Unexpected Journeys: Unmasking Home While Abroad

A Thesis Submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Science

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ABSTRACT

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The last two decades have seen thousands of Canadian university graduates go to teach English in places such as China, South Korea, and Japan. In this thesis, drawing on Clandinin and Connelly's concept of narrative inquiry, I situate the stories I heard about the experiences of 15 teachers who taught English as a Second Language in South Korea between 2003 and 2012.

While my interviewees expressed intrinsically personal reasons for taking on such temporary professional employment, they also acknowledged that they felt somewhat forced to do so by an increasingly bleak job market at home. I position their decisions in the neoliberal employment context in Canada over the past two decades, highlighting the personal and socioeconomic factors that influenced them to take up such opportunities. Additionally, I examine how these experiences shifted their views of Canada and what it meant to be Canadian, both while they were away and upon their return home by revealing the contradictions between expectation and the lived realities of young Canadians. These contradictions unmask the deceptive nature of dominant narratives in Canadian society.

Keywords: narrative, Canadian identity, teaching abroad, Canadian job market, neoliberalism

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"Nice to meet you!" one of the boys I've been teaching for the last twelve months called out. A little piece of me dies. For weeks I tried to teach the proper time to use that phrase to no avail. I know he's just trying to impress me with the little bit of English he knows, but it just reinforces my failures in the class. I cannot blame the students, they try their best. I may be a trained English teacher, but not the kind they need. I spent five years in university and went $36,000 into debt in order to learn how to teach English literature. What am I supposed to do for students who still spell violet in English with a 'B'?

On most nights, I would be heading home to rest after another exhausting day of fighting the language barrier and school bureaucracy, but tonight I have no home to go to.

Already a cleaning crew is preparing my apartment for the new foreign teacher. I have twenty four hours to make it to the airport or I will be fined for breaking South Korea's immigration laws. If I dawdle, I risk deportation. My contract over, my usefulness to the Korean government program that sponsored me has come to an end and they have no qualms about letting me know. I spend my final night in South Korea at the airport on the phone with a placement agency, trying to secure another contract so I can return in a few weeks. Eventually, jet lagged and exhausted emotionally and physically, my first act on arriving in my childhood bedroom in Whitby after a fifteen hour flight home is to collapse into bed and sleep for an entire day.

When I wake up, I take the time to reflect on the path I took to get there and realize I do not have it in me to spend another year overseas. South Korea helped me survive for a year, but the grand adventure I had built it up to be failed to materialize. I had deluded myself with a narrative that covered up my true reasons for leaving Canada.

My struggle to find work in the teaching profession forced me overseas, but I crafted a story of adventure and discovery to make the transition easier. Stories are the way that we make sense of our world. Through them, we make meaning out of the events of our lives, but they do not happen in vacuum. Yet that is how they are often presented to us. All stories, we are taught, need to have a beginning, middle, and an end. But our lives are not that tidy. Everything that happens to us is the result of a web of events, some of which we cannot control and not all of which we are aware. It was only when I returned to the safety of home that my story fell apart and I began to view my time in South Korea in a different light. As I struggled to readjust to Canadian society, the new perspective I had gained during the past year changed how I related to the stories I had heard since childhood: not only did returning to Canada change the story I told myself about South Korea, but my time in South Korea changed how I understood the stories I had learned growing up in Canada.

This thesis is about stories and how a handful of Canadians made sense of their own struggles to find a place for themselves in Canada's neoliberal job market, how it led them to teach in South Korea and, how the experience of doing so changed their understanding of what it means to be Canadian.

* * *

I begin with my story and how I came to write this thesis.

In the first grade, I met the first in a succession of wonderful, caring teachers. As a child with Tourette's Syndrome, I had many problems at school that I doubt I would have been able overcome without their help. I wanted to follow their example - and still aspire to live up to them, decades later. In the tenth grade I resolved to become a teacher and did whatever I could to reach that goal. I spent my lunches tutoring, I volunteered after school, and I did co-op placements in my high school helping teachers, all in the hopes of being accepted into teacher's college. Throughout the whole university application process, I was repeatedly told by news reports and guidance counselors that teaching jobs would be easy to get considering the teacher shortage of the late 1990s and early 2000s in Ontario and the wave of baby boomers who were expected to retire around the time I planned to be certified as a teacher in 2007.

In 2002 I applied to a number of concurrent education programs. I was not accepted to any of them and thus I accepted a spot in the General Arts and Sciences program at Trent University in the hopes that I would be accepted into the consecutive education program after I graduated. That plan did not work out either but I was granted admission to teacher's college programs outside of Canada. Border colleges in New York State and universities throughout Australia competed for my money and after receiving a stack of acceptance letters, I enrolled at the University of Queensland, one of Australia's top Education faculties. Many others followed the same path: I was told

sixteen people applied for every position in the concurrent education program at Trent; many of my classmates in Australia were Canadians who had likewise tried and failed to find a spot in a Canadian teacher's college.

The cost of being an international student in Australia was almost as much as my entire undergraduate degree in Canada, but I was sure that it would be worth the expenditure in the end. Throughout, I received reassurances from faculty, friends, and media sources about the continued need for teachers and the importance of getting a university education in order to find a good job. But even at this time, the job market was changing. Unbeknownst to me, in Canada the number of unemployed youth with degrees was rising and the job market for teachers was already tightening.

I was certified with the Ontario College of Teachers in 2008 as a teacher of history and English at the intermediate and senior levels. To date, I have not worked a single day in a Canadian high school. Instead, I found myself in a world of frozen supply lists and contract and part-time positions that pitted me against hundreds of other applicants. What few supply, contract, and part-time positions came available were often taken by retired teachers who exacerbated the problem for new teachers (Brown, 2008; Alfonso and Hammer, 2010; Van Nuland, 2011). Frustrated, but unwilling to give up, I broadened my search instead.

I was lucky. Thanks to some personal connections at Durham College[1] that helped me get my foot in the door I started to work there as a part-time instructor. For a year and a half I made things work at Durham. Between this work and a part-time

[1] A post-secondary institution focused on two and three year diploma programs and a few two to four year degree programs.

tutoring job, I had enough to scrape by to make my debt payments and pay rent. It was not much, but the possibility of full-time work kept me hopeful. After all, I had an undergraduate degree and a diploma in education while the majority of full-time faculty at Durham College at the time had no university education. These qualifications alone were supposed to put me on the short-list when new positions came available. But I was not the only one to follow this path. Soon, other underemployed and unemployed graduates from many fields of study began to apply as they found their ambitions frustrated by an oversupply of graduates and an undersupply of jobs. I was joined not just by education graduates either, but a wide array of young people with knowledge and skills they could not put to use in the job market. This oversupply combined with changes in policy at not just Durham College, but many Ontario colleges that saw full-time positions replaced with multiple part-time positions led to much higher competition for the few remaining full-time openings that previously had no education requirement but almost overnight now required a master's degree as a minimum.

It would have been easier to accept this situation if at least the part-time teaching had been reliable. Instead, as contract faculty, I had to fight for my job every four months. Without the financial stability of a permanent position, it was impossible to plan for the future. In March of 2009, I was told there was no need for me in the coming summer semester and that any future work would come at a 10% pay cut. Within two months I would be unemployed and my savings would run out a month after that. My only hope of finding work in my field lay in following in the footsteps of a few friends who had taught overseas.

I followed their advice and put my resume on Dave's ESL Café,[2] one of the biggest English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching job websites. Within two days, I had thirty-six offers from recruiters all around the world trying to hire me for one-year contracts. Save for a few positions in the Middle East, they largely came from East and Southeast Asia: Japan, China, South Korea, Vietnam and Thailand. The requirements were nearly universally the same: an undergraduate degree, speak English as a first language, and be a citizen of Canada, The United States, The United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa or Ireland. Most of my offers came from South Korea. A quick crunching of numbers led me to the conclusion it was the place that would yield to greatest financial reward. I sifted through the pile of e-mails and contacted what I understood to be the best recruiting firm. After a short phone interview they set up a second phone interview with a Korean high school teacher who offered me a job in less than a day which I quickly accepted.

Most foreign teachers of non-Korean descent come to South Korea on an E-2 visa that requires an array of documents ranging from criminal background checks to apostilled degrees and transcripts.[3] Though the checks and verifications make a good show, they are really little more than a formality. Teachers with criminal records have entered the country as no one bothered to read their background checks and I was even accepted after accidentally applying with an incomplete transcript. Once all of my

[2] Dave's ESL Café (www.eslcafe.com),commonly shortened to Dave's by expatriates, has been an important job board for recruiters and ESL teachers and discussion forum for ESL teachers and students around the world since its launch in 1995. South Korean jobs make up the largest part of Dave's offerings and until recently was the only location to have its own dedicated job board.

[3] E-2 visas are issued to those teaching a foreign language in South Korea, usually for a one year period. Documents that are notarized and authenticated for international acceptance are referred to as apostilled.

documents were in hand, I was called down to the Korean Consulate in Toronto for an interview.[4] After a mere three minutes of questions, I was accepted, issued a visa, and a few days later boarded the plane for South Korea. The whole process from application to my departure from Canada took a little more than two months, all the while with the recruiter pushing to get me through the visa process as fast as possible. If not for an error on their part, the process may have taken half as long.

Even though I had decided to go overseas for purely financial reasons, when asked why I was going, I stressed that it was an adventure. A love of travel and the chance to learn from another culture became the reason for my trip, not the fear of unemployment and shame of moving back to live with my parents. I maintained this posture throughout my time in South Korea.

Life in South Korea was different than I had imagined it. Instead of immersing myself in the local culture, I found myself seeking out other expatriates for companionship. Most of my colleagues were just as lost as I was. Despite the wide variety of backgrounds and nationalities most were, like me, facing dismal job markets in their fields at home.

Once when introduced to another expatriate teacher in a Seoul café, he remarked "Not another fucking Canadian."[5] His comment revealed something I had not

[4] As of March 31, 2011, these interviews are no longer required.

[5] Foreigners working in South Korea commonly refer to themselves as expatriates or expats regardless of the length of their stay or intention to return to their home countries. Self-identified expatriates include new arrivals on short-term contracts, foreigners who have gained South Korean citizenship, and every level of permanency in between. The expatriate community is clearly structured by race and profession. The community I was a part of was largely made up of white teachers from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland. I return to the importance of race in the expatriate community in Chapter 3.

noticed: the proportion of Canadians teaching in South Korea was per capita higher than teachers from almost any other country. In the public school program I was a part of, for example, there were approximately 400 Canadians and 1000 Americans, meaning Canadians were overrepresented by a factor of four when compared to relative populations of each country.[6] I began to wonder why so many Canadians decided to make this choice.

Despite the close knit nature of the expatriate community and the commonalities I shared with other *waegukin*[7], especially fellow teachers in South Korea, it was not really a cohesive group. I found myself singled me out as different from my non-Canadian colleagues. I was seen to be distinctly Canadian. I came to learn that the values we each held influenced how we conducted everyday activities and these differences flagged us as distinct national groups.

Additionally, the places where we worked had an enormous impact on our experiences in South Korea. For example, teachers at private schools known as *hagwons*[8] quickly learned that 'teaching' really meant rote learning geared towards helping students pass university entrance exams heavily weighted towards English

[6] Exact numbers broken down by nationality and visa type are difficult to find in English. I attended an orientation seminar in 2009 hosted by the GEPIK program that handles native speaking English teachers in public high and elementary schools in Gyeonggi-do where I learned that 2.5 Americans taught for GEPIK for every one Canadian. Canadians and New Zealanders were represented in far greater numbers in the program than would be expected for their populations compared to the other five nationalities in the GEPIK program. Outside of the teaching community, Americans make up a disproportionately large part of the expat population in South Korea due in part to the presence of tens of thousands of American military personnel and their families in the country.

[7] *Waegukin* means foreigner in Korean. It is sometimes used by members of expatriate community to refer to themselves in a humorous way.

[8] A *hagwon* is a private, for-profit educational institutions that students typically attend before and after school and on weekends. While there are *hagwons* teaching a wide variety of subjects, English *hagwons* are common and employ a large number of expatriate teachers.

competency, pleasing parents and entertaining our students. Ironically, these latter outcomes were often prioritized above educational outcomes, something which native English speaking teachers found very unrewarding. Teachers also struggled against administrative disinterest in their work and endured poor working and living conditions. Native English speaking teachers contracted with public schools, like me, often had better working conditions, but we still had to fight to be taken seriously as teachers. A much smaller number of teachers were employed at universities where they received significantly better pay and more respect. But still others who taught at international schools where students of Korean and other origins were taught a variety of subjects by mostly foreign teachers viewed their positions as both the most challenging and the most rewarding. I came to understand that the context in which my community of expatriate teachers taught had profound effects on how well we integrated into Korean society, how we regarded the work that we did, and the stories we would later tell about our experiences.

When I left for South Korea, I expected to learn more about the world beyond Canada and grow as a person. I was fully prepared for culture shock and looked forward to the tensions and challenges that I expected my new life to bring. I knew I would need to be adaptable. Living in South Korea brought all of these things. While I expected that my time abroad would change how I related to and understood the rest of the world, I did not predict how it would change the way how I felt about Canada and what it meant to be Canadian.

Life in South Korea challenged many of my preconceptions about the world in unexpected ways. Before I went to South Korea, I had nothing with which to compare my life in Canada. But immersing myself in the world of South Korea made me start to recognize and appreciate things about Canada that I had taken for granted, such as our social safety net, understandings of privacy, and clean air as well as the privileges afforded to me a white male in Canada. At the same time, it allowed me to critically think about the norms and values of Canadian society that had gone previously unnoticed by me. Many of these differences were most obvious to me in mundane everyday activities. For example, to me it seemed as if the Koreans were obsessed with fighting airborne diseases with masks, but constantly spread germs by sharing food and drinks. These behaviours contrast with the Canadian fear of germ transmission by touch and our now-commonplace obsession with hand sanitizers, while very little is done to prevent airborne disease transmission. Other examples challenged the entire framework upon which Canadian society had been built such as the ridiculousness of our love of the automobile which leads to shocking inadequacies in Canadian public transportation systems, particularly when compared to pedestrian friendly South Korea, with its comprehensive public transportation network. My reflections on the contrast between such taken-for-granted elements of everyday life highlighted both the absurdity (and the value) of both traditions to me.

But I learned that not all in my social world valued my observations. When I raised many of my newfound critiques of Canada, my friends and family at home were unable to comprehend what I was saying. But others who had lived overseas for a

significant amount of time could connect with my views. Ironically, I started to feel much closer to immigrants to Canada than I had previously. Other experiences helped fuel my connections. In South Korea I came to know what it was like to be regarded as an exotic outsider who was not allowed to become part of the mainstream, to be a victim of racist behaviour and to know the anxiety of being a bystander when my friends were targeted by nativist extremists. These troubling incidents helped me to notice discrimination faced by immigrants to Canada that I had never noticed before that contradicted my previous understanding of Canada as a welcoming and equal country.

