

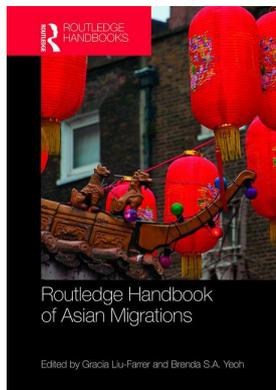
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TEMPORARY LABOUR
MIGRATION*Michiel Baas***Introduction**

Temporary labour migration might be one of the most easily recognised forms of migration because of its immediate association with disenfranchised migrant workers. Yet, the ostensible straightforwardness of its three inherent components – temporary, labour and migration – also makes it one of the most illusive ones. Although the focus in many studies is indeed on migrant workers with *temporary* work visas, undertaking hard *labour* over long hours and with limited rights, other studies take a much broader approach and include virtually any person migrating to another country for the purpose of finding employment. While both strands of research have their obvious reasons for doing so, the primary aim of this chapter is to disentangle the three different components that make up the concept and, by doing so, argue that each in their own way – temporary, labour and migration – builds on problematic assumptions. These assumptions tend to replicate the way receiving nations organise and manage their inflow of migrants through highly specific categories. By taking a critical approach to the way migration research is generally organised along the lines drawn by migration regimes of receiving nations, this chapter seeks to contribute to a growing awareness that this is ultimately an inadequate way of understanding migration. Although the analysis will specifically zoom in on the case of Singapore, other Asian nations that receive a large number of migrants organise their inflow in a similar matter. Moreover it can be argued that increasingly this way of organising migration is replicated outside the Asia region as well (see Asis and Battistella, this volume, Chapter 21).

In order to better understand what temporary labour migration actually entails in terms of theory, policy and practice, this chapter is organised around the three components that create the illusion of a coherent whole. In the first section, the chapter engages with the ostensible temporal aspect of migration and seeks to put forward the argument that labelling labour migration as ‘temporary’ draws on an inherently contradictory assumption. At a macro level temporary labour migrants form a more or less permanent presence in most developed Asian nations, which contrasts rather ironically with ‘labour migration’ at an individual/micro level which tends to be ‘permanently’ temporary.

The second section aims to unpack the meaning of labour when we speak of ‘labour migration’. It is here that we will encounter a problem in the literature on labour migration itself; some studies define it in terms of low-skilled and low-waged, while others include all migrants

seeking employment in another country. Investigating the way 'labour' itself is interpreted will take us deeper into the way migration itself is actually organised across the Asia-Pacific region. Labour may reference 'work', but it often also points at a particular hierarchy whereby certain migrants are privileged over others.

In the final section the implied or assumed meaning of 'migration' itself will be unpacked. In the most general interpretation of migration it is imagined to describe a cross-border trajectory whereby a migrant moves from one country to the next. While numerically this may be unjustified – there are many more internal than international migrants – it continues to define the way migration is understood by the public at large, impacting both politics and policy, and it guides the vast majority of academic research into migration (see Skeldon, this volume, Chapter 13). The 'question of migration' is not simply one of internal vs. international, though. What constitutes migration references a political process of inclusion and exclusion as well as *othering*, whereby the idea of the 'migrant' needs to be reiterated on a regular basis. Globalisation and the potential for 'transnational' lives are crucial to understanding this, but perhaps even more so the way migration programmes are continuously fine-tuned to control and regulate the inflow and temporary/permanent stay of migrants even further. Based on this, the chapter suggests that an increasing number of migrants actually never quite 'migrate' in the classical sense any more.

In short, what this analysis will finally reveal is that the three elements that 'define' temporary labour migration are not only problematic in themselves but also as an allegedly coherent phenomenon. In the conclusion, this chapter will make some suggestions for future research and will suggest that we need to start adopting a more critical stand to the way we conceptualise the idea or question of migration itself.

Temporary migration

Temporary becomes permanent

In recent years there has been growing awareness that the temporal dimensions of migration deserve our specific attention (Robertson 2016; Robertson and Ho 2016), especially since an increasing number of migrants can be characterised as 'permanently' temporary or their pathways as 'continually' circular (see also Zapata-Barrero et al. 2012). While previously permanent residency permits and dual citizenship statuses were observed to facilitate transnational lifestyles, the fact that a growing number of migrants have no access to (eventual) 'permanency' has produced a different kind of transnationality characterised by marginality, inequality and exploitation. The way migrants negotiate, engage with and experience the various temporal aspects of their individual trajectories, often faced with the structural constraints imposed by the architecture of a particular migration programme, has thus become a pressing concern.

