flows (i.e., new origins and new destinations) with new contents (i.e., new types of migrants with new types of skills).

IV KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND GLOCALISATION

Optimistic scenarios assume that ICTs will make location irrelevant for employment: in the information society employment opportunities will be more evenly distributed across space. Pessimistic scenarios, as we have seen, by contrast suggest that the world economy is becoming *more* concentrated. The same issues, the same visions, occur within the production of knowledge, although there is surprisingly little social science analysis. These knowledge hierarchies, so we can assume, also help to shape the flows of skilled labour across the globe.

There has long been a hierarchy of prestige within the third level sector of education, and mass higher education only makes the role of a limited number of prestige universities more obvious. In terms of research, although different universities may have different strengths, it is virtually impossible to imagine a university with world class research in one department and no serious research anywhere else. Equally, at undergraduate level, hierarchies of prestige are so well known that in many countries a graduate's university is more important than the class of degree she or he obtained (Brown and Scase, 1994). However, there are substantial national differences here. Certainly, it is difficult to imagine a mass higher education system without

some such hierarchies, but below that threshold we can contrast the relatively egalitarian German and the notoriously inegalitarian UK or French systems.

There seems to be very little research or discussion of the relationship between these hierarchies (whatever their form and extent) and the use of the new information technologies within third level education. There are of course claims that in the "information society" all knowledge will become available to everyone, but such techno-hype can be safely disregarded. Two ideal-typical extreme scenarios can be sketched. On the one hand, only the most prestigious and well-funded universities can both purchase and use the most expensive educational technologies.⁴ ICTs then link elite universities to each other, increasingly on an international scale, and so further isolate them from the rest of the national educational system. In this case, ICTs act to consolidate and globalise existing knowledge status hierarchies.

Alternatively, ICTs are used to break down the boundaries of educational institutions, in particular through the use of distance learning techniques⁵ in order to increase access and/or productivity. Given that employers necessarily select graduates and therefore must somehow create hierarchies of preference, we could anticipate a straightforward qualification inflation as the number of graduates increases.

The more intriguing possibility is that educational achievement could become like achievement in areas of consumption. Theories of contemporary consumption argue that we live in a epoch of over-supply of cultural goods: the abundance leads to declassification and cultural disorder. There are no clear hierarchies of taste to legitimate social inequalities; there is no fashion, only fashions (Featherstone, 1990). Applying this to high tech, rapid response education we can imagine a situation where the abundance and diversity of educational offerings makes it impossible to create stable hierarchies in terms of formal knowledge content. In the extreme case then, recruitment would become entirely arbitrary and probably based more on ascriptive criteria (gender, race, social class) which involve social capital rather than technical knowledge. Indeed, there are indications that this is already happening precisely in the most advanced forms of economic organisation. Thus studies of Japanese "transplant" firms in the USA suggest that they systematically discriminate against women and minorities in their

4. Educational institutions often acquire technology but lack the human resources to use it. Anderson *et al.* (1994) document cases of schools being given shiny new computers by charitable corporate donors, but keeping them locked away in cupboards because there are no teachers competent to use them in class.

5. There are obvious similarities with the way in which electronic networks (especially EDI systems) "open up" the interior of firms within a supplier-purchaser relationship (Williams, 1995).

recruitment of production workers in the USA (Berggren, 1993), because such categories of people are assumed to lack the commitment that “Just In Time” manufacturing requires. At the other end of the occupational hierarchy, British recruiters in the more “flexible” organisations are increasingly seeking teamwork and leadership skills in their graduate recruits: the sort of social skills that are linked to social class rather than formal qualifications (Brown and Scase, 1994). This would be in line with other putative aspects of stratification in post-modern society, which mark a move back from universalism towards ascription.⁶

V GLOBAL RESOURCES AND PROFESSIONAL CAREERS

Such speculation may seem very esoteric, far removed from the apparently mundane needs of high technology firms for “more skilled graduates”. Yet that is precisely the point. Even the most technical education is also irreducibly social. What is the “best” technical education is necessarily socially defined. The same issues arise in the relationship between the existing hierarchies of prestige and graduates’ subsequent careers. Do those who gain their qualifications from the most prestigious universities have in fact the most successful careers? And of course to what extent does success relate to social rather than scientific or technical knowledges? It is all too easy to assume that such *social* aspects only operate in the “soft” areas of knowledge (arts degrees etc.), but this is rather implausible in sociological terms. The French *grandes écoles*, for example, would seem to provide a clear case where the transmission of highly formalised technical knowledges is interwoven with the reproduction of social capital, all occurring in the context of a thoroughly meritocratic selection system.