Furthermore, upon my return I encountered a still very limited job market which made reintegrating into life in Canada difficult. I had found financial stability in South Korea, but it was to be fleeting. My return to Canada left me in the same position of precarious underemployment that had prompted my move to South Korea. The job market was, if anything, worse. Each year, another batch of teacher candidates graduated to compete for the few jobs available. I returned to Durham College as a part-time instructor,[9] but even that job was in jeopardy as again, every four months my contract came up for renewal. As it had in 2009, my contract was not renewed in the summer of 2011 and I fled to South Korea a second time. This time there was no illusion that I was there on an adventure to learn and grow. I was there because there was nothing for me in Canada as even temporary placement agencies found it difficult to

[9] College teaching is highly competitive and instructors are encouraged to seek out opportunities in as many schools and subjects as possible. In my time at Durham College I have taught in the schools of Media, Art and Design and Interdisciplinary Studies and Employment Services. My students ranged in from upper level high school students through first, second, and third year college students. I have taught courses on history, communications, sociology, computers and research skills and have pitched courses in Canadian studies, English literature, and gender studies.

find work for individuals such as me. For the foreseeable future it seemed that my life would continue to be a series of short-term, part-time contracts laden with uncertainty in Canada. Thus I was still unable to plan for the future, and not just because of financial insecurity, but because of uncertainty about which continent I would be living on every few months.

Credential inflation continued to plague me. Now a Master's degree was required for all full-time and many part-time college teaching jobs that I could have applied for, with most job postings noting that they preferred applicants have PhDs. These were the same positions that required no university education when I started teaching in 2006. With no other choice, I applied for and was accepted into the Master's programme in Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies program at Trent University with the intention of exploring the only topic I could think of: to figure out what had happened with my life.

I learned that the situation I found myself in was the result of a series of complex changes throughout the world centered on two major trends: globalization and neoliberalism. Both go hand in hand as many interests fight for deregulation in the developed world in order to compete with countries with lower wages and weaker safety nets. Neoliberal governments as early as the 1980s aimed to reduce the size of the social safety net, to shift risk from employers to employees, to make labour more flexible, and to commodify elements of society that were not previously considered commodities (Teeple, 2000). All of these factors contribute to the precarious position of young Canadians in 2014.

The effects of neoliberal policies on the decline of industry and thus the loss of good jobs in manufacturing, and the rise of the service sector have been the subject of much scrutiny (see for example, Livingstone 1999, 2009). But throughout the 1990s and very early 2000s, the teaching profession was seen as largely untouched by this decrease in employment security and a decline in benefits: teaching positions were at that time still mostly full-time, secure, relatively prestigious, well-paying with good benefits and pensions. But the first decade of the 2000s saw the realities of neoliberalism steadily creep into the teaching profession and post-secondary institutions. Neoliberal ideology is centered on the belief that the free market can meet the needs of society better and more efficiently than government can and that people are, in the words of Gary Teeple, "mere exchangers of goods and services" (2000, p. 85). Reductions in government funding and the encroachment of neoliberal ideology into the education sector has led to education being seen as a commodity to be sold and resulted in more teacher candidates throughout Canada, even as student enrollments decreased in elementary and high schools due to a declining national birth rate. Yet the rhetoric I heard as a university student has been repeated to me by every new cohort of students I study beside at Trent University: go to teacher's college and by the time you graduate, the baby boomers will have retired to make room for you. The issue does not just affect aspiring teachers as many of my colleagues at Trent and students at Durham College repeat the belief that a college or university education will guarantee a brighter economic future and a more satisfying career. While this may be accurate in many cases, students imagine that a more satisfying career includes a well-paying, long-term

and full-time job with benefits. Yet a large number of graduates from a wide array of degree programs have found themselves unemployed or underemployed and directionless in the early years of the 21st century, fighting for fewer good jobs than were available to their parents. With so many young people following the same path towards dubious employment prospects, what future do they face when they come to the realization that the promise of a good and secure job may well likely remain unrealized?

Many Canadians grow up with the story that life will offer them endless possibilities, stability, security and opportunities for growth. But the neoliberal world has revealed to many young people that this story may not mirror their reality. Faced with unexpected difficulties and a future where they may make less and have fewer social safety net benefits than their parents, these narratives are being picked apart. My experiences and the expatriate teachers I interviewed are representative of the disenchantment experienced by many educated young Canadians as they struggle to find a place within the current labour market, trying to launch a life that they assumed would unfold for them as they matured into young adults.

Ironically, the same forces of globalization and neoliberalism that have led to problems at home have helped create the market for native English speaking teachers allowing for the temporary stability I came to know. The neoliberal policies implemented in South Korea throughout the late 1990s and 2000s led to an increase in precarious jobs for South Korean youth and an highlighted the importance of communication skills focused on the internet and the capacity to function in English—

the language of global business—to improve the career and economic prospects for Korean youth, creating an increased demand for English-speaking language teachers in South Korea (Song, 2007, p. 333-338).

Methodology

The methodology I used for my research relied heavily on the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1998, 2006) who have done much to develop narrative inquiry within the social sciences, especially in the field of education. To them stories shape our lives:

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experiences of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful (2006, p. 477).

It is through the stories we tell ourselves and others that we find our place in the world. Such was the role of the stories I told myself about my experiences in South Korea, and as I learned, stories were played the same role for those I interviewed.

To Clandinin and Connelly (2006), there are three main factors that influence stories that an interviewer needs to keep in mind when designing and analyzing interviews: the flow of time before and after the event; the social context that influences the stories he hears; and, the storyteller's understanding of the location in which their story takes place.

Analyzing stories in a vacuum risks misinterpreting them entirely. While the researcher who collects stories will by definition interpret the stories he hears in ways different from the person telling them. Paying careful attention to the context of the

narrative and the place each story has in the larger, life story of the storyteller and in the society he or she lives, can capture a richer understanding of what was being said and what it means.

I initially attempted to contact expat teachers who taught in South Korea whom I did not know to take part in my research but all of these efforts proved unsuccessful.[10] I thus turned to interviewing some expat teachers I knew, and from there to adopt snowball sampling. I asked my friends who were either in or had been to South Korea for contacts who would be willing to take part in my research. They passed along my information to people they knew who then had the option to contact me or not. For all my interviewees, but especially for the ones who were previously known to me, I have done my best to reflect on how my relationship with them may have influenced the interviews, both before they were conducted and after as I coded the transcripts.

Using these methods I was able to connect with fourteen current and former native English speaking Canadians who taught in South Korea. Of these fourteen, seven had either gone to teacher's college or worked in the education field prior to going abroad, while two more planned to go to teacher's college when they returned to Canada. They went to South Korea in order to improve their chances of getting into

[10] I reached out in three different ways to this community via the internet: through the Seoulpodcast, an English language podcast hosted by long-time expatriates in South Korea aimed at helping current and prospective ESL teachers in South Korea and frequently comments on South Korean news and pop culture from an expatriate perspective; 10 Magazine, an English language online magazine serving the expatriate community in South Korea since 2008 which can be accessed at www.10mag.com; and the online forum at the website Dave's ESL Café. An advertisement placed in 10 Magazine resulted in no responses and my attempts to take part in a recording of the Seoulpodcast fell through when the creators did not produce a podcast during the period I had available to conduct my interviews. The post in Dave's ESL Café was met with a single respondent who requested $200 for an interview. I could not afford such costs nor did they seem appropriate.

teacher's college at home. The other eight of my interviewees were mostly recent university graduates with non-teaching related undergraduate degrees. The earliest interviewee arrived in South Korea in 2003 and while three are still teaching in South Korea and one is teaching in another country, the rest have returned to Canada. My interviewees had a wide variety of teaching experiences in South Korea including positions at universities, public elementary and secondary schools, *hagwons*, international schools, and summer camps. Interviewees generally had one to three years of experience teaching in South Korea, often separated by returns to Canada of several months to a year. Those with more than one year of experience had frequently taught at multiple types of institutions in South Korea. They were a young group ranging in age from twenty-one to thirty-two when they first arrived in South Korea. Interviewees tended to be on the younger side of that scale, with all but two aged between twenty-one and twenty-six. More details about individual interviewees can be found in Appendix 2.

I developed a series of open-ended questions (Appendix 1) to frame my semi-structured interviews. My questions were intended to draw out details about the interviewees' experiences in South Korea, the context of their lives in Canada before and after their sojourns abroad, to find out about the decision making process that led them to go to South Korea, and subsequently their readjustment experience upon their return to Canada. My interviews were all conducted over Skype and recorded. This format allowed me to include Canadians from as many different locations as possible as well as teachers still in South Korea. Participants selected a pseudonym for my use.

Additionally, the names of specific institutions, people, and companies have been changed. The recordings were transcribed then coded with particular attention paid to common story elements.

Thesis Structure

This thesis has two main themes. One examines how some young university graduates have adapted to neoliberal realities by making the decision to go overseas to find employment, to gain professional employment experience, intending to eventually return to Canada to become a productive member of society. Most importantly, I will consider how my interviewees interpreted their choice to move to South Korea and what the narratives they created about that experience say about their place both in Canada and South Korea. I intend to put a human face on the mounting data—both qualitative and quantitative—on the difficulties faced by young university-educated Canadians today who far too often find themselves underemployed and unemployed.

Secondly, I examine how the perceptions of my interviewees about being Canadian were changed by their experiences as expatriate teachers in South Korea. Many came to see themselves as markedly different from other expatriates they came to know, and in unanticipated ways from South Koreans. Repatriation was unexpectedly difficult, both in terms of the interactions interviewees had with others and in their return to the same neoliberal job market that left Canada to escape. In trying to reconcile the narratives they grew up with about Canada with their experiences at home

and abroad, these teachers created new narratives that helped them to make sense of their place at home in Canada.

Chapter Two situates these expat teachers in the neoliberal job market of the post 2000 era. I discuss the rise of neoliberalism both in Canada and beyond, the state of the Canadian job market in that period, and the role that it played in the decision of those I interviewed to teach in South Korea. I argue that in the current labour market education has become commodified compounding the dissonance between expectations and realities in career prospects. I conclude by analyzing how returning to the same Canadian job market after the temporary stability and independence offered by their experience in South Korea affected interviewees.

Chapter Three examines some of the scholarly discussion about the tensions and ambiguities of what it means to be 'Canadian', leading to the heart of my discussion which focuses on how expatriates redefined what it means to be Canadian through their overseas experience. They came to understand what it meant to be racialized and excluded from the mainstream. I conclude with reflections on how the difficult repatriation process my interviewees experienced contributed to dissonance between the Canada they imagined while in South Korea and the reality to which they returned.

In Chapter Four I argue that contradictions in the dominant narratives that these expatriate teachers that had known growing up in Canada that were revealed by their South Korean experiences forced them to create new stories that redefined themselves and their country.

Chapter 2
No Other Option: The Neoliberal Job Market and Expatriation

My journey to South Korea began in March of 2009 with a pair of memos from the college where I taught. My associate dean had no courses for me to teach for the summer semester and when I returned to work in the fall all contract faculty would have their pay cut by 10%. Even before the cut, I could barely keep up on student debt payments and rent. There was no way I could survive on my own for any longer. I had hoped that life would unfold differently. I was left with two options: move back into my parent's house at the age of 26 and try to survive off of temp agency placements and 4-month teaching contracts with no guarantee of security, or follow in the footsteps of an old university friend who went overseas to teach.

I put my resume online at Dave's ESL Cafe and by the time I woke up the next morning, thirty-six placement agencies and schools had contacted me, more than half of which were based out of South Korea. For the first time in my life, my skills were in demand and within a month I had chosen a school to work for in Gyeonggi-do.[11]

During my year in South Korea I enjoyed the sense of independence that came from living on my own and knowing that I had enough in my bank account to pay next month's rent. When my contract ended I returned to Canada, I fell into the same trap of short-term, poorly-paid contract teaching I had been in before I left. Four years after my return to Canada, the situation has changed little.

[11] Gyeonggi surrounds the capital of Seoul and is the most populous and densely populated province in South Korea. It is a very important economic center and home to much of South Korea's industry and food production.

I heard similar stories from Canadian colleagues in South Korea, and years later from those I interviewed as part of the research for this thesis. Though the specifics varied, the same themes cut through them all: their hopes of a stable and secure future were dashed by the difficulty of finding reliable, well-paying work in Canada that led to constant uncertainty.

This chapter examines how national and global trends encourage young Canadians to take jobs teaching ESL in South Korea. Specifically, I examine how neoliberal policies have created a climate where economic growth is prized above all other goals ironically resulting in a job market with reduced employment opportunities in Canada. In this climate, the value of further education as a means to get a job has gradually eclipsed other beneficial outcomes of post-secondary education in the minds of many Canadians. But as the young Canadian university graduates I interviewed have found, the utility of education in the job market has actually been reduced and opportunities to use skills and knowledge gained through education in the workplace have shrunk, especially in comparison to the volume of graduates. This scenario, prevents students from obtaining the prestigious, stable, well-paying jobs they were led to believe education would help them achieve. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the ways expatriates understand their time overseas and the language they use to frame it. Their reflections challenge the belief that hard work, education, and flexibility are rewarded with careers in a neoliberal job market.

Employment in a Neoliberal World

In the 1970s a discourse and political agenda that advocated that everything possible should be done to encourage economic prosperity and growth through market competitiveness grew to dominate Great Britain and the United States during the 1980s (Beach, 2010, p. 551-552). This idea formed the nucleus of what has come to be called neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism is a set of political beliefs centered on the conviction that the only legitimate purpose of the state is to protect individual, and especially commercial, liberty and strong property rights. The role of the state, therefore, should be reduced in size and scope (Thorson & Lie, 2006, p. 14). As a result, market principles have since then come to have an increasingly powerful influence on all aspects of life. In this climate, neoliberal governments and corporate policies have progressively eroded the Canadian welfare state leading to an overall reduction in job security, benefits, and wages.

The popularity of neoliberal ideas arose as a result of shifts in the global economic system. The rise of computer technology, especially its effects on communication, has led to corporations that are no longer tied to national interests, but who now stretch across the globe (Teeple, 2000). It has become easier to move production and information around the world, giving multinational corporations to flexibility to move their business from country to country based on the benefits different countries around the world can offer. This internationalization of capital has many benefits for multinational corporations, but it has resulted in an economic climate

that is extremely competitive for both nations and individuals. Now, workers don't just compete with workers in other parts of their countries, but with workers all around the world.

Neoliberalism argues that flexibility is required to compete. Regulations, social spending, and government provided services—core elements of what has been called the 'welfare state'—are anathema to neoliberal ideology as they increase higher costs and reduce a company's flexibility. The welfare state represented state intervention in an attempt to mitigate conflict between workers and business and comprised important programs that affected the labour market. The welfare state includes a wide variety of programs and policies, including but not limited regulations on wages and working hours, better working conditions, pensions, disability payments, welfare, and social programs such as health and education (Teeple, 2000, p. 15).