Receiving nations in the West as well as the East have been organising, streamlining and managing their inflow of various migrants via skilled migration programmes for decades. An important difference, though, is that while Europe and North America have gradually shifted towards immigrant incorporation – thus offering routes towards permanent residency – migration in Asia continues to be premised on the idea of exclusion (Lian et al. 2016: 3) and difference. This means that Asian migration programmes tend to be more hierarchically organised than their western counterparts, with migrants categorised in highly specific groups on the basis of education, skill and wage levels. These categories not only correspond with specific rights in terms of staying on (for instance in case of job loss), eligibility for permanent residency, or family reunion, but also determine who is allowed to apply for the particular visa he or she qualifies

for. In the case of low-skilled migrants, the procedure often requires the involvement of specific professionals, such as brokers or agents, who charge a considerable fee for their services. The intermediation by such professionals is another feature that sets Asian migration programmes apart from their western counterparts (see also Battistella 2014: 14; Lian 2016: 4). A brief history of how these programmes developed over time illustrates their divergent trajectories.

Migration programmes in the West

In the West, migration programmes typically emerged during and after World War Two. The agriculture-based Bracero Program in the US, for instance, facilitated temporary labour migration between the US and Mexico commencing in 1942. While it was initially intended to alleviate wartime labour shortages, the programme in fact ran until 1964. The H-2 Visa Program, which was instituted in the 1950s, initially also aimed to facilitate low-skilled migrants to find temporary employment in the US by giving them so-called 'non-immigrant visas'. In the mid-1980s this programme was split into two different sections: H-2A and H-2B. The H-2A continues to facilitate low-skilled migration (particularly for agricultural work) while the H-2B has become synonymous with high-skilled migration. While the influx of low-skilled and often illegal (Latin American) migrants finding employment in the US continues to feature prominently on the political agenda, the H-2B visa does so as well, especially where it concerns US-based companies recruiting foreign personnel – for instance from India for the IT industries – who are held to compete (unfairly) with local professionals.

European nations have a less-rigid division in terms of skills in their migration programmes. Initially, however, these programmes were strongly oriented towards low-skilled personnel who, post-World War Two, were in great demand with fast-growing West European economies that experienced severe labour shortages in manufacturing, construction and the service industries (Castles and Ozkul 2014: 2). Besides spontaneous migrants who were regularised once they found jobs, many immigrants initially hailed from the former colonies (ibid). This changed with the emergence of so-called guestworker programmes in the 1960s. Germany's *Gastarbeiter* arrived throughout the 1960s and 1970s under its *Gastarbeiterprogramm*. Other European nations such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden ran parallel programmes. While in the Netherlands these *gastarbeiders* initially mainly hailed from southern European nations such as Italy, Portugal and Spain, from the 1960s onwards migrants would increasingly arrive from Morocco and Turkey.

It has been noted that, like comparable schemes in Western Europe, the German guestworker programme eventually failed to achieve its aims. Although most migrants only came with the intention to work for a few years, others stayed on longer and eventually started bringing over dependents. In addition to this they managed to gain longer-term residence rights and access to Germany's welfare system. When Germany ended its formal agreement with Turkey for labour recruitment because of the 1973 oil crisis, it found that many migrant workers stayed on because of a lack of job opportunities back home. Family reunions and the formation of ethnic enclaves heightened the sense of a certain irreversibility about the situation (as discussed in Castles and Ozkul 2014: 32). At present the Turkish community in Germany is roughly 2.8 million and, although not only the product of post-World War Two migration, it cannot be denied that its guestworker programme played a crucial role in facilitating this. Other Western European nations also became home to significant groups of former migrants. For instance, in the Netherlands the Turkish and Moroccan communities are now the two largest ethnic communities, closely followed by those from the former Dutch colonies, Indonesia and Surinam.¹

In Western Europe, temporary labour migration thus often resulted in the formation of ethnic communities in the host nation. Although this was initially the product of so-called ‘non-return’ – meaning that the scheme under which these migrants had entered the country had intended it to be temporary – at present most European nations offer routes towards citizenship. Until the 1990s this was a relatively straightforward affair; however, in more recent years additional requirements regarding minimum income, guaranteed length of employment and knowledge of local culture and language have been added. Concerns over the formation of ethnic enclaves, issues of non-integration and ‘Islamisation’ seem to have fuelled these developments the most.