Once a person has acquired a qualification, what determines the extent to which they are geographically mobile in a way that uses this qualification? One element that defines a common labour market is that the same knowledge can be applied anywhere within it. This is not simply a question of the mutual recognition of qualifications which has pre-occupied EU policy makers. On the one hand, some forms of knowledge and expertise may be widely recognised but not through the medium of formal qualifications (qualifications are at most entry tickets to careers). And in some careers qualifications do not even operate as entry tickets. All recognition of expertise has a strong reputational element and this need not be bounded by national frameworks.

6. Note that this argument actually contradicts Beck’s argument that inherited social groups become less important (individualisation thesis).

Different forms of knowledge involve different degrees of internationalisation. At one extreme we can imagine a knowledge that can only be applied within the local framework within which it was produced. Research cited by Heidenreich (1994) reports that in Italian industrial districts technical employees are recruited on the basis of personal recommendations — formal qualifications are treated as irrelevant. In this case technical knowledge does not depend on formal certification, and the “informal” networks define the technical knowledge. For professional employees a more normal situation is that of formal and national certification. For example, most forms of legal training involve a detailed knowledge of the national legal system and its laws; this knowledge is not easily transferable to another country and so the knowledge itself can only be applied within “its” national state. The example of law is important because it represents a case where knowledge is both highly technical and highly nationalised. Notice that although a successful legal career, and even the successful application of legal knowledge, may well require social skills which are themselves highly localised, that is not the issue here. Technical knowledges themselves can be local. Technical therefore is not the same as global.

At the other extreme to the local labour market is the global labour market. The most obvious — and limiting — case is the market for specialised technical and scientific global expertise. Here the knowledge can be applied irrespective of its local or national context. Or put more precisely, the institutional context for the application of knowledge is itself separated off from the rest of the society. The clearest examples are various forms of research and development in weapons manufacture. Notice that although the knowledge is technical, expertise within it is vouchsafed by reputational mechanisms (publication of scientific papers etc.).

A crude initial typology of the deployment of technical knowledge can therefore be constructed along two dimensions (Figure 1). The horizontal axis is the local-global dimension, the vertical axis is the degree of formalisation. Once again notice that neither dimension is a social-technical dimension: we are concerned here with *varieties* of technical knowledge.

Using these two dimensions it is possible to plot the origin and development of different knowledges. Historically, the movement of most knowledges has been towards a greater degree of formal certification (“up” the vertical axis). Equally, there has been a movement from local to global knowledges (from left to right on the horizontal axis). However, there are major differences. Of our four knowledges, that of sound engineering is remarkable for the extent to which its *practice* does not rely on formal qualifications (there are plenty of courses, but they are not widely recognised as providing an entry certificate to the occupation). At the same time, it is