With scores of countries to choose from with lower operating costs than Canada, corporations often apply pressure to decrease social programs and worker protections by playing countries off of each other. The labour market it seems has become a race to the bottom. The values of equality, choice, and individuality are used to justify the rollback of social programs. Rather than focus on the collective good out of a sense of responsibility to the nation's citizens, citizens are increasingly told that they have a responsibility to the state to be independent from it; it is their personal responsibility to have a job, to look after their own needs, and thus contribute to the economy (Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011, p. 906). Standard rhetoric argues that the global spread of

neoliberalism will make it difficult for those who refuse such ideas to retain and attract business and investment (Lennox, 2007, p. 1017).

But the welfare state has historically formed an important component of Canadian identity and pride (Brodie, 2002; Johnston et al, 2010). Canada withstood neoliberal influence for longer than some of its stronger neighbours. While neoliberalism became dominant in the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher and the United States under Ronald Reagan, it was not until Jean Chretien in the 1990s that Canada began to chip away at the welfare state. Since then, there has been an attempt to refocus Canadian society on entrepreneurship as a means to solve issues of social security and national unity through a strong economy (Brodie, 2002, p. 387-391). But while neoliberalism states that the free market, without regulation, will create more jobs, and of better quality, it often replaces good jobs with bad jobs as working conditions and job security are undermined (Teeple, 2000, p. 78, 88).

As a result of neoliberal policies, employment rates may be comparable to the 1980s, but the jobs available to youth today are often lower paying, offer less security, fewer benefits, and reduced hours. Kalleberg (2009, 2011) and Standing (2012) connect these major changes in the labour market to the shifting of risk from employers to employees, something achieved by hiring larger portions of employees on part-time, temporary or contract basis, facilitating increased labour flexibility for the employer. The theory is that businesses with a flexible workforce can react to changing conditions quickly and effectively (Kalleberg, 2011, p. 83; Herd, Lightman & Mitchell, 2009, p. 129-130). The disadvantages of this flexibility are borne largely by workers. In the past

employees could count on full-time jobs with anticipated job security over several decades (Livingstone, 1999, 2009). Even when full-time employees retire, there is a tendency now to replace them with several part-time employees or turn the position into a limited-term contract position. This has become a problem even in fields that are perceived to have strong unions and high job security, or where profit is not seen as the goal, such as teaching. New high school and elementary teachers find it increasingly difficult with each passing year to move from contract and supply work to full-times positions (*Transition to Teaching*, 2012, p. 3).

All of the above trends combine to create an extremely difficult labour market for young job seekers. Some may actively seek out jobs that are part-time, contract or short term for the potential freedoms such 'flexibilities' allow, but a growing proportion of the workforce is involuntarily working part-time (Livingstone, 2009, p. 68; Mills, 2004, p. 132; Statistics Canada, 2013c). Assessments based on unemployment rates alone overlook what the shift from 'good' jobs to 'bad' jobs means for the lives of individuals and communities, just as they overlook that job growth has been increasingly coming in the form of part-time work over full-time, and from self-employment over paid employment (Moore & Mueller, 2002, p. 791)

Involuntary part time, temporary jobs, and many contract positions are representative of a type of precarious employment: work that is insecure and poorly paid (Standing, 2011, 2012). These positions lack the job and income security that is associated with the idea of a 'good 'job (Standing, 2011, p. 10). Workers in these types of jobs often go from one low-paid position to another without advancing in their

careers (Livingstone, 1999; McKay et al, 2012, p. 7-8). These jobs can create what Standing (2011, p. 48-49) calls the precarity trap: people stuck unable to break the cycle of poor jobs. Bujold and Fournier's (2008) research on precarious employment identified a list of negative impacts of such employment on Canadians including burnout, the impression of not being respected or belonging, and strain on relationships with friends and family. Precarity has a wide-ranging impact reaching across Canadians of all genders, races, and ages. Research suggests that few groups remain unscathed. Secure employment potential is even more elusive for groups as diverse as young women (Amine, 2012; Caragata, 2003), visible minorities and migrants (Annisette & Trivedi, 2013; Dean & Wilson, 2009) older workers (see also McKay et al, 2012; Standing, 2011, 2012) and white-collar and prime age males (Kalleberg, 2011, p. 86, 98).

Hand in hand with job precarity is underemployment. Underemployment includes any situation where a worker's ability and potential is wasted. Livingstone (1999, p.53-55) identified six dimensions of underemployment: a talent use gap, where those from low socio-economic status are denied education and jobs to put their talents to use; structural unemployment where there is a chronic gap between jobs and job seekers; involuntary reduced employment; a credential gap where job seekers are unable to find jobs that utilize their credentials; a performance gap in which workers are unable to apply their knowledge and skills in their work; and subjective underemployment which occurs when individuals believe their skills are not being properly utilized. All of these experiences are largely the result of systemic failures as risk is shifted from employers to employees. Businesses layoff or fire workers in large

numbers during hard times, but even in profitable years many corporations cut jobs in order to maximize profits, often by simply not renewing the contracts of employees who have no capacity for recourse in the face of their job-loss (Standing, 2012).

Underemployment can have serious negative impacts on physical and mental health triggered by ongoing stress and uncertainty (Dean & Wilson, 2009; Graham et al, 2009; Quinlan, 2012). In North America one's employment is central to one's identity as it is frequently the primary way that individuals are positioned in the economic and social systems of society (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 1, 2011, p. 2). A series of short-term, temporary, or part-time jobs do not add up to a career in unrelated fields do not add up to a career and precarious workers often suffer from a lack of belonging (Bujold & Fournier, 2008, p. 342; Standing, 2012). The lack of identity and stability many young people suffer stands in stark contrast to the prestige and respect that goes along with permanent, professional jobs like teaching. But in growing numbers, university graduates are not obtaining these jobs and instead are forced to survive as part of the precarious workforce, working to live and frequently pay student debts through contract and part-time positions, frequently in the service sector without any of the recognition they had hoped for. Almost none of my interviewees managed to achieve a full-time permanent job in their field, teaching or otherwise, before they left for South Korea.

As wages and hours go down, and the downtime between contracts becomes more frequent, the amount of tax revenue governments are able to draw from goes down. As a result, governments at all levels are forced to the size and scope of the

welfare state (Teeple, 2000, p. 78). In Canada, there has been a reduction in many aspects of the welfare state, particularly those that are seen as less universal or as benefitting those who the public view as undeserving of support. Public support for old age pensions, health care, and education remain high but support has shrunk for what are seen as programs that only help select individuals as the national conversation moves from universal support to punishing those who do not work (Matthews & Erickson, 2005, p. 388-392). The demonization of young Canadians, especially their characterization as lazy whiners in the popular imagination and has done much to alienate youth and allow for policies to be put in place that specifically target young people such as artificially separating student debt from commercial debt which made it harder to discharge student debt (Wright, 2004, p. 154, 167-169).

The dismantling of the welfare state in Canada compounds the difficulties faced by workers in precarious jobs (Herd, Lightman, & Mitchell, 2009; McKay et al, 2012). Changes to the national Employment Insurance (EI) program provide a good example. Many temporary and contract jobs do not last long enough for workers to ever receive EI, while part-time workers never become eligible in light of recent EI policy changes (Fuller, 2011; Mills, 2004). The proliferation of part-time and contract work, especially among the young, therefore results in not only reduced wage income for youth but removes other sources of income that could help them subsist independently while seeking another job.

The unemployed or underemployed are frequently thought to lack of moral character, have a bad work ethic, or are simply insufficiently educated or trained (Herd,

Lightman, & Mitchell, 2009, p. 134-134, 144; Graham et al, 2009, p. 2-3; Standing, 2011, p. 45). Such notions fuel the idea that unemployment is the result of personal failings rather than systemic problems or corporate greed. Government programs that focus on how individuals need to change their attitudes and acquire more education in order to solve their employment troubles reinforce them. Such programs assume job seekers lack basic skills and work ethics (Herd, Lightman, & Mitchell, 2009). Many of my interviewees internalized this rhetoric and linked education with upward mobility, as have many other young people (Wright, 2004, p. 174). Canadians have become the most educated population in the world, but as many have since discovered, hard work and education are often not enough to earn a job in a neoliberal economy that was good enough to give them the stability or income previous generations enjoyed.

The Commodification of Education and the Ruse of Progress

> … it scares me because you hear about all these people getting let out of university with their teaching degrees … [but] they come out with no jobs. Janelle

As Janelle observed, young people are entering into an economy that has decreased opportunities for her cohort as a whole. Having been brought up in a country that emphasizes opportunity and progress towards a better, more prosperous society, many young Canadians find themselves increasingly disillusioned as they fail to "progress" towards this ideal. My interviewees' experiences reveal the idea of continual progress to be a ruse. Instead, their lives resemble Charles Taylor's description of the flow of history, "Modern history is not unilinear, not an inexorable progress or decline, or a progress which entails decline. Rather, it is made up of movements and counter-

movements in which typically modern dangers have bred typically modern defenses" (1993, p. 109). Taylor's view of progress runs contrary to what many Canadians grow up assuming. There is an expectation in Canada that children will experience better lives than their parents, just as their parents and grandparents experienced a better standard of living and quality of life than their ancestors. As Taylor says, there is no guarantee of progress, and today's youth find new dangers in the neoliberal job market. Constant messages from the media, government, post-secondary institutions and family contribute to the idea that education will provide a strong defense for young people against the dangers of the neoliberal job market. But the experiences of many young people who follow this path reveal the bright future education is supposed to lead them to is a ruse.

In recent years industry and government have exerted pressure on higher education institutions to focus on the development of human capital and job preparedness (Standing, 2011, p. 68; Zeichner, 2010, p. 1545). As a result, education has been reframed by an increasing number of politicians and post-secondary institutions primarily as a means to help individuals gain employment and less so as a way to gain knowledge and grow as a person and citizen (Kaye, Bickel & Birtwistle, 2006). Ironically, in the current Canadians labour market, the value and utility of education has actually gone down even as its price increases (Habib, 2013).

As I suggested above one of the most insidious dimensions of underemployment is the credential gap. The credential gap is closely related to credential inflation. As degrees and other credentials become more common, their value becomes diluted

(Standing, 2011, p. 70). According to Statistics Canada (2013c), the number of university graduates has increased rapidly since the 1980s, while the percentage of employed graduates in the Canadian labour force with a bachelor's degree decreased from 81% in 1990 to 74.8% in 2012, meaning that the likelihood of a person with a bachelor's degree being employed has gone down significantly since 1990. Prospects for Master's graduates declined even more sharply, with an employment rate that dropped from 85.1% to 75.4% in the same period. A job market oversaturated with educated workers has led to further credential inflation as more graduates compete for fewer jobs requiring the skills they have learned.

Research has shown that a much greater proportion of jobs in all sectors, but especially in the industrial and service sector, now require undergraduate degrees or college diplomas (Livingstone, 1999, p.74; 2009). In fact, Livingstone (2009, p. 92) found that in the period from 1983 to 2004, the percentage of jobs requiring these qualification rose from 28% to 45% resulting in many having to invest in years of university education just to get what used to be entry level jobs requiring only a high school diploma. However despite the increased demand for higher education, the supply of educated workers has far exceeded it. Looking at credential mismatches alone, underemployment rose from 25% in 1983 to 31% in 2004 (Livingstone, 2009, p. 93). Having a university education has become necessary while the economic payoffs for the investment of time, energy and resources in obtaining it have decreased. Furthermore, the focus on the utility of education in the establishing a career has de-emphasized other benefits of postsecondary education.

New Teachers and the Canadian Job Market

> I could either go to Jeju[12] [to teach] or go up North to Nunavut. So obviously I chose to go back to Korea.
> Carmen

Newly trained high school and elementary teachers formed an important subset of my interviewees. Out of my fourteen interviewees, seven had trained as teachers in Canada before leaving to teach in South Korea. Their experiences in South Korea differed from those of the eight interviewees who graduated from other university programs.

New teachers have been hit hard by the realities of underemployment and unemployment in Canada, but in different ways than other graduates. Unlike workers attempting to find employment elsewhere, education graduates are attempting to enter into a field with limitations defined more by the number of school-aged children than the needs of employers and the declining student population means fewer jobs.[13] Yet despite the relative stability of teaching positions, more and more young Canadians trained as teachers are unable to find work in their field and find themselves cobbling together a living from other sources of often precarious employment (*Transition to Teaching*, 2003-2013).[14] Every year since 2002, the job prospects of teachers throughout Canada have gone steadily downward (*Transition to Teaching*, 2003-2013). Yet the

[12] A subtropical island province of South Korea.

[13] In Ontario, where many of my interviewees came from, the number of students enrolled in Ontario's publicly funded school boards shrinks significantly with younger grades (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013)

[14] The best available figures documenting the job outcomes of newly accredited teachers are produced by the Ontario College of Teachers and are found in the annual *Transition to Teaching* reports from 2003-2013. Their figures are limited to the province of Ontario, but interviewees reported similar outcomes, if not worse ones, in other provinces. The trends cited in this instance are present in all eleven *Transition to Teaching* documents from 2003-2013.

number of teachers being trained across the country has actually gone up (Statistics Canada, 2013b). Two of my interviewees, Janelle and Waldo came from Nova Scotia and wanted to teach there. Yet Nova Scotia is one province which provides a good example of the disjuncture between teacher training and teacher-demand. In Nova Scotia the number of children aged 17 and under decreased from 220,069 in 1996 to 169,199 in 2012. Yet the number of students enrolled in university Education programs in that province rose from a low of 1,761 in the 1996-1997 academic year to over 3,000 in the 2008-2009 with only a slight drop to 2,676 in 2011-2012.

If the job market for teaching is so bleak, why do so many university graduates line up to become teachers? Many see it as a way to do meaningful work and give back to their community (*Transition to Teaching,* 2012, p. 41). Others seek to become teachers based on the advice of guidance counselors, family, schools, and media. Yet in a neoliberal climate schools face increasing pressures to cut budgets and raise revenues, feeling pressured to find market driven solutions to reductions in government funding (Shoveller, Elliot, & Johnson, 2005, p. 1; Van Nuland, 2011, p. 415). In this climate universities open new teacher's colleges or increase the number of positions in existing ones, regardless of the demand for teachers in order to improve their tuition revenues to make up for cuts in government funding (Zeichner, 2010). But by 2013 the issue of too many teacher graduates had become so severe that the province of Ontario recently introduced legislation that would reduce the number of teacher's college spots (Alphonso, Morrow, & Bradshaw, 2013). The bill does nothing to address the enormous oversupply of teachers already in the job market and will likely prove insufficient to curb

the number of teachers certified in Ontario every year. Many young people who were refused entry to teacher's college in the last decade were so convinced that teaching was the right career for them that they applied to international universities. The teaching job market in Canada faces increased competition from graduates returning from other countries, especially from Australia and the United States. Even if the policy did solve the issue in this instance, teaching is far from the only profession to face an oversupply and government micromanagement of one, or even many fields, would do little to alleviate structural problems with the entire Canadian education system and job market, as well as the attitudes that encourage students to become teachers.