Migration programmes in the East

In Asia labour migration programmes can be traced back to the colonial days of indentured and semi-indentured labour flows, something both colonial authorities and the private sector were heavily invested in (Hugo 2009; Amrith, this volume, Chapter 1). It’s a little-known fact that, in terms of the scale of movement of people, this was actually comparable to movement across the Atlantic at the time (Amrith 2014). In the century after 1840, some 20 million Chinese and 30 million Indians moved to Southeast Asia to work on its plantations and in its rapidly developing cities (Amrith 2014: 1569). Furthermore, it has been estimated that in the 1911–1929 period alone, the combined migration to Burma, British Malaya and Thailand was more than twice the number of migrants who headed for the United States (Lian et al. 2016: 4)². This development was directly related to the free and open immigration policy that British, Dutch and French colonial powers practised between the 1850s and 1930s because of labour shortages and other needs of local colonial economies. The multi-ethnic/racial composition of countries such as Malaysia and Singapore continues to reflect that many stayed behind and went on to form permanent communities in the countries they migrated to.

While the oil crisis of 1973 marked the end of guestworker schemes in countries such as Germany, the oil boom of the early 1970s actually triggered the emergence of the first Asian migration schemes (Wickramasekara 2014: 58). Fuelled by economic growth, nations in the Gulf embarked on ‘ambitious modernisation programmes’ which required the inflow of large numbers of labour migrants who primarily hailed from Asia (ibid). Similarly, the rapid development of Malaysia and Thailand also necessitated significant numbers of labour migrants during this period. However, as Wickramasekara writes, apart from Hong Kong other East Asian nations did not operate migration schemes for low-skilled labourers, although there was certainly demand there as well (ibid: 58–59). Taiwan only liberalised the inflow of low-skilled workers in the early 1990s, while South Korea did this even later in 2004 (ibid: 59).

What stands out when it comes to Asian migration schemes and programmes is that they were and continue to be guided by economic considerations in which profit maximisation is key. This is mainly reflected in how they consider different groups of migrants as inherently unequal and place them in a hierarchical schema in terms of their rights in and obligations to the host nation. Most concretely this becomes clear when we look at the maximum number of years a migrant can be employed in a particular country, or the way eligibility for permanent residency or citizenship is organised. The case of South Korea illustrates this clearly. Its migration programme in its earliest form – the Industrial Trainee System, launched in 1994 – allowed its ‘trainees’ (who were in fact mainly low-skilled contract workers) to stay for a maximum of three years (Castles and Ozkul 2014: 39). In 2005 the South Korean government replaced this programme with its Employment Permit System, which recognised migrants’ labour rights – something it previously didn’t – but is again capped in terms of the length of stay in South Korea (ibid). In a similar vein, Singapore limits the maximum number of years a low- or semi-skilled migrant worker is allowed

to be employed in the city-state. Basic skilled construction workers, for instance, can only be employed for up to ten years, while higher skilled ones are permitted to stay as long as 22 years.³ Furthermore, the categories of construction and foreign domestic worker also come with specific age-limits. In terms of eligibility for permanent residence both countries also entertain specific rules. While South Korea restricts this to so-called ‘special talent’ – excelling in a specific field such as science, management, education, cultural arts, or athletics – Singapore excludes its Work Permit holders (thus low-skilled workers) from eligibility.

Ethics, concerns and awareness

A growing body of studies engages with the ethical dimensions of temporariness and restrictiveness of migration, especially in terms of the way specific migration schemes exclude low-skilled migrants from basic rights or simply treat them ‘differently’. Scholars have noted how this may facilitate or even encourage exploitation and abuse (e.g. Hugo 2009; Dauvergne and Marsden 2014a). Concern is also voiced over working and living conditions, health and safety standards and quality of accommodation provided. The latter is not only about hygiene standards and comfort but increasingly also about segregation from local inhabitants, as migrant dormitories are more and more constructed in isolated areas on the outskirts of cities. While studies on migrant workers in the Gulf stand out in terms of their association with the above-mentioned issues (e.g. Ahmed, A. 2010; Bindhulakshmi 2010; Buckley 2012; Jureidini 2003; Prakash 1998; Rahman 2010; Rajan and Narayana 2011; Timothy and Sasikumar 2012), there has been a growing body of work on Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan as well. In the case of Singapore a particular focus of research has been on foreign domestic workers (e.g. Yeoh and Huang 1998, 1999, 2000; Parreñas 2000, 2001; Yeoh and Annadurai 2008). However, more recently the living conditions of construction workers have come under scrutiny as well (e.g. Rahman 2004; Rahman and Fee 2005; Rahman and Kiong 2013; Yaw and Ofori 1997, 2001).