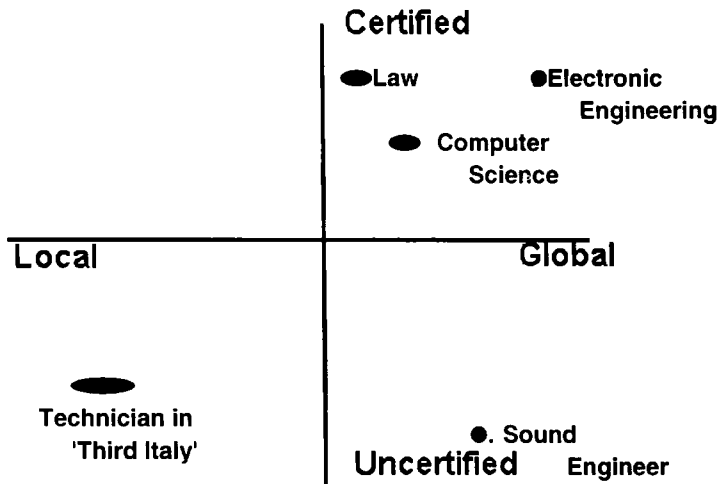


Figure 1: *Dimensions of Knowledge*

probably towards the global end of the horizontal axis. We can hypothesise that computer science and electronics engineering, despite being often considered together, differ on both dimensions. Electronics engineering is both more global, i.e., the knowledge is less context bound, and more certified than computer science. Finally, law is highly certified but national rather than either global or local in application: it falls on the mid-point of the horizontal dimension.

As Robertson (1995) points out, 1980s business jargon introduced the term *glocalisation* to designate the way in which in particular Japanese manufacturing firms combined a global outlook and strategy with a careful adaptation to local conditions. This is a metaphor for what has been happening in many other areas of social life: a move *up* towards the *global* level, and at the same time a movement *down* towards the local. The new politics of ecology, the new forms of identity, both are seen as operating at either ends of the local-global continuum, but not at what previously was considered the “natural” social level, the national. This process is arguably occurring within knowledge production and application. On the one hand the career becomes global, on the other hand the resources on which it is based are increasingly not national but local.

VI PERIPHERAL DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND MIGRATION

One “obvious” justification for expanding scientific and technological education is that it will contribute to economic development. For several

generations now the main government economic development agency, the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) has lobbied Irish governments to increase the educational output in areas such as engineering and computer science. Irish education's reliance on European Union funding (European Social Fund etc.) occurs because these programmes assume that expanding technological education contributes to improving the infrastructure of the periphery. And superficially these policies appear to work. The IDA can boast that Ireland not only has a young but also a well qualified labour force; it can cite the high production of engineering graduates as a proportion of third level and Ireland's high "educational relevance" score in international surveys.

This argument works by not examining either the careers of the graduates or the actual utilisation of their knowledge within the economy. In fact, educational expansion faces a quandary. Very simplistically, the more economically relevant the subject, the more likely it is that the graduate will emigrate. Worse, the more expensive the education, the higher the emigration level.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) publishes an annual "First Destinations" survey which shows the percentage of graduates in various disciplines who have emigrated within a year of graduating. While it is optimistically claimed that emigrants will return (see below), one can only cynically add that emigrants have always been "about to come home" and very infrequently do so. By contrast, both Hanlon and Wickham have documented the simple fact that in these more vocational areas many graduates work in Ireland and emigrate after a year (Hanlon, 1994; Wickham, 1992; see also Shuttleworth, 1993). Spending money on "relevant" higher education in Ireland has uncomfortable echoes of the Third World's brain drain (Irizarry, 1980): national and international funds are spent to help the children of the indigenous middle class develop international mobility. It is like "filling the bath and forgetting to put the plug in" (Murray and Wickham, 1990).

The study of electronics engineers also showed that there was a mis-match between graduates' expectations and their actual employment conditions. In electronics plants in the 1980s engineers were employed primarily in direct production, yet their training had created aspirations for them to work in research and design. These frustrated expectations were one major reason why so many wished to emigrate. Rather more tentatively, the study also suggested that this mis-match was the result of a university education system oriented towards the needs of international research rather than indigenous industrialisation.

This finding may have been the result of very particular circumstances. On

the one hand the Irish electronics industry in the 1980s was dominated by the assembly plants of American companies. The occupational structure of these firms created a truncated labour market for engineers: they had very little need in Ireland for engineering apart from production engineering, so that the promotion had to involve moving into management very early in the graduate's career. On the other hand one can tentatively suggest that electronics engineering in the universities was a very internationalised subject, with academic careers dependent on international recognition.