There are several important factors contributing to the disconnect between the supply of teachers and the demands of the labour market. In the very early years of the 21st century, many teacher candidates—and I include myself here—had heard that there would be a wave of retiring teachers just around the corner. But this failed to materialize in part because potential retirees were staying in their jobs longer (Van Nuland, 2011, p. 415). Many retirees started to practice double-dipping: that is they retired from teaching full-time, but continued to take part-time, contracts, and supply teaching jobs that historically were stepping stones for new graduates (Van Nuland, 2011, p. 416). Additionally when positions do come open due to retirement, there is not always a need to fill them as across Canada, the number of school aged children dropped due to the declining birthrate (OECD, 2011, p. 63; Van Nuland, 2011, p. 415). Strangely, the region with the greatest drop in students, the Atlantic Provinces, is home to the largest increase in the number of teachers trained. Only three provinces, Ontario,

Alberta, and British Columbia, have seen the number of enrollments in elementary and high school rise, yet British Columbia and Ontario have still trained far more teachers than are needed to cover this growth in the student population (Statistics Canada, 2013e, 2013f).

Some provincial teacher organizations keep detailed quantitative data on the types of jobs that newly accredited teachers are able to find. The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) annually publishes the *Transition to Teaching* document which includes information on the numbers of unemployed and underemployed teachers drawn from surveys of accredited teachers in Ontario. For the period 2002 and 2011 the OCT recorded that the number of newly accredited teachers finding full-time work and the number finding any kind of teaching work has gone down every year. In 2002 93.3% of teachers accredited had jobs within a year, 74.3% of them full-time, but in 2011 only 14% graduating cohort had full-time work within a year, and 37% had found no employment as teachers. As a result 29% of new teachers were working in other occupations to make ends meet. Sixteen percent of those found work outside of the province, many going overseas especially to South Korea, China, and the United Kingdom.[15]

On the rare chances that interviewees were able to find work in Canada, they were often in locations or situations viewed as less desirable than the positions they took in South Korea. Often, they were in remote locations in the North that appeared to many teachers as just as isolated from friends and family as South Korea, but without

[15] I was unable to locate any reliable statistics in English on the number of Canadians who went to each country to teach.

the prestige and respect that comes with international travel. Familiarity with South Korea made the decision even easier for expatriates taking additional contracts overseas, hence the ease with which Carmen chose Jeju over Nunavut.

With the a sizable number of teacher's college graduates unable to obtain work in teaching, especially the stable, well-paying and unionized full-time positions that they hoped to achieve, frustrated trained teachers have been forced to find work elsewhere to make ends meet. In the case of my interviewees, this has meant the part-time and contract minimum wage jobs that can result in the precarity trap described above.

Taking such a job when a teacher graduate has just spent four or more years in postsecondary education to become a trained professional is a source of frustration, especially given the stability and security of teaching jobs compared to the jobs they end up working. Many unemployed teachers decide to pursue Master's degrees, frequently in Education, in an effort to get ahead in the overcrowded job market that can often compound the problems of student debt and delayed entry into the job market (Mills, 2004, p. 132-134; Zeichner, 2010, p. 1545). In such a competitive field, many teachers seek out overseas positions as an opportunity to practice their profession and achieve some measure of the self-sufficiency they had anticipated that a job as a teacher would bring.

The English Language and Identity: A Commodity in South Korea

> They don't trust their own Korean [teachers] … they demand expats to come to fulfil their thirst for learning the language.
> Carlee

The same neoliberal policies that helped deprive graduates of both teacher's colleges and university more broadly of 'good' jobs has opened up opportunities for ESL teaching opportunities overseas. Fluency in the English language has become a valuable skill in many parts of the world (Jeon, 2009, p. 234). With the English language positioned as a resource, as a commodity important for individuals and nation-states to compete, there has been a global drive to obtain fluency in English. In 1995 in South Korea there was a shift in public policy aimed to increase English skills to improve the country's global competitiveness (Jeon, 2012, p. 239-242). These policies were expanded throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, prompting a steady increase the number of teachers of English recruited to come to South Korea. South Korea requires native English speaking teachers from one of seven countries, each with large Caucasian populations, and not the remaining fifty-three sovereign states where English is an official language. This policy speaks to particular biases. Native English speaking teachers are often hired on the basis of their national identity, not necessarily on the basis of their training or skills as teachers (Jeon, 2009, 2012). I will explore the roles of race, culture, and nationality for native English language teachers in South Korea in greater depth in Chapter 3.

While overseas teaching positions are full-time, professional positions, and for trained teachers provide valuable work experience in their field, they are problematic. They are only contract positions and often unrelated to expatriate's prior education or

intended career path. They are, in fact, examples of precarious work and have some of the hallmarks of underemployment. Employment remains insecure as employers can cancel an expatriate's job contract and their visa at any time. There is little chance for advancement or a permanent position, especially in the public sector (Cho, 2012, p. 232) leading to the frequent necessity of lateral moves to different locations. Regardless of the instability of ESL teaching, many Canadians go overseas to do it.

Adventure and Fulfillment or Economic Necessity?

> It's a new adventure. My contract will be over in August next year, 2013. So wherever I go after this is going to be a new adventure … But I really don't know – it's kind of exciting because for four years I've been here and it's been this constant thing in my life, living in Korea, teaching English … And it's exciting not to know … if I'll be in Canada or go to another country or do something else [next].
> Madison

Native English speaking teachers are economic migrants of a type that Standing (2011, p. 90-92) calls 'circulants': migrants who go not as settlers, but as itinerants looking for earnings and experiences they can take with them when they return home. But despite the economic realities of their travels, many native English speaking teachers adopt the mindset of voluntourists. They leave to seek out personal growth, see the world, and make a difference. Having a tourist mindset makes sense. Being a tourist is considered to be character forming, fostering a sense of independence, both things that are denied if one's career trajectory seems stymied. Voluntourists go abroad in order to 'find themselves' and get job training, both consistent to the needs of the increasing number of underemployed and alienated youth (Tiesson & Heron, 2012, p. 3). They also travel to escape personal troubles and failures (Chen & Chen, 2011, p. 436).

Despite the paychecks enjoyed by native English speaking teachers, like voluntourists they desire to make a contribution by helping their students. Many who trained to be teachers were especially motivated to go overseas by such sentiments. However, the dissonance between the reality of overseas teaching jobs where helping students is not always the goal of the school makes this mindset problematic, as I discuss below.

The economic and cultural atmosphere of Canada provides fertile ground for South Korean recruiters. Tiessen and Heron (2012, p. 46) sum up these factors best in their examination of Canadian voluntourists. They state, "The perceived value of living abroad is so taken for granted that there is a general assumption that Canadians should learn about the world by travelling on short-term assignments of anywhere between two weeks and six months." Travel is a source of cultural capital in Canadian society and allows for members of the middle class to maintain their position in society (Harrison, 2003, p. 11). Given the difficulty that interviewees had in attaining the economic markers of a middle-class existence, overseas travel allowed them to maintain the middle-class status that most of them had grown up with.

The cultural capital gained by travel helps to counteract a lack of social capital experienced through the inability of many young people to acquire the markers traditionally associated with adulthood in Canada (Clark, 2007). Adulthood is strongly associated with independent living and self-sufficiency (Arnett, 2004), but the poor labour market and increasing length of post-secondary education has put the independence out of reach for many Canadians well into their twenties and thirties. The delay in achieving what they, and those around them, perceive as adulthood has

profound negative effects on individual's subjective well-being (Kins & Beyers, 2010, p. 771). The opportunity to achieve independence, even if only temporarily, is a significant factor in expatriate's choices to teach overseas given the pressure placed on them by friends and family to "grow up" and begin "real life".

The lure of an actual teaching job is especially tantalizing for university graduates who had hoped to go into the teaching profession. Despite years of unemployment or underemployment in the teaching profession, recent teacher graduates report that they remain highly committed to teaching (*Transition to Teaching,* 2011, p. 45). Though they take other work when available as an interim measure, many remain hopeful of opportunities for the career they desire to pursue. For most, the chance to make a difference in the lives of young people, no matter how far away, is hard pass up. The same can be said for aspirants to the teaching profession. Several interviewees were graduates of other university programs who came to South Korea in the hopes that a year of teaching abroad would help earn them a place in one of Canada's competitive Bachelor of Education programs.

However, the reality of overseas jobs often differs from native speaking English teachers' expectations. As mentioned above, native speaking English teachers can be classed as temporary migrants. There is no expectation they will establish a permanent home in South Korea; they know their relationship with South Korea is fleeting, and so do the Koreans with whom they interact. Native English speaking teachers differ in both purpose and mindset from other types of expatriates. Those known as organizational expatriates (OEs) are sent over at the behest of the organization, frequently a

multinational corporation, for whom they work. Native English speaking teachers are instead a type of self-initiated expatriate (SIE), that is individuals hired on a contractual basis and not transferred overseas by a parent organization (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Selmer & Lauring, 2011). Despite the fact that an estimated fifty to seventy percent of expatriates are SIEs, the focus of most research into expatriates has been on OEs (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013, p. 1953). Additionally, what little research there is into SIEs has been done primarily on professional academics (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013, p. 1955). I would argue that the position of these foreign academics in South Korean universities is very different from the majority of expatriate teachers in South Korea, as most of those studied in the past are older professionals who had established career paths before they moved overseas.

Research focused on university professors over the age of thirty documented an emphasis on the experience of travel, and less on a desire to improve career prospects and financial concerns. In one study, all but one respondent mentioned adventure and travel as a major reason, while only four mentioned careers and six mentioned financial reasons (Richardson & Mallon, 2005, p. 412). While Selmer and Lauring (2010, p. 171) also found higher correlations between financial and career reasons and younger academics who move abroad, they also found a high correlations between their desire for pure adventure and opportunities to travel. They postulate that this is because the younger any professional is, the more are more likely they are to take risks. They also suggest that young workers have less of a choice in whether they will have international or domestic careers. Other young professionals are prompted to make such moves by

the lack of jobs in the neoliberal labour market which limits their ability to achieve the lives they imagined at home.

The stories of teachers who go overseas definitely do not fall into the narratives of well-paid and stable executive expatriates and academics, nor do they fall neatly into that of voluntourists. They tell of individuals so motivated to find meaningful, good jobs that they are willing to leave behind friends, family, and the familiar for the chance to temporarily live as independent, financially solvent professionals. To better understand the motivations and experiences of those I interviewed, in the rest of the chapter I will draw on their commentaries about their motivations and responses to the move that they made to South Korea. I have divided their narratives into three sections, each separated in space and time: their experiences of trying to find work in Canada and how it led them to take work overseas; their lives in South Korea; and, finally their return to a limited job opportunities in Canada, and their attempts to reconcile their freedom and relative financial stability of they had known in South Korea with life at home. I have divided their stories in this way to illustrate the differences in how they conceived of their jobs, careers, and place in society as well as the effects on their mental and emotional well-being as they moved through the three phrases of expatriation, life abroad, and repatriation.[16] These sections coincide with the different conceptions of their identity as Canadians that will be examined in Chapter 3.

[16] A few interviewees have not returned to Canada, some due to choice. Where this is the case, it has been noted in the text and in Appendix 2. Of those who have decided not to return to Canada by choice, only one would choose to remain in South Korea. If more interviewees made similar decisions a different structure would likely have been necessary.

Economics of Escape: Choosing South Korea

> You can see the world … straight after graduating when you have no ties. I had a student loan … so, it was pretty nice to not worry about how I would pay [it] back and see the world at the same time, right after graduating from college. I was thinking of getting into education and I would like to have some experience teaching before I jump right into … teachers college … so it [was] … professional and personal reasons, definitely.
> Madison

Madison's quote exemplifies the two main reasons for taking jobs in South Korea that came up in my interviews. Each interviewee mentioned factors related to their career and financial situation that encouraged them to make the move. Additionally, ten of the fourteen expatriates I spoke to felt that travel, especially learning about and experiencing new places and cultures, was a major part of their decision to go to work in South Korea. As Peter explained:

> I wanted to travel and as I said, I was between jobs and I was trying to change careers. I was in my mid-twenties kind of beginning another [career] … I wasn't involved or attached to anything here so I just decided it would be a great experience. … I always wanted to travel in Asia. So I [was] teaching and making some money, as well as having the opportunity to travel was a great thing.

Many interviewees like Peter needed an income and welcomed the chance to travel the world. Those who mentioned the importance of the experience of travel to their decision to go to South Korea drew heavily on the language of voluntourism—a desire to 'discover themselves', make a difference, adventure, and learn about a different culture. Those who could afford to used some of their savings and the cheaper travel opportunities from South Korea to the rest of Asia to explore more of the world. Peter, for example, spent months in India after his contract while Katherine and Carmen travelled to Laos and Thailand respectively.

While the interviewees frequently remarked that they hoped for an adventure and that their friends and families saw their trip in the same way, I learned that such framing was often a way to rationalize their decision. Underneath, economic survival and the hope that overseas work will jumpstart their careers proved to be much more powerful factors in their decisions to leave Canada.

The vast majority of my interviewees did not originally plan to go to South Korea to work. A few were genuinely interested in, and passionate about, going overseas, such as Carlee and Jeremiah. Even in the case of Jeremiah, South Korea was his second choice after a mix-up ended his plans to work in his first choice, Taiwan. Aside from these two, the idea to go to South Korea was prompted by a variety of factors. Some learned about South Korea as place of possible employment from friends already there; others learned about opportunities there through their own job searches and, for some they were directly approached by recruiters. Several described their coming to South Korea as an accident. No matter what their background all, with one exception, were underemployed, unemployed, or soon to be unemployed when they made the decision to leave. Those who were underemployed felt trapped, without any potential for advancement. Carlee, the only interviewee who held a stable, full-time position when she applied to go to South Korea explained her situation:

> … after working in the federal government for close to five years I wasn't able to move into the Literacy Secretariat, I thought, 'you know what? I really, really enjoy teaching. I really enjoy my work in Literacy. I'd really like to understand what teaching a second language is like. Let's see about going overseas and just getting my feet wet with that.'

There were some important differences in how those I interviewed structured their stories based on their career paths. Of my fourteen interviewees, eight had either worked as teachers in the past or gone to teacher's college while three more planned to become educators. A teaching stint in South Korea was always seen a preliminary and thus temporary step. Alexandra's case is a good example her choice to work in South Korea came after years of underemployment in teaching and a failed job search:

> I was working in the United States at camps with troubled teens. I did that for four years and I wanted to still work with kids and do the exact same job except back home in Canada. I had enough qualifications after four years of being in the field and so I went home to try to find a job. After almost a year, I couldn't find a job. … I didn't apply to work in Korea but somewhere in cyberspace they found my resume and called me and asked me if I wanted to teach in Korea. And I said 'okay let's do that … I just fell into it.