What stands out in the analysis is that the ‘temporariness’ of arrangements in terms of labour contracts and working permits contribute to an innately unequal and unstable relationship between migrant, employer and the state. As mentioned earlier, considerations of profit maximisation play a crucial role here; both employer and the state benefit from the system’s flexibility and hierarchical organisation. In the case of Hong Kong and Taiwan this has led to increased political participation and protests by migrant workers in recent years (see also Constable 2009), while Singapore’s Little India Riot of 2013 could possibly be understood within this context as well.

While so far the focus has been on the temporalities of labour migration, it is now time to move on to the element of ‘labour’ itself. As the next section will show, the notion of labour is imbued with a particular fuzziness and characterised by ambiguity. With migration programmes strongly bifurcated between low-skilled and highly skilled migrants, the inevitable question is whether these seemingly polar opposites actually represent the skills of the individual migrants.

Labour migration

The fuzziness of labour

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are currently 105 million persons working in a country other than where they were born.⁴ These migrants make

up 90 per cent of the total number of international migrants worldwide. As the ILO further elaborates, only an estimated 7–8 per cent of migrants are refugees or asylum seekers, some of whom are also regularly employed. The labour mobility that organisations such as the ILO speak of basically encapsulates virtually all migrants, and thus does not differentiate between the various categorisations that nation-states themselves use. This also contrasts with the popular notion of ‘labour’, which tends to reference work that is of the low-skilled and low-waged variety. Within migration literature, this interpretation of labour reverberates in the bulk of studies on labour migration, though there is certainly no clear consensus on what ‘labour’ actually means. Graeme Hugo’s (2009) study distinguishes six types of temporary labour migrants in Australia who, in terms of skills, wages and temporalities, could not be more different from each other. Besides low-skilled contract and seasonal workers, Hugo includes highly skilled professionals as well as those coming in as international students or on so-called Working Holiday Maker visas. His approach is an attempt to cover the whole gamut of different types of migrant ‘labour’ which resonates with the migration infrastructure of countries as diverse as Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore or South Korea. However, the study of migration itself continues to be strongly bifurcated between low- and highly skilled migrants in its focus. In doing so, studies tend to reflect the way receiving nations organise and manage the inflow of migrants themselves. A brief return to the Singaporean case will prove illuminating in this regard.

While low-skilled migrants by far outnumber highly skilled ones in Singapore, the city-state mainly envisions itself as a destination for highly skilled or so-called ‘talent’ migrants, and has thus implemented a whole range of policies and other initiatives to attract them to its shores (e.g. Shachar 2006; Yeoh and Eng 2008; Ho 2011; Yeoh and Huang 2011). The use of the term ‘talent’ is particularly interesting here, denoting a whole interplay of factors ranging from skills and education to the notion of being ‘global citizens’. The latter is clearly also imbued with the idea of high mobility, which is adorned with an aura of cosmopolitanism and success and infused with a considerable amount of symbolic value or capital (Yeoh and Eng 2008: 236). This kind of symbolism seems partly a by-product of the rhetoric of the *global war for talent* itself, which has led to the emergence of a new type of global meritocracy. Influenced by this, the Singaporean government, as well as other Asian nations, has changed its social and economic policies with the aim of attracting the ‘best and brightest’ (Ng 2011: 262). For such talent migrants a wide variety of nomenclature has effloresced in recent years, ranging from elite transnational subjects and astronauts to frequent flyers, globalites and transnational nomads (for a more wide-ranging discussion of this, see Baas 2017).