There is no reason to believe that this contrast would be so extreme in all disciplines, in all educational institutions and in all countries. Thus, a recent Irish government report on science and technology policy (Government of Ireland, 1996) suggests that the Regional Technical Colleges have a much closer relationship to local industry than Irish universities, while it also uses the concept of "national innovation systems" (Nelson, 1992) to investigate the relationship between the educational system and the local economy. Research on regional technological development in successful European areas such as Baden-Wurtemberg or Emilia-Romagna has underlined the importance of institutional networks linking local firms and local educational institutions (Lane, 1994) and these have clearly been relatively underdeveloped in Ireland until recently. As a national system therefore Irish university education has been good at equipping graduates for the global market, but bad at developing graduates for the local economy. Indeed, one problem is that the system remains a national system rather than a series of local systems.

An initial research hypothesis therefore is that graduate emigration is shaped by the form of the regional innovation system. If education forms part of a strong regional innovation system this will push education towards the "local" end of the local/global axis. To the extent that the knowledge becomes adjusted to the specific local conditions, then presumably the less that it can be effectively applied globally. Such a local innovation system may benefit employers, it will certainly contribute to developing the local economy, but the implication is that it will actually hinder the development of graduates' own global careers. Shuttleworth (1993) documents that Irish students are more likely to emigrate than British (English and Scottish) students; he explains this in terms of "contagion" of graduates by those people already emigrated, and sees this as an aspect of the extraordinarily strong "culture of emigration" in Ireland. However, focusing on the national system of innovation adds a structural and contemporary element to such historical and cultural explanations of graduate migration.

VII HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PERIPHERAL LABOUR MARKETS

Company policy is one major way in which knowledge is deployed within the individual's career. In Ireland, and possibly in other peripheral European countries, company human resource management exacerbates the effects of national educational policy.

Using arguments first applied to the British economy (Finegold and Soskice, 1988), a recent government report characterised the Irish economy as an example of a low skill equilibrium (Industrial Policy Review Group, 1992). Confronted by a labour market where the general level of skill is low, firms have adjusted their product strategies to compete on the basis of cost rather than quality and innovation. As a result they do not experience any serious skill shortages. Firms themselves see little point in the state committing resources to education and training, and see even less point in training their own employees. The fact that employers do not perceive education as a problem is, from this perspective, itself part of the problem.

Although this account may fit many Irish-owned firms in the more traditional sectors, initially it seems a rather implausible account of the successful "high tech" sector. In both hardware and software business organisations have campaigned for a greater output of "relevant" graduates from the educational system. The deployment of technical knowledge is clearly crucial to these firms' success. However, this in turn appears to sit uneasily with the fact that such firms appear to spend relatively little resources on training and certainly make no serious effort to provide career development for their graduates. In one way this is hardly surprising: since there is no levy system, state educated graduates are a free good for employers. Furthermore, McGovern (1995) has shown that such firms see little point in committing resources to retaining graduates, given that they believe they can always recruit replacements direct from college. Clearly to the extent that this is the case, firms are encouraging graduates to see their initial employment, however "high tech" it may be, as a stepping stone on a global career.

Hanlon has identified a second way in which the actual human resource management of Irish companies encourage emigration (1994). He shows how, in the rather different area of accountancy, firms believe that experience abroad is an essential prerequisite for promotion to senior positions. Within accountancy this is not because of any greater technical experience graduates will have gained, but because work in London or New York is seen to involve larger and more prestigious accounts. Graduates who do not emigrate, therefore, run the risk of being seen as lacking ambition and entrepreneurial drive.

One way of approaching the issue is to ask more precisely what firms are utilising from education. Heidenreich (1994) differentiates between education as *capital* and education as *ability*. In the case of the former education is used for its non-specialised aspects and provides the basis for learning particular tasks; by contrast, education as ability means, as one would expect, that education has equipped individuals with the ability to do such tasks. Notice that education in scientific or technical subjects is not necessarily used by firms in terms of “ability” to do the task. Most commentators agree that French third level education, particularly the elite *grandes écoles*, is both strongly oriented towards science and technology *and* utilised by employers as a general resource.