Others saw overseas teaching as a temporary measure to cover their expenses while they searched for jobs in other fields or applied to return to university in Canada. Carmen's first year in South Korea gave her the experience to get into teacher's college. Sadly, after she completed school, she found there was no employment available and thus took another contract in South Korea, hoping that the job market would improve at home while she was away. Her two experiences in South Korea were quite different. As she said:

> The first time … I went because I needed teaching experience [to get into teacher's college], and also to travel because I really like travelling …The second time, a lot of it was financial reasons. I had just graduated in the Bachelor of Education programme … and I needed a job opportunity in [in my hometown]. [However] the [local] School Board is almost impossible [to get in to].

Waldo and his wife both had taken jobs in South Korea because of a similar situation in Nova Scotia. They only decided to return to Nova Scotia when a slight

improvement in the job market allowed them to find employment there, even though Waldo was enjoying his time in South Korea. In hindsight he viewed the decision as a good one, despite his wish to continue in South Korea. He felt that if he had not returned home then, it was unlikely he or his wife would have been able to find a job in Canada, let alone in their home province of Nova Scotia as the employment situation for teachers in the Atlantic Provinces had taken a steady downturn.

With the job market continuing to worsen in Canada, there was a shift in the tone of the interviewees who have moved to South Korea more recently. Interviewees who left Canada between 2003 and 2008 were more likely to emphasize the adventure side of their trip and downplay the economic imperative, while interviewees who came later focused more on the on the necessity. Some who are still overseas feel that they are in a trap, not moving forward in South Korea, yet not able to return to Canada due to the poor job market. Given the choice of independence in South Korea, or returning to a home where at best they would have to return for another degree and avoid "real life", they choose to stay. I will return to the implications of this "trap", as one interviewee described it, in a later section.

Those who were not initially interested in teaching for its own sake reported several different reasons for going, but they all emphasized the position they were at in life and the limited job market. Whether coming off of a contract, newly graduated, or trying to escape a job they no longer found satisfying, they all needed (or wanted) new work of some kind. To be able to make such a change, they found that they had to go overseas, demonstrating that the argument cited above that young people have less

agency as to whether they work domestically or overseas (Selmer & Lauring, 2010, p. 171). Even though some of those I interviewed were not looking for overseas work, when presented with the opportunity, considering their debt load in a difficult job market where they were unable to use their skill sets, the choice was between living at a lower standard of living with a job beneath their education and qualifications or taking a professional job overseas made the decision to go to Korea seem sensible.

Student debt loads compounded the difficulty of under and unemployment leading many to unwillingly return to live with their parents. These realities were more prominent in the stories of interviewees who went to Korea in 2008 or later and in those of graduates of teacher's college. The extra year of postsecondary education[17] in teacher's college, and resources it demands, often resulted in even higher debt loads and left many interviewees with the feeling that they could not abandon this career path due to the time and money they had already devoted to it, let alone the commitment they had to the idea of being a teacher, and thus they remained resolutely committed to a job search as a teacher. Thus interviewees with teaching qualifications were more likely to report long stretches of time with no earnings whatsoever than those without them. Long periods of unemployment led to significant negative feelings among these interviewees. Many felt trapped, frustrated or disappointed. They reflected on the difficult job market and despaired of ever finding a permanent job of any sort, especially a job in their field.

[17] While some provinces now mandate two years of teacher's college, all of my interviewees completed their programs while one year was still acceptable.

Debt repayment had a place in almost all of the stories I heard. South Korean teaching jobs pay relatively low wages[18] compared to Canada, but the low cost of living and benefits such as paid accommodations allow ESL teachers to both save money and pay their debts. Some interviewees were able to save upwards of twelve thousand dollars a year.

By additionally creating a narrative of adventure, my interviewees gave themselves some agency in their lives. They were not simply economic migrants struggling for survival and a place in the world; they were adventurers who chose to go on a journey of discovery. Katherine summed up the situation best when she described her decision to go to South Korea, "I wanted to travel but the need for money made travel a necessity." Many expatriates wrapped their reasons for leaving in the language of travel, putting an emphasis on "finding themselves", experiencing, and learning about another culture. They hoped that the experience would help them find direction they felt was lacking in lives that they felt were on hold and directionless due to stagnant careers.

Building Temporary Lives

> I felt like a little English parrot or puppet or, you know, something to entertain the kids.
> Sofia

My interviewees did find independence, freedom, and stability, at least on a temporary basis, during their sojourns in South Korea. Each interviewee framed it differently, but they all talked about the importance of being able to survive and thrive on their own,

[18] The government program EPIK pays 1.8 to 2.7 million won/month ($1665 to $2497 Canadian as of July 2013) depending on experience, education, and location.

unsupported by family. Some talked about the freedom from expectations at home. In Peter's words:

> [I] … always [felt] forced into some kind of structure … , you go to school, you go to university, you get a job, you get married. It's part of a cycle of what's expected of you … what was really great in Korea was that I could kind of get away from that sort of life…But it was just kind of – I don't know, it gave me a chance to kind of have two years for myself, that was truly for myself … without getting wrapped up into 'OK you've got to finish university so you can go get a job and buy a house' …

By going overseas, Peter found a socially acceptable way to push back the clock on the pressure of external expectations. Though few would be able to translate their time overseas into a career in Canada, interviewees often felt relief from the pressure to settle and find a permanent position in Canada as people back home saw what they were doing as valid work, unlike the pressures faced during periods of under or unemployment in Canada.

In addition to gaining experience and independence a few people I spoke to were able to achieve some of their other career goals by teaching overseas. Carlee who as I quote above chose to leave the civil service has been teaching overseas since 2005 in South Korea, Japan, and Malaysia. Overseas teaching offered her the challenge that she felt was not available in her previous employment. Tyler transitioned from teaching to journalism and now works as a journalist in Canada. In fact, he claims his career would not have gone in this direction if not for his time in South Korea:

> I wanted to get into journalism. That can be difficult in any part of North America … I find in North America unless you started to do what you wanted to do when you were eighteen, it can prove to be fairly difficult [to change]. But as an expat I … start[ed] working for this expat magazine …There was a change in publisher and next thing you know I was one of the main writers. And then I was content

> editor ... then I was managing editor all in a couple of years … I wanted to be a journalist and I felt well why not just start … I will build a rapport and teach on the side. I did that – got in with a Korean newspaper and now I'm a professional journalist – that's my job. It's my career.

Ironically, Tyler's story illustrates the reason many went to South Korea in the first place—they wanted to get a start in their chosen career—something many had wanted to do since they were young. But not all stories I heard were as successful as Peter's. Janelle has been teaching overseas since 2005 but has not been able to find work in Canada. As she put it:

> The teaching situation in Nova Scotia … scares me because you hear about all these people getting let out of university with their teaching degrees … [when there are] no jobs. The process of going to get a permanent job scares me … The opportunities teaching internationally are just so much better. I don't have to do the substitute teaching to get ahead. I don't have to compete with as many people for the same position. And I feel like the opportunities that I get while working in these international schools … don't even … compare to the opportunities that I would have at home … there [are] networking … professional development opportunities in other countries [that] I just don't think [are here]. I don't think they have good packages at home at all … from my friends that have jobs at home and just hearing the headaches that they have to go through and that they have to reapply for their job every single year. That's just not my idea of an ideal situation.

Her fear of fierce competition for scarce, unstable jobs was common throughout the narratives and was often the driving force behind decisions on whether to return home as Waldo did, or remain in South Korea, as Janelle has for seven years.

Almost all of the interviewees I spoke to were content with their jobs at first, but as time went on, frustrations with their positions took their toll. Teaching jobs in *hagwons* and public schools in South Korea were considered by most to be easy which was seen as positive, specifically by those who had not trained to be teachers. But for trained teachers who saw South Korea as a way to improve teacher's college

applications, the lack of challenge in their jobs was frustrating. While many had the freedom to design whatever lessons they wanted, such latitude was often accompanied by the knowledge that the school and their Korean co-teachers did not care about what they taught. In fact, interviewees referred to their positions as “English prostitutes” or “English puppets, rather than English teachers. Feelings of uselessness were common as a result. Sofia describes the situation well:

> On top of the fact that I *am* a teacher, I just [felt] useless. I felt like I was being patronized. I felt it was very demeaning. They just kind of pushed me around and had me do whatever it was that was convenient for them … so many times I felt like a little English parrot or puppet … something to entertain the kids … I just felt really frustrated with that and so I found a job where I [could] actually teach and feel more a part of it.

Sofia took her teaching very seriously, yet her co-workers and administrators did not treat her as a real teacher but merely as an entertainer or status symbol. Canadians were often brought to meetings held entirely in Korean, often when meeting with officials and teachers from other schools. Native English speaking teachers interpreted their role at these meetings as simply to sit there and “be white” as having authentic looking foreign teachers improved the image of the school. These feelings made it difficult for the teachers to establish their professional identity as many struggled with their administrators in their efforts to actually teach rather than entertain. Some, like Sofia, found a solution at better schools, almost always universities, which did better at integrating native speaking English teachers into their curriculums and made their contributions seem valued.

Isolation and lack of challenge and respect in the *hagwon* and public school jobs that make up the majority of teaching jobs in South Korea were compounded by lack of

advancement in teaching. After two years in the EPIK program[19], for example, a teacher would be at the top of the salary scale. While some opportunities existed to move into universities or other careers, many interviewees did not see their experiences as a way to build a career that would further their lives or ground them permanently in South Korea. Instead, they would have to leave the lives they had built in South Korea. And as a result, over time, the feeling of adventure wore off and the reality sunk in that they could not build a permanent career in South Korea. While some like Janelle are still waiting for the opportune time to return to Canada, most others have jumped back into the difficult labour market they originally fled.

Returning to Reality/Returning to Captivity

> I came back here [Canada] knowing full well that … [I had to] get it together. When I came back … I went back to a real job in the real world.
> Peter

Peter was one of several interviewees who felt that their time in South Korea was not "real life". Only by returning to Canada for a "real job" could they launch what they viewed as an acceptable life.

Six of my eight interviewees who had returned to Canada mentioned in some form that they felt that their life had been hold in South Korea and it could only move forward again in Canada. As Madison said:

> At some point I need to move on. This isn't going to be my future forever. I think I need to move on. … I love it here, but this isn't my purpose for living. … teaching my native language isn't something that gets me really excited every morning.

[19] EPIK and its affiliated programs place and monitor teachers in public schools throughout South Korea.

While this feeling was strongest among ESL teachers like Madison who had already returned to Canada, some still working in South Korea shared Madison's lack of purpose. Alexandra was still in South Korea at the time of my interview and while she recommended the experience, but was clear that it was a time filler in her life:

> I personally think it would be a fantastic experience for anyone if you have ... nothing else to do … it is not kind of like real life … But if you have a couple years … [or] if you're going to go to university or if you're going to work in a bar or if you're going to pick up garbage along the side of the road, why don't you do that somewhere you've never been? And I just think this is a fantastic opportunity to learn … about yourself and about the world … It's easy to do. All you have to do is get to the airport. And then you're here.

The precarious nature of the overseas job worked both ways. Although an employer could fire an employee at any time, a contract could just as easily be cancelled by foreign teacher who chose to return to Canada. The transient nature of their lives, the difficulty of integrating into Korean culture, the lack of advancement in the teaching field and homesickness lead to a sense of anomie that all contributed to the feeling that their lives in South Korea could not be permanent or "real". Only a return to Canada would allow them to begin their real lives.

Madison's is a familiar story to Tyler, who after seven years in South Korea had seen many leave for similar reasons. The only teachers Tyler knew who stayed were those who were passionate about ESL teaching who generally managed to get better paying and more respected positions at universities. Katherine, who has taught in South Korea at two different times observed another pattern. She noted that many expatriates who return to Canada take another contract in South Korea at a later date. She suggests that these individuals are caught in a trap, one that she nearly found herself in:

> … I saw a lot of people … floundering … they would come to Korea and they would have a pretty good lifestyle and then they would go home without really much of a plan. And they would not be able to get a job or things wouldn't be going well for them and they would say "oh well I'll go back to Korea" and it became sort of a vicious cycle… I feel I did what I needed to ensure that I wouldn't get stuck [in that position] … If I did go back, I wanted it to be something I chose. Not something where I had no other choice … I wanted to go back because I felt that I wasn't done with Korea yet, but I was keenly aware of the fact that was just good fortune … because I wasn't going to get work in Canada … I was keenly aware that I was in a situation where I had no choice and I didn't like that ... I'd seen expats who went over there [South Korea] and ended up staying not because they loved it … they ended up staying because they had no other option and I really did not want to be in that situation … you need to make it part of a bigger plan, or you are going to get stuck.

Her awareness of the trap others around her fell into helped her to plan a way out, but that plan involved a third degree before she was finally able to land a full-time contract job in Canada. Her observations reveal the return of old problems to returning expatriates. Though they may have found temporary relief, they return to the same job market that originally rejected them. They return with experience, but that experience is often not recognized by Canadian employers. Additionally, many like Katherine return to higher education in order to find work in Canada. Again, Katherine sums her situation up best, "I had a Master's degree in English lit, what was I going to be able to do with that? I couldn't teach in Canada because I didn't have a teacher's license." Many were caught in the vicious cycle of taking overseas teaching contracts to keep debts from overwhelming them and to feel like they had some control over their lives.

For many who returned to South Korea for additional contracts, or longed for a return to the familiar, the adventure was over. All who undertook these journeys felt they had grown in some important way, and every one of them recommended that other Canadians do something similar, but the choice to return home was based not so

much on a completed adventure as the necessities of life. Instead of new learning experiences each day, many of these teachers saw themselves as having put their life on hold and saw leaving South Korea as the only way to "start" their lives. Korean culture and how foreigners fit into it that had been so appealing in the freedom it offered at first could become oppressive and constricting, as Sean puts it:

> It ceased to be fun, I guess. I think, because it's so transient, right? So … I had, a group of friends for a while there that we kind of called each other "the family" … all of them left ... in the end when it gets to you seeing other people coming in and you're thinking: they're coming in because my friend is leaving. Even though they're going to be awesome people … I really missed being in Canada because as much as Korea felt like home when I got there. I was never Korean, and I'm never going to be Korean. So, there was always like a division somehow. It was very obvious because I was a blonde hair, blue eyed white girl…it didn't matter what I did or what language I spoke, or what anything, I was always going to be a little bit out of place. And I remember when I came back to Canada I really just wanted to live like a North American and just live beyond my means, and …You know how Americans have big cars, big houses, big meals, big everything, over what you needed to have and I wanted that as opposed to Korean meals … when I came back I just wanted to let loose and be free. I guess at the end of my experience I didn't really feel free anymore.

Regardless of how fun it had been, the loss of friends, the transience, and the knowledge that she could never have future in Korean society eventually drove her away from South Korea to the known comforts of Canada, a theme I take up in Chapter 3.

On their return to Canada, many interviewees found their sense of independence and freedom was lost. Save for Waldo who returned because of a small window available teaching jobs in Nova Scotia and Tyler who managed to convert his journalism experience into a permanent position in Canada, returnees found themselves either going on to a second or third degree, or struggling to find sufficient employment.