What stands out in the Singaporean case is the alternative trajectory that is envisioned for both low- and highly skilled migrants. While low-skilled ‘workers’ strictly come in as temporary labour, highly skilled ‘professionals’ are afforded more permanent pathways. Besides envisioning these highly skilled migrants as important to the country’s ambition to remain globally competitive, they are also imagined to provide a solution with respect to certain demographic concerns brought about by an ageing population and low fertility rates. Both these problems are experienced by other Asian nations such as Japan and South Korea as well, something which has received significant scholarly interest in recent years. As we will see below, not only does the bifurcation between low- and highly skilled migrants in migration studies divert from the way local populations engage with questions of migration, it also does not always adequately reflect the actual level of education, skills and/or income of migrants themselves. In short, what we need to engage with more critically is migrant categorisations themselves.

The ambiguity of skills

As noted, Graeme Hugo (2009) identifies multiple categories among the broader spectrum of temporary labour migration. While this in itself introduces a more diverse perspective to the idea of labour, it is also indicative of a problem which is obfuscated by the very bifurcation between low and high. As I have argued elsewhere (Baas 2017), there is a growing group of migrants who could be conceptualised as the ‘mobile middle’; skilled migrants who actively negotiate the constraints and test the flexibilities of a skilled migration programme in order to work and potentially stay on permanently in a particular country. In Singapore this mobile middle sees itself represented in a mid-level skilled visa category, which is currently also the fastest growing one. However, the designation of mid-level skilled often does not adequately capture the skills, level of education and income of those who make up this middle ground between various more clearly defined categories.

In Singapore those who fall in the category of mid-level skilled migrant in terms of income (S\$2,200–S\$4,500 per month) and education/skills can apply for a so-called S-Pass. This work visa not only facilitates mid-level skilled migration to Singapore but also functions as a bridging category for those migrants whose skills/education and proposed salary do not squarely meet the criteria of those intended for low- or highly skilled migrants. Some of the Indian migrants I interviewed for my research, for instance, were highly educated, but the salary packages they had been offered were lower than what was required for a so-called Employment Pass (or E-Pass). This E-Pass is primarily oriented towards highly educated migrants. Other migrants had been awarded an E-Pass based on a salary which in reality they did not make; their employer required them to return a portion of their salaries in cash every month. While this chapter does not intend to discuss the legalities of such arrangements, what it brings to the fore is that the low- vs. highly skilled bifurcation does not necessarily always reflect the way ‘migration’ gets organised or works out in practice.

Thus, in the case of Singapore, the ambiguity of skills is partly resolved by the mid-level skilled category, which caters to a diverse range of migrants who do not fit into the neat compartmentalisation that the other categories represent. The category of international students functions as another example when it comes to how education/skills and employment are not always neatly aligned. Recent scholarship on international students from Asia, for instance, clearly indicates that in order to finance their study abroad and/or pay for their daily expenses, international students are almost exclusively involved in work of the low-skilled variety (e.g. cleaning work, waiting tables or driving taxis) (see Baas 2010; Liu-Farrer 2012). At the same time, international students are typically equated with high-potential or talent migrants and in the case of Australia, for instance, the country directly recruits its highly skilled migrants from the pool of freshly graduated international students. Yet, as Liu-Farrer also points out, considering them as ‘skilled’ migrants is problematic, since having completed a tertiary education is the main qualifier for this (2012: 161). Moreover, as Liu-Farrer writes, ‘international students are often recruited for a plethora of political, economic, and cultural initiatives, from producing international peace and supplementing the shrinking domestic student pool to enriching campus life’ (ibid). As such, they are generally left out of studies of labour migration altogether.

The question of ‘labour’ is thus indicative of a particular fluidity which studies of migration often have a hard time adequately capturing. Mid-level skilled migrants are one such category; slotted in-between two more recognisable groups of migrants, they are in fact a rapidly growing group in Singapore. The inclusion of other categories of migrants, most notably that of international students, further muddies a clear definition of what can be understood as

temporary labour migration. The primary question that the final section will engage in, then, is that if both 'temporary' and 'labour' are in themselves problematic in terms of what they are assumed to stand for, what does this tell us about commonly held ideas of *migration* itself?