We can assume that if firms are interested in education in terms of *ability*, as they appear to be in the Irish electronics industry, then they will have relatively precise ideas as to what they require from the educational system. These requirements will focus on the extent to which graduates are equipped to carry out particular tasks without much further training: knowledge will tend to be product or process specific. Clearly, given continual innovation, these requirements will also be continually changing. To the extent that firms succeed in imposing these definitions on the educational system, then the knowledge produced will tend to be both highly specialised and to become redundant very quickly. In this situation, then it will always be easy for the firm to update its knowledge base by simply recruiting new graduates, rather than by re-training existing staff. If the firm pursues this policy it has a “slash and burn” relationship to the educational system: it simply uses the product of the educational system, without developing the human resources in the economy at all. At a systemic level, such a strategy represents an exploitative relationship between firms and the educational system; at an individual level it encourages “job hopping” by employees and furthermore, propels those who wish to develop their careers towards emigration. Employment is ejection.

VIII SUBJECTIVITY, IDENTITY AND STRATIFICATION

So far the argument has been “structuralist”, examining the institutional processes that may propel certain types of qualified individuals to migrate. However, this final section of the paper suggests that graduate emigration may well involve new forms of subjectivity. New cultural resources are involved and deployed in new and more conscious ways.

Until recently a graduate career was movement through a large state or private bureaucracy: the progression along a relatively well defined path from lower to higher paid positions. Some people might move faster than others,

some might go further than others, but the structure was clear, everybody knew where the ladder was and how many rungs it had. The subjective element was the extent to which the individual equipped himself (and it was nearly always he) with the qualifications to move faster rather than slower. For graduates career planning has long been both possible and rational.

The British literature at least is clear that graduate careers have changed: there is more mobility between employers, there is even more experience of a variety of employment statuses, such as self-employment and consultancy as well as salaried employee (Savage *et al.*, 1992). The fashionable management fads of 1990s, downsizing and layering, have “stripped out” so many middle management positions that those graduates who remain in large organisations can no longer look forward to increasing earnings over their working life (Brown and Scase, 1994). The weakening of the bureaucratic model must mean a radical individualisation of the career. There are now more ladders of different lengths; some ladders have missing rungs; sometimes you can build your own ladder; what is required to climb the ladder is less clear. No longer do individuals face clearly defined career structures in which they must compete with others for promotion. Instead individuals must construct their own “careers” (the term itself changes its meaning) as personal trajectories across a relatively uncharted economic space.

Popular “guru” authors like Handy (1993) have promulgated such a vision of the future of employment. It is accepted by more academic accounts, even if they are more restrained and more nuanced (stressing for example the importance of international differences). What implications do these changes have for the subjective strategies of graduate emigrants?

The successful bureaucratic career always required self-conscious planning: the pursuit of qualifications and suitable work experience. The new career however also requires the calculated mobilisation of personal resources. In an epoch in which nurturing your “networks” has replaced friendship and even collegiality (Beck, 1986), professional individuals operate a career path in which their own identity is understood as one possible resource. Developing a career now involves developing an instrumental understanding of the self (du Gay, 1995). It also involves developing a particular social circle and a particular identity in which the “private” is instrumentalised for the public “personality”. Firms develop recruit strategies (assessment centres etc.) which evaluate the graduate as a whole:

This represents the “commodification” of the whole person, as dress, deportment, speech, skiing holidays, hobbies and interests are all incorporated in the creation of a personality package which must be sold on the job market (Brown and Scase, 1994, p. 144).

Migration has also always been a very conscious, even dramatised decision. Not only has it raised questions of identity, migrants have been aware that this was so. To migrate is to leave the familiar, the routine, the secure; it is therefore to problematise the taken for granted routines and understandings of everyday life. In Schutz's essay *The Stranger* the person moving between societies always had to consciously learn what others accepted as natural: the stranger's privilege was to incorporate social reflexivity (cited in Schutz, 1970, pp. 87-95).