While the cycle of expatriation and repatriation left most of my interviewees in the same poor financial and career situations that they originally left, interviewees saw the experience as very valuable. Much of that value lay not in the experience they gained, or the salary they earned or fringe benefits they enjoyed, but in the important lessons they learned about themselves and their home country, something that they learned because they left Canada behind.

Chapter 3
Seeing Home with New Eyes

One day I retreated with two American friends to a Canadian themed-bar in the Gangnam district of Seoul.[20] During a chat about politics and culture, the two stopped and stared at me for a moment. "You're so Canadian," one of them finally said. I wasn't sure what it was that had prompted the comment, but my other friend agreed. Suddenly self-conscious, I remembered that other Americans I met in South Korea said the same thing about me.

What was it that made me Canadian? Was it my mannerisms? What ideas or perspectives did I have that struck them as so distinct, and so identifiably Canadian? My self-consciousness became reflection as I tried to parse what made me different. What parts of my identity, I wondered, remain unmarked and unmentioned at home but are so apparent to others?

This question has followed me for four years and inspired this thesis. Only now, with confirmation from my interviewees and wider theoretical reading I have done, do I feel that I have some understanding of what made me so identifiably Canadian to my fellow *waegukin*. In *Finding Our Way* Will Kymlicka thanked colleagues from around the world from whom he had "learned a great deal about Canada by trying to explain it to non-Canadians…" (1998, p. vii). I have the same expression of thanks to extend. As Jeremiah one of my interviewees said, "If you want to know what a typical Canadian is,

[20] Gangnam is an affluent district of Seoul south of the Han River known for its expensive real estate and upscale shopping. This particular bar had Canadian beer on tap, hockey sweaters on the walls, and food that was common in Canadian pubs but was rare in South Korea. Other Canadian-themed bars and restaurants served a mixture of western and Korean foods. The food and décor suggest how someone who had never been to Canada might imagine Canadian food and adapting to local tastes, in the same way ethnic food is often produced and sold in Canada.

you can't ask a Canadian, you have to ask an American, or an Irishman or a Scottish woman. You have to go outside of it to get a really good sense of what it is." So it was for the English speaking Canadians that I interviewed. The realities of living in South Korean society, the tensions within the expatriate community and the common experience of repatriation brought to light aspects of their identities that to them had previously gone unmarked. I learned that these revelations gave them a greater sense of what it was to be Canadian, the motivation to become more active citizens of Canada, and the ability to view Canadian society from a new perspectives upon their return home.

This chapter examines how the experience of teaching and living in the context of South Korea shaped how my interviewees viewed Canada and their place within it. The first section will examine how other scholars have imagined Canada and how their thinking compares with my interviewees' views before expatriation. The second will explore how interactions with South Koreans and other expatriates shaped my interviewees' understanding of Canada and allowed what had been unmarked to become visible. I will then discuss the idealization of home and how expatriate teachers imagined Canada while in South Korea. The final section will deal with the repatriation process and how returnees dealt with the mismatch between their expectations and their lived reality. This process proved to be especially critical as it provided opportunities for reflection for many. Returnees felt their experience and reflexivity resulted in a more inclusive and empathetic vision of Canada and a better understanding of humanity as a whole.

Being Canadian

> When you are raised in a country, when you are raised a certain way, you don't really question how things are done, right? You don't really question anything because that's just how it is.
> Madison

It can be difficult for individuals to critically analyze any group of which they are a part. This difficulty, expressed by Madison above, is compounded by a lack of contrastive experience. Before she had experienced living in a different, specifically Korean culture, Madison had no comparative framework for Canadian society and culture. Living outside of Canada allowed her to remove her cultural blinders.

Before her overseas experience, she was unaware of the specific set of cultural blinders she had grown up with. For the most part, my interviewees represented the Canadian-Canadians Mackey (1998) examined. For these mostly white English-speaking Canadians, their culture and race went unmarked through their day-to-day lives. They took for granted their place in Canada. She found that Canadian identity itself is seen as a fragile and weak thing. But it is not weak, merely hidden from those who have an often strong sense of Canadian identity (Blattberg, 2003, p. 69-70). Just as whiteness is defined as an unmarked normal in comparison to marked others, the idea of Canadianness and an English Canadian nation with its own cultural practices is hidden by the belief that to be Canadian is to be unmarked and 'normal'. In this way, English Canadian national identity and culture is positioned as the natural state of humanity, fragile, in need of protection, and difficult to define.

However, the cultural differences of an English Canadian nation are not hidden from others. English Canadians see French Canadians as a different group within

Canada, distinct from the undivided, unmarked, 'normal' of Canadian-Canadians. French Canadians, meanwhile, regard French and English as two nations within the single state of Canada (Taylor, 1993, p. 102). Many of the tensions between French and English result from such representations.

The hidden, unmarked nature of English Canadian national identity has only been fuelled by Canada's multicultural policies and the increased immigration to Canada by non-whites in recent decades. Multiculturalism, to some, perpetuates the idea of a white, English Canadian normal against which all other races are contrasted. In this context whiteness is regarded as the default, unmarked state of humanity (Mackey, 1999, p. 15, 33-35; Pratto & Stewart, 2012, p. 30-31). Multiculturalism teaches Canadians that while they should accept the contributions and cultures of other groups within Canada, these groups are contrasted against a 'normal' of white Anglophones, identified by their differences in racial type and culture. Minorities in Canada are often very aware of the race of those on both sides of an interaction with whites often making mundane transactions problematic, while the ignorance on the part of many whites as to how race plays a role in the internal dynamics of such, a phenomenon Garner calls a "malevolent absence" of race (2006, p. 259). The ease with which Canadian-Canadians[21] move through Canadian society compared to others and the quickness that immigrant whites are integrated into the norm compared to immigrants of other racial backgrounds forms a significant part of the privilege enjoyed by white Canadians.

[21] Race, culture and language are not the only factors that affect the definition of who is considered normal in Canadian society. But while sexuality, gender, ability, and class complicate encounters between individuals and groups, they were not nearly as common in my interviewees' narratives as race, culture and language.

As Madison's quote reveals, it is easy for many Canadians to be unaware of their social and cultural position in Canada, let alone that the privilege enjoyed by this position should be questioned. But the experiences of the teachers I interviewed in South Korea allowed them to start to ask those questions.

Becoming Canadian Overseas

> If you want to know what a typical Canadian is, you can't ask a Canadian, you have to ask an American, or an Irishman or a Scottish woman … you have to go outside to get a really good sense of what it is.
> Jeremiah

My interviewees' experiences in South Korea provided new reference points against which to contrast their life in Canada allowing them to develop new conceptions of themselves as Canadians. Their taken-for-granted Canadian cultural understandings were first and foremost contrasted to their host nation, as they began to understand themselves in relation to South Koreans. Their differences were noted in the South Korean public sphere in ways that ranged from innocuous to offensively xenophobic. Exposure to the perceptions of South Koreans led many foreign teachers to become racialized for the first time in their lives. Additionally due to the predominance of Americans and to a lesser extent Canadians in the expatriate teacher community, we also learned to define ourselves in contrast to Americans, but in entirely different ways than we had expected. Such identifications began a process of reflection about what being Canadian means in the minds of my interviewees that would continue throughout their time in Korea, but would become especially important when they returned to Canada.

Becoming Racialized

> When you work in a private academy … you get there and it's 'here's page 14, go start'. No training. They weren't really interested in my opinion or teaching the kids English. They wanted to make money, the kids needed babysitting, you're white or you're Western looking or whatever you want to call it and they would send you into the classroom … They really didn't care for the most part about the quality as long as they weren't getting real complaints from their parents. Tyler

Tyler was one of several I interviewed who initially taught at *hagwons* where ESL teachers were treated as entertainers with little respect and few expectations. Most subsequently moved on to positions that they found more fulfilling where their skills were respected and utilized. The story above about his first job in South Korea highlights what he felt was the importance and visibility of his race in the classroom.

He expected to be valued for his educational qualifications and teaching ability when he was hired. But what he felt was the apparent privileging of his racial and national identity—what he represented rather than what he was—contributed to his somewhat cynical understanding of Korean society. Tyler believed that the real reason he had been hired was to act as an entertainer or symbol of authenticity rather than as a teacher as he has been led to believe. The hiring of large number of foreign teachers in Asia whose degrees are not related to English, Linguistics, or Education support Tyler's interpretation (Lan, 2011, p. 1681). Koreans identify 'authentic' English speakers as those who come from selected English-speaking countries (Cho, 2012, p. 227-228). These linkages are evident in the hiring practices of Korean schools such as Tyler's. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the main requirements to get a public school job in the English

Program in Korea[22], which are also standard in most *hagwons* and other teaching institutions, are a three or four year university degree in any subject, to have studied from at least the 7th grade in one of seven English-speaking countries, and to be a citizen of one of these countries (English Program in Korea, 2013). It is not a coincidence that out of the many sovereign states where English is an official language, six of these countries have a white majority population and the seventh, South Africa, has a large white minority. Headshots are required as part of job applications, while other requirements, such as criminal background checks and school transcripts are not always checked.[23] HIV and drug tests are required for the majority of foreign teachers who enter the country on E-2 foreign language instructor visas, but are not required for ethnic Korean foreign teachers who enter on F-4 overseas Korean visas (Kang, 2008). These requirements lead to the widespread belief among expatriate teachers that it is their looks, and especially race, which earns them a position in a Korean school. The perceived difficulty blacks and Asians of non-Korean descent face in finding teaching positions help to reinforce this belief, highlights that in the eyes of many Koreans, Canadians are understood to be white.

All but two of my interviewees were white and many remarked on the discomfort of moving through Korean society as a visible minority. They told me first how surprising and then how unsettling they found the stares that followed them

[22] This organization is affiliated with the Korean Ministry of Education with a mandate that covers most of South Korea that handles native speaking English teachers .

[23] I accidentally submitted an out of date university transcript that showed I had not completed my undergraduate degree for a job but was hired regardless. Other expatriates expressed doubts over whether background checks submitted to the Korean Consulate are effective, or if they are even read. While I could find no way to confirm this, the fact that the perception exists speaks to how some expatriates feel about problems and biases in the application process.

wherever they went. One of Jeremiah's biggest issues was adjusting to this unwanted attention, "People will stop what they're doing, turn and with their entire body, follow you as you walk past them on the street. It is like being under a magnifying glass." The stares, the singling out based on their race, made visible his previously invisible whiteness, marking him as different in ways that he had never experienced in Canada. While some just ignored these responses, Jeremiah felt his race came to matter in his everyday life and mundane interaction with others. As he told me:

> It's a very homogenous culture. It's a country that's spent centuries either hunkering down and trying to remain as isolationist as possible or being conquered … sort of being suspicious of outsiders actually. … you do get a lot … casual racial slurs … You get a lot of cabs that won't pick you up. Every now and then you get someone who won't serve you at a restaurant or something. That gets old pretty quick.

Such responses are perpetuated by popular stereotypes about foreign teachers. Regardless of race or country of origin, western foreigners are lumped together. They are portrayed in the local media as being promiscuous, addicted to drugs, and more prone to criminal acts than Koreans. In one example, *Yonhap News*, one of South Korea's largest news agencies, reported on a Korean Institute of Criminology report claiming that the number of foreigners committing crimes is increasingly rapidly (Yonhap, 2013). Expatriates attempt to debunk these sensationalist representations through expatriate blogs such as *Gusts of Popular Feeling*[24], which picks apart both the *Yonhap* article and the report upon which it was based. In another case, a South Korea television station aired an episode of its talk show "We Are Detectives" that described

[24] http://populargusts.blogspot.ca/

sex between a white man and a Korean woman as a sex crime. These negative images affect the interactions between foreigners and Koreans. Carlee was exasperated with the common belief that foreign women were more promiscuous than Korean women leading Korean men to repeatedly proposition her.

However, I did learn that racism was not only directed at white expatriates. My Korean co-teachers warned me to avoid the Itaewon neighbourhood in Seoul.[25] They feared I would be murdered by the Arabs or blacks who lived there.

Racial stereotyping was not only limited to personal everyday interactions. Foreign teachers faced discrimination at the state-level in the form of mandatory HIV and drug testing for E-2 visas. Tyler was especially angered by such testing:

> …if you're a teacher the government will stigmatize you by the AIDS testing … the UN came out in the 1980s and said, you shouldn't be doing any form of … AIDS testing…[26] [it] really got under my skin … there was an anti-foreign group [operating] while I was there. They actually changed the visa regulations through misinformation and essentially lies.[27]

Many expatriates like Tyler blame continued HIV and drug testing of E-2 visas holders on xenophobia perpetuated by the media and activist groups based on the perceived criminality and promiscuity of non-Korean foreign teachers. As Tyler pointed out to me, the fact that holders of E-6 Entertainer visas meant for artistic performers, but

[25] Itaewon is a district of Seoul where foreigners such as expatriate teachers, tourists and American military personnel gather. Foreign-themed bars and restaurants (such as the Canadian one I mentioned above), and other shops and services (book stores, grocery stores, and doctors) located there cater to Seoul's foreign populations who come from around the world including Europe, North American Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East.

[26] The United Nations' International Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is expected to make a ruling on whether this testing constitutes racial discrimination by March of 2014 (Power, 2013).

[27] Tyler was referring to Anti-English Spectrum, an anti-foreign teacher group often consulted by the media. Its members have been accused of stalking and threatening foreign teachers with violence. Tyler blames their sensationalist campaign for the government's refusal to end HIV and drug testing that teachers entering on an E-2 visa have to pass.

frequently associated with prostitution don't have to take HIV testing, is a testament to the hypocrisy of the system. Despite these instances of discrimination, it is important to note that the vast majority of interactions my interviewees had with Koreans were positive.

My interviewees observed that their interactions frequently included conversations that contrasted Canadians (or foreigners more generally) with Koreans, as if the two were monocultures, something that rarely reflects reality and surprised some of those I interviewed. Kathryn Mathers (2010) observed how the reverse gaze of South Africans on a group of American university students studying abroad was blind to the often hyphenated identities the students claimed. Thus the students came to understand themselves as American first, positioning in new ways their understanding of their nationality in relation to their sense of personal identity. Helene Lee (2013) found similar results among Korean-American women who discovered how American they were only after attempting to integrate into South Korean society. The women Lee spoke to felt strong ties to Korea while in the United States, but when they moved to South Korea, conflicts arose between the expectations placed on a Korean woman and their American values and behavioural norms. These clashes led to a reassertion of the American portion of their identities. Thus clearly when at home, individuals are more likely to see the differences that separate them from other Canadians. But when they were overseas, my interviewees were more likely to see the similarities in norms and values that differentiated them from Koreans and Americans and united them as Canadians. I return to this point below.

The foreign teacher expat community, like those described by Vered Amit (2007, p. 11) frequently move in 'circuits' while abroad. They tend to meet and build social circles around travelers who have come to South Korea for the same reasons. Foreign teachers meet and connect mostly with other foreign teachers. These communities act as a refuge from culture shock.