Migration and im/mobility

Paradigmatic shifts in migration research

Like most fields of scholarly inquiry, that of migration has gone through various paradigmatic shifts over time, influenced by research findings as well as changes in the geopolitical, sociocultural and economic landscape across sending and receiving nations. What stood out in earlier research was the deeply functionalist approach with a weighty neoclassical focus that sought to explain migration via various push and pull factors (Arango 2000; Castles 2000; Fog and Sorensen 2002). Key in this was not only to explain but also to predict migration, and as such various socioeconomic indicators would be employed to understand what motivated migrants to leave their homes for 'better' destinations elsewhere. Migration thus described a process from A to B which in its conceptualisation was imbued with a particular inevitability. In line with this, an eventual return 'home' was chiefly conceptualised in terms of either failure to make it or (at best) retirement after having faced hardships overseas (e.g. Cerase 1974; Gmelch 1980; Rhoades 1979). Questions of integration and assimilation initially also built upon this notion of permanency; temporary migrants (guestworkers) were observed to stay on permanently over time and by doing so posed a challenge by, for instance, not integrating or assimilating into local cultural norms and values (e.g. Brettell and Hollifield 2000). Especially in Europe this led to significant public debates about 'national culture' to which newcomers are perceived to be a threat.

The 1990s introduced an important shift in thinking about migration with the concept of transnationalism, which was held to challenge the legitimacy of the nation-state itself. The argument which became increasingly prominent was that a growing number of migrants could be observed to maintain multiple ties and connections between home and host country, living 'transnational lifestyles' across and beyond nation-state boundaries (see for instance Vertovec 1999; Guarnizo and Díaz 1999; Glick-Schiller 1999). Studies of globalisation were particularly of influence here, as it became clear that these transnational lifestyles were made possible by the arrival of budget carriers as well as technological advances such as the availability of cheap calling cards and (later) the emergence of online media.

An inevitable consequence for migration studies was that it had to refocus its attention on the multiplicity of migrant lives and thus move away from earlier models that were utilised to investigate migrant trajectories. Important in the early phase of the study of transnationalism was to establish this optic as a 'new' approach to understanding current-day migration (Kivisto 2001). In the two decades since, studies have now advanced to the stage of arguing that increasingly migrants leave 'home' with the idea of transnational lifestyles in mind (e.g. Baas 2010). The role of social media cannot be denied here: more than ever before migrants are able to access and compare information about various migration programmes, strategies and opportunities online, envisioning a life across and beyond borders for themselves. Consequently, migration is increasingly referred to as transnational migration or, as we will see below, as transnational mobility.

Mobilities paradigm

The introduction of the 'new mobilities paradigm' by Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006) has confronted the study of migration with new questions about how to understand the mobile

trajectories of migrants across the globe. Introduced as a fundamental recasting of social science by drawing attention to the constitutive role of movement within the functioning of social institutions and practices, it is important to underline that this new paradigm is not simply about asserting that the world is more mobile than ever (Sheller and Urry 2006). Rather, it seeks to highlight that the complex character of mobility systems draws upon the multiple fixities or 'moorings' – often on a substantial physical scale – that produce fluidity elsewhere (Sheller 2011). From this it follows that the systems which regulate or lubricate mobility are deeply infused with notions of il/legalities that are constructed upon sociocultural and political ideas of belonging and what the nation-state is imagined to stand for. What is crucial to this new way of thinking about (transnational) mobility is that its focus is not necessarily only on questions of movement but also, perhaps even more importantly, on the power of discourses, practices and infrastructures that both facilitate as well as obstruct, pause and even bar movement (Sheller 2011: 2).

The new mobilities paradigm's influence on migration research cannot be denied, especially in terms of refocusing its orientation towards questions of *who* gets to migrate, under *what* conditions, and *how* discussions in receiving nations about this often centre on deeply neoliberal notions of benefit and profit. Aihwa Ong's (2006) conceptualisation of neoliberalism *as exception*, through which she addresses the way governing activities are recast as non-political and non-ideological, thus mainly requiring a technical approach, has been instrumental in rethinking what migration actually entails in this respect. What follows from this is that denying citizenship to some migrants while fast-tracking the applications of others depends on one's marketable skills and ultimately usability for the receiving nation. With the fine-tuning of migration programmes, especially those of countries such as Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore that are highly dependent on a sizable inflow of variously skilled migrants, this has partly resulted in a refocus within migration research on questions of 'immobility', rather than the idea of frequency and fluency of mobility that seems to imbue transnational lifestyles. As Cresswell (2012) notes, this immobility is characterised by notions of stillness, waiting and being stuck, in effect not moving forward. Increasingly this 'not moving forward' within the context of the system itself is about not being eligible for a more permanent residency status and thus also about denying – even in the very long term – certain groups of migrants to ever have equal rights to other groups of migrants and local citizens.