The framework for conventional migration studies was the homogenous nation state. Culturally of course this was both socially created and at "best" a not quite attained aspiration (homogeneity was never complete). However, today the ideal has ended, the ideal of a modern national home can no longer be sustained. While the barriers between states tumble, so the differences within them become more legitimate, diversity is tolerated and even becomes a resource to be harnessed, not a threat to be suppressed (Robertson, 1995). The paradigmatic migration experience was a movement from national land to immigrant ghetto, and then perhaps onwards to assimilation. Now this has changed. On the one hand the migrant's point of origin is more difficult to understand as a unique national soil, on the other hand there is no hegemonic homogenous ideal to which to aspire. All identities are not just socially constructed, but are known to be socially constructed by the participants themselves. The immigrant loses his/her epistemological privilege. The migrant has no greater access to the transience of the normal than normal people. Yet if we are all migrants now in terms of epistemology, it may nonetheless be the case that the migrant has greater or at least different cultural resources. And paradoxically, this may well be particularly the case for emigrants with professional qualifications.

In a rapidly globalising world one would obviously assume that migration for the privileged sections of the labour market is not so traumatic as in previous ages. Transport and communication technologies make staying in touch with home easier and temporary or permanent return more plausible or at least cheaper. While this applies at all levels of the labour market, a fully globalised labour market is emerging for some professionals.

Reich presents the gloomy scenario in which these *symbolic analysts* (the top 20 per cent of the society) become detached from any particular national labour market. Income differentials stretch between the highly qualified and highly mobile and the rest of the society, creating new relationships of unequal dependence:

As the rest of the nation grows more economically dependent than ever on the fortunate fifth [the symbolic analysts], the fortunate fifth is becoming less and less dependent on them (Reich, 1993, p. 250).

Reich argues quite explicitly that this new form of stratification undermines existing conceptions of nation. The symbolic analysts have an increasingly contingent relationship to the wider society within which they reside. In terms of migration, we might therefore expect questions of national identity for “symbolic analysts” to become less salient than in the past. Such people are no longer moving from one society to another, but are moving around within the same social milieu. The networks are international networks, held together by telephone, fax and e-mail as well as the occasional letter and the frequent aeroplane flight. Indeed, in such networks a measure of local success is often the time spent away from “home”. Certainly such people have a different relation to physical national territories to other strata. As Lash and Urry (1993, p. 30) note, for people whose working and holiday life involves international circulation, *all* social life becomes partially touristic.

Yet to contrast a new “rootless” elite and a “nationalised” mass is simplistic. On the one hand, as we have seen, everyone has access to some cosmopolitan experience. On the other hand, if the top 20 per cent are really so “de-nationalised”, how can we explain that Irish electronics engineers in California follow job advertisements in Ireland on the Irish emigrants’ electronic newspaper? Why should the IDA expect to entice back to Ireland highly skilled (and highly paid) professional emigrants?

Precisely the globalisation of the market puts a priority on strategies through which professionals differentiate themselves from each other. Such differentiation can use the economic and social resources of the spatial area where the professional happens to be physically located, and it can also use the more immaterial resources of cultural identity. Far from disappearing, as Reich suggests, for the new professionals national identity may well be useful — as one form of brand differentiation in the marketing of the self. Whether this is the case is one of the more intriguing questions raised by a globalisation approach to Irish professional emigration.

IX CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to develop some basic issues that a sociology of Irish middle class emigration would have to tackle. The arguments put forward will be subject to revision in the light of empirical research. One key research issue which has only been touched on here is how graduates differ

from each other. The paper has suggested ways of understanding the different ways in which their knowledges are created, but has not developed any arguments as to the different strategies and identities of different groups of graduates, whether defined in terms of their education or in terms of their gender.