Fellow teachers relied on each other for support and advice when they faced these frustrations. Most interviewees had limited contact with Koreans outside of work, with most relying on the expatriate community for support and friendship. Belonging to a local expatriate community and sharing common stories affirmed a stronger foreign identity. Sean referred to such expatriate friends as "the Family". But that community was by the nature of the job transient. As friends within the community left due to high turnover, those who stayed for multiple contracts often felt alienated and lost the sense of belonging they originally drew from such a group. The repeated disappearance of their closest friends reinforced the understanding that South Korea was not a permanent home for my interviewees.

While native speaking English teachers may have had better wages and lifestyles than expatriates with from other national backgrounds, they are what Standing (2011, p. 14) describes as "denizens", not citizens. They had no economic or political rights within South Korea, and could be deported at a moment's notice.

While these communities bonded through their shared experiences in and of living in South Korea, there were distinct differences within them. In fact, the forced closeness of expatriates from different countries leads to what Fechter (2007, p. 45-46)

terms a “hothouse” effect, where cultural differences are heightened and judged, often causing tension and friction. For Canadians, these tensions frequently emerged with the Americans who make up the largest segment of the English teaching expatriate community in Korea.

The Importance of Everyday Differences

> One of the first phrases I learned in Korea was ‘I’m not American, I’m Canadian’… Because you get asked that … you’re a white guy, clearly not British from your accent. ‘Are you American?’ is the first question. And you say ‘no’ and ‘no I’m from Canada actually’. And I don’t know that anyone didn’t smile at least a little when I told them that.
> Jeremiah

Scholars often frame the difference between the United States and Canada in the terms of public policies such as those that make up the welfare state. In his book *The Vanishing Country* Mel Hurtig lamented the imminent destruction of Canada (2002). The takeover of our economy by American investment and corporations, he argued, would eventually result in the end of Canada. He appeals to his readers to do something to save Canada by defining why we are different: health care, education, gun control, and social welfare top his list. More recently, on the other side of this argument is Diane Francis who argues that Canada and the United States should merge in her book *Merger of the Century* (2013). She appeals to the similarities of Canadians and Americans, but on the same scales of social and economic policy. Canadians and Americans in Democrat-leaning states, she argues, think in very similar ways about public policy while Americans of all stripes live similar lifestyles based on income, home ownership, and

other economic indicators. In both of these contrasting views, it seems that Canada is something so ephemeral that is can be wiped out simply by a change in ownership.

National identity goes far deeper than policy or material culture, remaining strong even as the old policy cornerstones are eroded. The dismantling of the welfare state that so has been a focal point of national pride is part of an attempt to rebrand Canada from a caring, sharing society to an entrepreneurial one (Brodie, 2002, p. 390; Raney, 2009, p. 19). Yet Canadians actually felt closer to their country in 2004 than they did in 1995. Studies by Tracey Raney have shown that Canadians outside of Quebec were more likely to feel "very close" to their country in 2004 than any other country studied in the International Social Science Programme except for New Zealand (Raney, 2009, p. 14; Raney & Berdahl, 2011, p. 267). How Canadians imagine the national community they belong to may be influenced by the specific examples presented by Hurtig and Francis, but reducing it to those factors does a disservice to the multitude of ways that Canadians relate to their country and to each other. Nationalism, as Benedict Anderson claims, is more closely related to kinship than to ideologies such as liberalism and fascism (2006, p. 5). While Canada's governing ideology has shifted, Canadians retain their imagined ties to each other. These ties are maintained through the subtle but pervasive ways that nationalism permeates life in Canada. As Michael Billig argues, nationalism is perpetuated by everyday routines and constant reminders that often go unnoticed by members of western nations; what he calls "banal nationalism" (1995, p. 6-8). These constant reminders become conspicuous in their absence and through and awareness of the banal nationalism of others.

The subtle ways that make Canadians distinct from others were revealed to me and those I interviewed in the experiences in the 'hothouse' of the expatriate community in South Korea. These real and marked the cultural distinctions of Canada were real to the others we met, even if they had been previously unrecognized by us. My interviewees repeatedly remarked on their culture shock with direct reference to their encounters with American teachers in Korea. The most obvious differences came through how Americans and Canadians tended to deal with the problems they had surviving in Korean culture. Americans were more likely to take on an overtly aggressive attitude and refuse to take no for an answer while Canadians tended to avoid conflict and complain after the fact instead.

Canadians were not the only ones who noticed these differences. Katherine told me of observations made to her by an American colleague:

> She said Canadians are very whiny, and I laughed because I agree. I feel like Canadians complain a lot and they have very little to complain about…they're very materialistic…not realizing the extent of what they have just in terms of natural resources and educational opportunities and housing and cars and salaries.

Katherine's time overseas revealed the truth of these observations, as did other interviewee's conversations with Koreans. Despite the anti-foreigner sentiment and policies directed at all foreign teachers, some Koreans made the distinction between native speaking English teachers based on nationality. Jeremiah's quote above shows how individual reactions may be coloured by South Korea's relationship with expatriate's countries of origin. South Korea has a long and complex relationship with the American military, upon whom they rely for protection, but whom many resent.

Repeated issues between American servicemen based in South Korea and Korean civilians combined with sensational media coverage has led to resentment of Americans that often rubs off on American civilians. The perception of the aggressiveness of Americans compared to other foreigners was reinforced by the large number of American soldiers based in South Korea who are often banned from certain businesses due to their reputation for violence, but American native speaking English teachers are also more prone to confrontation with Koreans than others and were often surprised to see other foreigners approach situations with different strategies. American colleagues frequently complained about Canadian's refusal to stand up for themselves, seeing it as a weakness. In fact, it was my attempt to prevent my American friends from behaving rashly towards our server that led to the "you're so Canadian" comment that began this chapter as they attributed my, and others, preference for suppressing their feelings and whining later over aggression and confrontation to being Canadian. Through the different way that Canadians approached the problems they encountered as expatriates, and how they were perceived differently by Koreans, Canadians learned important lessons that defined them as different from their American colleagues.

What was often more enlightening about the difference between Canadian and American cultures came through smaller, unexpected differences in our priorities, ways of conversing, and how we went about everyday tasks. These differences were especially poignant to Katherine, who worked at an American-run international school. She had difficulties not only dealing with Korean parents, but in butting heads with the Americans who ran the school. She had ongoing struggles with the administration as she

tried to build a drama program, while they consistently downplayed the importance of the arts, emphasizing the importance of sports. She attributed this conflict to the different cultures at play. Despite her frustration with the way the school was run, she affirmed she was "not going to act like that, I am not American. I am not going to play this game." In addition to these conflicts, Katherine encountered differences she didn't expect in the way her American colleagues lived their lives.

> My American co-workers would [exclaim], "there's no guacamole mix at Home Plus! There's no brownie mix at Home Plus!" But they sold cocoa, they sold butter, they sold everything you need to make brownies. They sold everything you need to make guacamole but you had to do it from scratch. [laughs] This was too much for my American colleagues. I never really figured that out. It's not like you can't have guacamole if you really wanted, just go buy the [ingredients].

Though the preference for sports over arts or packaged food to that made from scratch may seem trivial, to Katherine they signaled important divides in the two cultures. For many of my interviewees, observations of the small but different ways American expatriate teachers lived their daily lives and what they privileged in American run schools allowed my interviewees to define what it meant for them to be a Canadian. Her experiences helped her to identify the differences between Canadians and Americans and revealed the privileges of her life as a Canadian.

The opportunity to compare both Americans and Canadians to a third culture, Korean, enabled Canadians to break free of a definition of Canada as not-American. Foreign teachers were able to see how constant comparison with the United States blinded them to many of the taken-for-granted benefits of living in Canada, as well as flaws that had not been visible before. For example, going to the doctor in South Korea was a very positive and easy experience for many foreign teachers. Katherine described

wait times as shorter and hospital staff as more efficient than their Canadian counterparts. For those who were used to putting Canadian healthcare on a pedestal through comparisons with the American system, the reality of a South Korean system that seemed much better and more efficient than either North American system prompted reflection on services available in Canada. As Katherine said, "As long as we're doing better the US, we're happy, but the US is setting the bar pretty low."

Through the pressures of the expatriate community Canadians came to see themselves differently, both in terms of how they differed from Americans and by breaking free of an identity based purely on that comparison. Such new ways of thinking about their own national, cultural and racial identity would haunt them on their return to Canada.

Idealizing Canada Overseas

> When you live abroad and something is going on…in South Korea, you'll complain. Something happens and you're like 'well that's not right' or 'this is garbage' or 'that's bullshit'… in the beginning you tend to look back at your own country, your home, with rose coloured glasses like 'that would never go on at home!'… then I move home and think 'no, no that does go on here.'
> Tyler

Many expatriates shared Tyler's rose coloured glasses while in South Korea. Living within an entirely different culture was difficult and many found themselves looking back fondly on Canada when they encountered aspects of Korean culture they did not like.

The challenges of living overseas exposed the importance of many benefits of living in Canada that interviewees had not appreciated before they left. In his later years

in South Korea Tyler transitioned from teaching to journalism and commented to me about the censorship faced by journalists, bloggers, and comedians in South Korea, up to and including arrests. Carlee told me that if she had not been raised in Canada, she felt she would not have had the educational opportunities and freedom of movement that allowed her to come to teach overseas. She came to appreciate the strides Canada has taken towards achieving gender equality when she was faced firsthand with the gender discrimination in South Korea and her later teaching jobs in Japan and Malaysia. Lee (2013, p. 41-42) noted that Korean-American women who had been raised in the United States then moved to South Korea remarked on the difficulty of adapting to Korean gender norms. Instead of finding a closer connection to Korean culture, these women developed a stronger attachment to, and appreciation of, America. In general, the words of Fran Markowitz on homecomings, "Be it ever so humble, home-sweet-home gains its sweetness only in contrast to the piquancy of other places and the other people who live there" (2004, p. 24) apply to how my interviewees imagined Canada while overseas.

Most of the subjects my interviewees touched on were cultural, reflecting values and everyday interactions. Interviewees focused on the small differences and the difficulty they faced carrying out everyday tasks, often with the assumption that the Korean ways of doing things were burdensome or illogical when compared to how these things were accomplished Canada. For example, the way that schools were heated with some classrooms unbearably hot and hallways freezing stuck out for some as wasteful and self-defeating, while the difficulty of taking a sick day and presence of obviously sick

co-workers and students went against Canadian sensibilities about health and well-being.

It became clear to me that if my interviewees were still living overseas or if they had returned home was an important factor in how or if Canada was idealized in their narratives. Canada comes off better in the stories of teachers who were still overseas than for those of who had returned home. For this latter group, a considerably different reality had emerged as, like Tyler, they removed their rose coloured glasses.

The idealization of Canada while overseas reflects the idealization of travel and adventure abroad that interviewees used to frame their choice to move to South Korea. The contradictions in some interviewees' stories revealed the rationalizations that they used to cope with the difficulties of their lives in both countries. The rational to travel to Korea was based on an idealization of the adventure and cultural learning travel would bring, and the belief that this had been a valuable experienced was reinforced even by those whose interviews were filled with stories of loneliness and frustration. But most left Canada to escape similarly alienating and futureless situations. Yet when these same people spoke about Canada while in South Korea, they idealized it. Some stories alternated very quickly between the greatest experiences of South Korea, and counting down the days until their return to Canada in order to embrace the idyllic version of Canada their constructed while overseas.

Returning Home

> It was a much bigger adjustment coming home than it was going there. Jeremiah

Repatriation proved to be a very difficult process for the majority of my interviewees. Many institutions, such as universities that regularly send students abroad, recognize the difficulty of readjusting to home and the importance of briefing and debriefing before and after an extended period abroad (Constantinian et al., 2008, p. 52). But there are no such programs for teachers returning from South Korea. Once their last day of work is over, they have until the end of the day to be at an airport ready to fly home. Returnees are left to readjust and rebuild their lives at home on their own. The difficulty of the transition is compounded by the shock of their often newly-cultivated idealized vision of Canada breaking down in contrast to the imperfect reality they encounter. Such reverse culture shock forms an important, and difficult part of the homecoming experience for expatriates (Gaw, 2000; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007; Pocock & McIntosh, 2011). The most difficult shock is the disconnect returnees feel between themselves and others who have not shared their experience and reflections.

The anxiety and confusion experienced entering a new culture, known as culture shock, is an expected part of travelling abroad especially to a country as culturally different to Canadian as South Korea. But what few expect is the culture shock upon return home that regularly happens to those who have lived abroad for a significant period of time (Pocock & McIntosh, 2011, p. 631). This experience, called reverse culture shock, can have devastating results on individuals (see also Gaw, 2000; Pocock & McIntosh, 2011, p. 638; Selby et al, 2011, p. 1008-1010). Depression, anxiety, social

withdrawal, loneliness and isolation can be common experiences upon return (Gaw, 2000; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007, p. 265-266). Many of my interviewees experienced these symptoms, especially social isolation and depression. Returnees who expect their homes to be the same as when they left them, have often idealized their return, layering it with nostalgia, seeing it only with the tinted glasses Tyler mentioned. This nostalgia dovetails with the tendency for returnees to believe that the homes they are returning to will not have changed during their absence (Gaw, 2000, p. 86; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007, p. 265).

They quickly learn however that life in Canada has been not static during their absence. Political and economic climates change, personal relationships shift, babies are born, individuals die, others move away leading to a disconnect in both personal relationships and the wider milieu. A year or more working overseas, while providing temporary financial relief and giving these individuals a much stronger senses of their abilities and personal identity, can make the return even more difficult. Finding a permanent job can remain elusive, just as it was before they left Canada. Returnees felt that they acquired many new skills and valuable knowledge overseas, yet they felt that these attributes were not valued valuable by employers. Some who remained overseas, did so out of an awareness of the difficult job market in Canada. Those who did find work in Canada reflected on how lucky they were to do so. Others I spoke with have either gone back to school, or were seriously considering it. These pressures led to a sense of the loss of their independence and self-sufficiency, something they treasured very much overseas. On a personal level, the difficulty of reintegrating into a society that many of my interviewees saw as emphasizing the importance of career and money

above all else was an especially sensitive issue. Friends and family at home assume that returnees will quickly find jobs, begin the process of 'settling down' and to be the same person upon their return that they were when they left-- just as expatriates expect home and the individuals who live there to stay the same.

And yet, expatriates I spoke with who returned to Canada unanimously felt that the experience had a profound effect on how they viewed Canada and the events in their daily lives. They were confronted with a reality upon their return that Canada is not the safe, stable, and accepting country they imagined it to be while in South Korea. The mismatch between their imaginings and reality exposed to them what they saw as many of Canada's flaws, things these interviewees were blinded to before they left. Returnees are often very vocal about their experiences overseas and the flaws in Canadian society that they revealed, which cause discord with their families, friends, and even potential. Returnees have an extremely difficult time convincing their family and friends, let alone strangers, of the value of new insights their experiences and reflections have revealed.