Migration has thus increasingly become about the opposite of what it was inherently and historically layered with. From a perspective that initially drew heavily on push-and-pull models and described a one-way trajectory in which non-return was assumed, the study of migration has increasingly become about describing transnational lifestyles in which frequent mobility seems key and notions of settling locally (integrating, assimilating) are gradually eroded to make way for lifestyles that appear to exist betwixt and between country of origin and destination. More recently, however, we have come to realise that with the fine-tuning of migration rules and regulations, limited mobility or immobility have become undeniable elements in many migration trajectories as well. One could even argue that for an increasing number of migrants, *migration*, as previously observed, is not what characterises their trajectories at all. It is here that we need to return to the concept of temporary labour migration itself, because while for a large group of migrants in the Asia-Pacific region it does capture the pathways they are on, at the same time the very opposite could also be argued.

Conclusion

A number of recent publications have engaged with the question of temporary labour migration in terms of ethics and ideology (e.g. Lenard and Straehle 2011; Lenard 2012), especially

with regards to the idea of a triple-win of which the International Labour Organization is an advocate. The first two *wins* are for the migrants and economies of receiving nations, while the *third* is for the economy of the sending nation (Dauvergne and Marsden 2014a: 227; see also IOM 2008: 92). Essentially it links questions of migration to those of development, while also engaging with notions of (in-)equality, constraints and opportunities. Such discussions about the ethics of temporary labour migration are rarely about *all* labour migrants; instead their focus is on a very particular labour migrant who is defined largely in terms of the category he or she falls into with respect to a particular migration regime. Yet as we have seen in this chapter, temporary labour migration is a troublesome concept.

The concept of temporary labour migration is indicative of two problems which together point at a more general problem within migration research. First of all the concept reflects a way of thinking about migration that is in essence too narrow and too oriented towards capturing particular groups of migrants within highly specific categories. The second problem is directly linked to this in that the concept fails to connect with the on-the-ground experiences of temporary labour migrants. In fact the migration experience is often permeated by contradictions produced by the very terminology used. Temporary can be a permanent status, but also a 'temporary' phase on the road to a permanent status. Furthermore, while at a macro level 'labour' includes all migrants seeking employment in another country, in practice receiving countries treat variously skilled migrants in completely different ways. Highly developed nations in the Asia-Pacific region that are on the receiving end of a significant number of migrants – even more so than elsewhere, perhaps with the exception of the Middle East – have implemented migration architecture that treats different groups of migrants in a deeply hierarchical fashion. This is reflected in regulations regarding the maximum age of migrants and possible length of their employment, the eligibility to apply for permanent residence permits, the freedom to switch employers, and even reproductive rights. Natalie Oswin (2014) captured it well by arguing that in Singapore migrant workers are put on a different trajectory of life and death from higher-skilled migrants and the local population.

Finally, there is the issue of migration itself. As the recent paradigmatic shift in terms of a renewed focus on *mobilities* has indicated, our focus as migration researchers should be much more oriented to the notion of immobility, of migrants not 'migrating' as such. I would argue that an increasing number of migrants actually are not migrants at all, but should perhaps be thought of as cross-border workers who simply move to another country temporarily without ever going through an actual and more traditional migration process. The creation of migrant enclaves in Hong Kong, Singapore, and also in the Middle East is indicative of this. Housing migrants far from city centres, in dormitories that may have all the facilities that a migrant would require for his day-to-day needs, but which at the same time are oriented towards segregating him from 'local' daily life, is an undeniable element in this. It is here that the question of the future of migration itself presents as one that ought to feature prominently on the research agenda for years to come.

Notes

- 1 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek: statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=37325&D1=0&D2=a&D3=0&D4=0&D5=a&D6=l&HDR=G2,G3&STB=G1,G5,T,G4&VW=T (checked 19-09-2016). Turkish: 397,471; Moroccan: 385,761; Indonesian: 366,849; Surinamese: 349,022.
- 2 Please note that it concerns 'gross' migration here, meaning that a significant number of these migrants did in fact return. This chapter does not engage in discussions of how much the 'net' migration eventually turned out to be.
- 3 This rule does not apply to Malaysians.

- 4 See: *International labour migration. A rights-based approach*, available here: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_protect/-protrav/-migrant/documents/publication/wcms_208594.pdf (visited 15-09-2016).

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