Equally obviously, the paper has ignored much of the historical experience of Irish emigration. It can be argued that emigration has become built into the Irish social structure, so that the Irish population is more prone to emigrate than that of other countries. Migration chains, for example, often remain in existence long after their immediate causes have disappeared. Yet such recourse to history ignores the simple empirical fact that history does not always repeat itself (Ireland experienced net immigration in the 1970s). The focus on contemporary institutions and the contemporary context is however important for another reason. As a leading contemporary historian has commented (Foster, 1995, p. 78), in Ireland public discussion seems to prefer explanations in terms of historical rather than contemporary causes. It is time for sociology to challenge this epistemological priority of the past, to understand contemporary Ireland in terms of the present. And this applies to the processes whereby graduates leave Ireland — and even return to it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ANDERSON, BENEDICT, 1983. *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso.
- ANDERSON, RONALD E., VICKI LUNDMARK, LINDA HARRIS, and SHON MAGNAN, 1994. "Equity in Computing", in C. Huff and T. Finholt (eds.), *Social Issues in Computing: Putting Computing in its Place*, NY: McGraw-Hill, pp. 352-385.
- BECK, ULRICH, 1986. *Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- BERGGREN, CHRISTIAN, 1993. "Lean Production — the end of history?" *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 163-188.
- BOYLE, M., *et al.*, 1994. "French Investment and Skill Transfer in the United Kingdom" in W. Gould and A. Findlay (eds.), *Population Migration and the Changing World Order*, Chichester: Wiley, pp. 47-89.
- BROWN, PHILIP, and RICHARD SCASE, 1994. *Higher Education and Corporate Realities: Class, Culture and the Decline of Graduate Careers*, London: UCL Press.
- CHARLES, DAVID, *et al.*, 1994. "IT, Organisational Change and Regional Development", Report submitted to DGIII, European Commission, Brussels.
- CRONBERG, TARJA, and KNUT SØRENSEN, (eds.), 1995. *Similar Concerns, Different Styles? Technology Studies in Western Europe*, Brussels: European Commission.
- CROOK, STEPHEN, JAN PAKULSKI, and MALCOLM WATERS, 1992. *Postmodernization: Change in Advanced Society*, London: Sage.
- DU GAY, PAUL, 1995. *Consumption and Identity at Work*, London: Sage.

- FEATHERSTONE, MIKE, 1990. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, London: Sage.
- FEATHERSTONE, MIKE, SCOTT LASH, and ROLAND ROBERTSON, (eds.), 1995. *Global Modernities*, London: Sage.
- FERRIS, TOM, 1993. *The Irish Narrow Gauge: A Pictorial History. Volume 1*, Belfast: Blackstaff Press.
- FINEGOLD, DAVID, and DAVID SOSKICE, 1988. "The Failure of Training in Britain: Analysis and Prescription", *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 21-53.
- FOSTER, ROBERT F., 1995. *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND, DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT, 1996. *Science Technology and Innovation. The White Paper*. Dublin: Stationery Office.
- HANDY, CHARLES, 1993. *The Empty Raincoat: Making Sense of the Future*. London: Hutchinson.
- HANLON, GERARD, 1994. *The Commercialisation of Accountancy: Flexible Accumulation and the Transformation of the Service Class*, London: Macmillan.
- HAZELKORN, ELLEN, 1997. "New Digital Technologies, Work Practices and Cultural Production in Ireland", *The Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 235-259.
- HEIDENREICH, MARTIN, 1994. "The Expansion of the Educational System and the Introduction of Production Control Systems", in M. Heidenreich (ed.), *Computers and Culture in Organisations*, Berlin: Edition Sigma, pp. 229-262.
- HENDERSON, JEFFREY, 1989. *The Globalization of High Technology: Society, Space and Semi-conductors in the Restructuring of the Modern World*, London: Routledge.
- HIGH LEVEL GROUP OF EXPERTS, 1994. *Europe and the Global Information Society: Recommendations to the European Council*, ["Bangemann Report"] Brussels: European Commission.
- HUTTON, WILL, 1995. *The State We're In*, London: Jonathan Cape.
- INDUSTRIAL POLICY REVIEW GROUP, 1992. *A Time for Change: Industrial Policy for the 1990s* ["Culliton Report"], Dublin: Stationery Office.
- ISSC — INFORMATION SOCIETY STEERING COMMITTEE, 1997. *Information Society Ireland: Strategy for Action*, Dublin: Forfás.
- IRIZARRY, RAFAEL, 1980. "Over-education and Unemployment in the Third World: The Paradoxes of Dependent Industrialisation", *Comparative Education Review* Vol. 24 No.3, pp. 338-352.
- KELLY, KATE, and TRIONA NIC GIOLLA CHOILLE, 1990. *Emigration Matters for Women*, Dublin: Attic Press.
- KING, RUSSELL L., and IAN SHUTTLEWORTH, 1988. "Ireland's New Wave of Emigration in the 1980s", *Irish Geography* Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 104-108.
- LANE, CHRISTEL, 1994. "Industrial Order and the Transformation of Industrial Relations: Britain, Germany and France Compared", in R. Hyman and A. Ferner (eds.), *New Frontiers in European Industrial Relations*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 167-195.
- LASH, SCOTT, and JOHN URRY, 1993. *Economies of Signs and Space*, London: Sage.

- MAC LAUGHLIN, JIM, 1994. *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy*, Cork: Cork University Press.
- McGOVERN, GERRY, 1996. *Ireland and the Digital Age*, Dublin: Forbairt.
- McGOVERN, PATRICK, 1995. "To Retain or not to Retain? Multinational Firms and Flexible Labour", *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 7-23.
- MURRAY, PETER, and JAMES WICKHAM, 1990. "Irish Graduate Emigration and the Single European Market", *Studies*, Spring, pp. 56-62.
- NELSON, RICHARD R. (ed.) 1992. *National Innovation Systems: A Comparative Study*, Oxford University Press.
- NESC — NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL, 1991. *The Economic and Social Implications of Emigration*, Dublin: NESC.
- O'RIAIN, SEAN, 1997. "An Offshore Silicon Valley? The Emerging Irish Software Industry", forthcoming in *Competition and Change*.
- PIETERSE, JAN NEDERVEEN, 1995. "Globalization as Hybridization", in M. Featherstone *et al.* (eds.), *Global Modernities*, pp 45-68.
- RAINBIRD, HELEN, 1993. "Vocational Education and Training", in M. Gold (ed.), *The Social Dimension: Employment Policy in the European Community*, London: Macmillan, pp. 184-202.
- RAMMERT, WERNER, 1995. "Technology Within Society: Germany", in T. Cronberg and K. Sørensen (eds.), *Technology Studies in Western Europe*, pp. 161-238.
- REICH, ROBERT, 1993. *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves For 21st Century Capitalism*, London: Simon and Schuster.
- ROBERTSON, ROLAND, 1995. "Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity", in M. Featherstone *et al.* (eds.), *Global Modernities*, London: Sage, pp. 25-44.
- SALT, J., and R. FORD, 1993. "Skilled International Migration in Europe" in R. King (ed.), *Mass Migrations in Europe*, London: Belhaven, pp. 293-309.
- SASSEN, SASKIA, 1991. *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton University Press.
- SAVAGE, MIKE *et al.*, 1992. *Property, Bureaucracy and Culture: Middle-Class Formation in Contemporary Britain*, London: Routledge.
- SCHUTZ, ALFRED, 1970. *On Phenomenology and Social Relations: Selected Writings*, Chicago University Press.
- SHIRLOW, PETER, and IAN SHUTTLEWORTH, 1994. "Training, Migration and the Changing World Order: a Case Study from the Republic of Ireland", in W. Gould and A. Findlay (eds.), *Population Migration and the Changing World Order*, Chichester: Wiley, pp. 91-111.
- SHUTTLEWORTH, IAN, 1993. "Irish Graduate Emigration: the Mobility of Qualified Manpower in the Context of Peripherality", in R. King (ed.), *Mass Migration in Europe*, London: Belhaven, pp. 310-326.
- THOM, GRAHAM, 1992. "The Single European Market and Labour Mobility", *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 14-25.
- WICKHAM, JAMES, 1992. "Irish Engineers: Education for Emigration?" in G. Lee and C. Smith (eds.), *Engineers and Management: International Comparisons*, London: Routledge, pp. 162-183.
- WILLIAMS, ROBIN (ed.), 1995. *The Social Shaping of Interorganisational IT Systems and Electronic Data Exchange*, Brussels: European Commission.