The most glaring issues I heard about revolved around how Canadians, especially white, English speaking Canadians, conceive of themselves compared to linguistic, cultural, and racial minorities in Canada. Many had developed strong senses of empathy with newcomers to Canada due to their shared experiences learning to adapt to and survive in another culture. The important role expatriate communities had had in their lives in South Korea was not forgotten. The knowledge of how these communities offered them safe spaces where they found comfort with people who shared their

language, and broad cultural values provided a strong counter-balance to concern about of ghettoization and resistance to assimilation of cultural and racial minorities that has been seen as widespread in Canada (Kymlicka, 2001, p. 152). Having been racialized and subjected to discrimination in South Korea, returnees were more keenly awareness of bigotry in Canada and the racial context of comments against visible minorities, and especially recent immigrants. Their experiences fostered an awareness of the shared humanity of all residents of Canada, regardless of race, culture or language. In Tyler's words:

> I know what it is to be, to live as a minority, to experience everything that goes on with that, some of the prejudices you run up against, some of the difficulties. I know what it is to be in a place where I'm challenged linguistically. To be in a place where none of this is easy because I haven't mastered the language … I think you stop and listen a little more because you know that things aren't always as they seem because you've seen how different things can be, you've seen how other people can be treated. Were those other people any different people than you?

One marker of difference than they were especially sensitive to was language. Their experiences both as members of a linguistic minority and as language teachers led to a strong resistance against the language-based discrimination they saw around them. Alexandra's experience teaching at both *hagwons* and public schools bests describes these revelations:

> Learning a language is SO difficult. And I learned French as a kid, … growing up … it's way easier for a child to learn it when they're just acquiring language. So it never occurred to me how difficult that really is. And then working at the *hagwon*, those kids are brilliant … And then working here at the public school, nobody understands it at all. And there's so much pressure to – well you have to have four chapters done in one month, or something. I mean I can teach it, but they're not going to understand it. So it changed me in the fact that it's made me more of an understanding person … it made me sick, going back home to Canada and hearing my family … extended, extended, but still – hearing people

> talk … 'go back, if you don't want to learn the language.' I can't believe that kind of thought exists. Do you know how hard it is to learn a second language, especially one like English? Oh my god, they have no idea what they're going through. I was always against that kind of talk but it just really drives me crazy here.

Changes in perception of aspects of Canadian life like Alexandra's and Tyler's, especially the behavior of their peers, had a significant impact in how they interacted with others who had never had such experiences. Returnees were frequently frustrated with others who were unable to understand their new perspectives on Canada, especially those that challenged aspects of taken-for-granted aspects of Canadian life.

Tyler, for example, never realized how nationalistic Canada, and especially his home province of Newfoundland, was until he went overseas. Becoming sensitive to the excessively nationalist media in South Korea allowed him to see the same things in Canadian media. As he puts it, "...oh that used to always bother me in South Korea and I didn't realize it was going on here to this extent." He found striking comparisons between how South Korean and Canadian media treated stars who became famous abroad, touting their accomplishments after they had become famous but not giving them the support to do so within their home countries. He also made new connections between sensitivity towards the opinions of outsiders he encountered among South Korea and the way people in his home province of Newfoundland act:

> Newfoundland is a nationalistic province. … Korea is a very nationalistic country and until moving home, I didn't always see it. Sometimes now that I'm home I think 'oh that used to always bother me in South Korea' and I didn't realize it was going on here to this extent. It bothers because it's just a big inferiority complex … They're [Koreans] not great at having jokes made about them. They're not good at looking at themselves and laughing I find … In Newfoundland you've got this inferiority complex because there's always these Newfie jokes going on and people get very sensitive and I don't want a Newfie joke told in

> front of me just … but to be so sensitive that every little thing is going to be looked at and scrutinized to see if because we're Newfoundlanders we'll be dumb. I just can't stand it. Then we talk in Newfoundland that we can go it alone from the rest of Canada and I say well 'no, we can't, so stop this talk'.

Madison became aware of the stigmas and value judgments Canadians apply to others in the context of something as fundamental as the use of public transportation. She said, "In Canada, who uses public transportation? Only poor people who don't have cars and why don't you have a car? Oh, because you're poor. I feel like there's so much that could be done with our public transportation system." The ubiquitousness and effectiveness of public transportation in South Korea made her reconsider car ownership when she returned to Canada, but she found other Canadians judged her based on that choice. The rejection of car culture was a common theme I heard as others reported that they felt that they were looked down by friends and even strangers for not owning or wanting to own a car. Canadian social norms as variable as fashion, etiquette, tipping, and nudity proved problematic as returnees reintegrated into Canadian society. After being exposed to the ways Koreans dealt with these issues, many interviewees saw the benefits of how they were handled South Korea and saw the Canadian way of doing certain things as problematic. These tensions did not rapidly disappear after they settled into a life in Canada. It has been eight years between when my first returning interviewee, Peter, returned to Canada and when the interviews were carried out and to that day, he and others found themselves in the double bind of both being more critical and more appreciative of Canada.

The imperfect nature of Canada helped Canadians to see the value of the different way of life they encountered in South Korea. Despite the difficulties in the

classroom, with administrators, or prejudice faced on the streets, interviewees expressed a deep respect and love for South Korea. No matter how difficult their time overseas was, every single interviewee said that others should have a similar experience. The process of reconciling their experience of Canada before and after expatriation with the different way of living they encountered in South Korea was seen as so valuable that it trumped all of the difficulties they faced.

Chapter 4
Reconciling the Contradictions

> In places your expats sound like exiles [...] In others, they sound like happy wanderers making the best of a lousy job market.
> Professor Robert Wright, in reference to an earlier draft of this thesis

The above quote from a member of my thesis committee captures the tone and content of many of my interviews. Interviewees switched quickly and frequently between laughing and crying as the stories they related changed. What I heard about their lives in Canada and South Korea was complex, nuanced with elements of exile, adventure, and personal growth. Their stories were in many ways full of contradictions as they tried to make sense of their teaching experiences in South Korea, what it meant to be 'Canadian', and assumptions about what their futures held.

Before moving to South Korea to teach ESL my interviewees assessed their lives in Canada based on their relation to their desired employment, or lack thereof. Many of those I interviewed had been unable to achieve their career goals of a job that provided them enough income and stability to acquire what they had internalized to be symbols of adulthood: personal fulfillment, steady professional employment, and other trappings of independence such as owning a home, or a vehicle. Without such things, many felt lost, inadequate, and trapped, floundering somewhere between adolescence and adulthood (Bell, 2012). The chance to teach in South Korea allowed these individuals the potential for the respect and the prestige that accompanied both a professional job and international travel. Such things flagged preliminary steps on the path to adulthood and independence. But Katherine also noted of her experience teaching in South Korea that she was, " … in a weird way … grateful to the messed up

economic forces [in Canada] that sent me [to South Korea]. It enabled me to do incredible things and make something more of my life" beyond these taken-for-granted markers of success in Canadian society. The contradictions inherent in these positions shape much of what I have written in previous chapters. The expatriates I interviewed rationalized their decision to go to South Korea based on the adventures they would have and what they would learn from teaching ESL in South Korea. They wove together narratives that swung wildly between heartfelt laughter and tears borne of frustration and fear.

The experiences to date of most of my interviewees contradicted the narrative that had inspired them throughout their life to date: get a good university education, work hard, and you will succeed. But rather than lead to success, as the global economies shifted in response to the ideas of neoliberalism, such notions seem deeply flawed. Unable to use their education in the labour market, many were forced to look for work that didn't utilize their credentials. In the period from 2008 to 2013, for example, the number of new teaching graduates working in other occupations rose from 7% to 37% (*Transition to Teaching*, 2014). Due to changes in the Canadian labour market since the 1990s that saw a weakening regulations, privatization, lay-offs, outsourcing, and replacing permanent full-time workers with part-time and contract workers, they were frequently unable to find employment that was stable or well-paid enough to support their independence.

The media is littered with characterizations of young Canadians as lacking a good work ethic and deserving of their frequently bleak employment situations (Boesveld,

2013; Scowen, 2013). But taking on significant debt and deciding to leave their homes and families behind for the chance at full-time, well-paying employment are decisions not easily taken by those anxious to affirm their transition to the next stage of their life. But as I learned the experiences gained from this move abroad played an important role in changing how my interviewees saw themselves, their country and their relationship to their future careers.

The opportunity for expatriate teachers to step outside of Canadian society for a year or more allowed them to see many of the contradictions in the narratives they had internalized throughout their lives in Canada. Living in South Korea gave them a new reference point for their taken-for-granted world. Being seen as an exotic, sometimes demonized and always racialized while in South Korean society revealed the many ways that Canada and Canadians do not live up to the idealized narratives they tell about themselves. Their experiences allowed them to rethink how the narrative of Canada as a welcoming, multicultural country plays out in everyday interactions. Many developed a new empathy towards what some newcomers to Canada experience. These ex-pats knew first-hand the many ways discrimination, based on racial, linguistic and cultural difference, can inflict damage as they confronted the difficulty of learning to work in an environment with a new language and vast cultural differences. Ironically, interviewees like Katherine, were grateful for such experiences. Upon returning home she, like others was prompted to be more empathetic in her everyday interactions and in the classroom, working to be a better citizen and help make Canada more closely resemble the welcoming country she had imagined it to be.

My interviewees also learned the many ways that Canadian culture is distinct from that of other cultures, even American culture. The everyday differences in how Canadians interacted with and understand the world, most notably in their interactions with Koreans, revealed concrete ways that Canadians are distinct. Their connection to Canada was strengthened by their ability to better define what it meant to be Canadian, even as some taken-for-granted narratives were dispelled in their minds. What my interviewees took for granted as a 'Canadian' normal was brought into focus. Exposure to South Korean nationalism allowed Canadians to recognize the strength of the nationalism they and their fellow citizens demonstrated, something that was often hidden while in Canada when compared to more overt American nationalism.

Several of my interviewees confronted the flawed assumptions that car ownership carries in Canada, and North America generally. The wastefulness of North American car culture became obvious as many of my interviewees commented favourably on the excellent public transportation system in South Korea, noting that South Koreans of all socioeconomic classes used it. The lack of stigma around public transportation usage in South Korea highlighted the realities of class hierarchies in Canada, where it is generally assumed that one only regularly uses public transportation if one lacks the resources to own a car.

This spring marks eleven years since my first interviewee left for South Korea. To date, only two of my interviewees have found permanent full-time employment of any sort in Canada, let alone in the profession in which they are trained. However, only one has chosen to remain overseas and not return. In the spring of 2014 another class of

post-secondary graduates will join them in an increasingly strained job market. These graduates will have heard the same narrative that my interviewees' family and friends ingrained into them: get an education, work hard, and you will get a job (Klassen, 2013). But as job quality and stability continues to decrease while a growing proportion of Canadians attend higher education, the dissonance between this narrative and reality grows.

The stories told by my interviewees exposed the power Canadian narratives of education, employment, and success have over individuals, especially in the form of stigmas when failing to live up to expectations, despite "doing everything right". This dissonance needs to be addressed. The economy has changed and students can no longer expect stable or well-paid employment upon graduation, but characterizing them as lazy or failures ignores the wider socioeconomic reasons behind the troubles they face. While examples still appear that lament the delayed adulthood, lack of work ethic and entitlement of youth, the conversation has begun to change. The value of university degrees, defined by most authors in these instances by job success and wages, has recently become the center of a discussion on the realities of the relationship between the job market and levels of education (Coates, 2014; Champagne, 2014). But the conversation largely ignores the role of employers, implying that post-secondary institutions are failing students by teaching material that is not 'useful' in the Canadian job market. Yet only a few mention the role employers play in the job market. Employers are investing less in their employees through reduced job training programs (Helfand, 2013) while demanding more education from new hires, even when that

education is not utilized in their positions (Alphonso, 2014). There is no incentive for employers to offer more, as employees are increasingly disposable and graduates increasingly living in poverty (Hopper, 2014). The framing of education as the path to a job also obscures the true value of the Bachelors of Arts and Sciences in developing critical thinking and analytical skills (Tapscott, 2014) things that were essential in helping my interviewees turn the difficult expatriation and repatriation process into one that, as Katherine stated, was on balance a positive and productive one.

Each one of my interviewee was ultimately thankful for having had the experience of living and teaching in South Korea. Though the experience often did not fully deliver the experience or long-term financial stability they hoped, it afforded them entirely new and challenging growth experiences. But the value of this learning experience is tempered as their inability to gain meaningful, good employment at home continues. For those expatriates who remain overseas for more extended periods, their adventures start to resemble exile. The result is a global brain drain where well-educated Canadian youth struggle to become productive and self-supporting members of Canadian society, but frequently find they can only do so by leaving Canada behind. I cannot say what the long-term ramifications of this scenario will be, but my interviewees' stories reveal that it should concern us all.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Where are you from in Canada?

When were you in South Korea?

How old were you when you were there?

Did you go with anyone?
Ask for each contract if more than one.

What did you do/study before you left?
Did you want to be a teacher before you went?

Why did you decide to go to South Korea as an ESL teacher?
Ask for each contract if more than one.

Tell me about the city you lived in Korea.
Ask for each contract if more than one.

Tell me about your first few weeks in South Korea.

Describe how your daily life in South Korea unfolded over time.

Describe your teaching experience(s) in South Korea.

Were there any support networks to fall back on?

Who made up your social network in Korea?

What were the things you liked the most about your life in Korea?

What were the things you like the least about your life in Korea?

How did you feel about returning to Canada?
Ask for each return if more than one.

What was it like for you readjusting to life in Canada?
Ask for each return if more than one.

Do you think your experience in Korea changed you? If so, how?

Has it changed the way you see Canada?

Are you working as a teacher now? If not, what is your employment?

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me that would be helpful for my research?

Is there anything you would like to add about your time in South Korea?

Appendix 2: Interviewee Profiles

PETER

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 26
Years in South Korea: 2003-2004
Employment in South Korea: A small city.
History: Peter was employed as a youth worker for three years, but was unable to make enough money. He was encouraged to leave Ottawa by his best friend. Though he was interested in teaching and loved his work with children, he has since gone into commerce.

MICHELLE

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 21
Years in South Korea: 2009-present
Employment in South Korea: Hagwon in a larger city, then a university in a small town.
History: Michelle left Ontario for South Korea after finishing her undergraduate degree. Although she feels that South Korea is her home, she knows it is only temporary. While she has expressed interest in returning to Canada and going to teacher's college, she is unsure whether it is a good idea or what to do next with her life.

MADISON

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 22
Years in South Korea: 2005-2007, 2008-present.
Employment in South Korea: High in a medium-sized city, then an elementary school in large city.
History: Madison was convinced to leave Nova Scotia by a friend after she was unable to get a spot in the education program she wanted. Aside from a year in Australia, she has returned to Canada only for summers and Christmases. She has no plans to return to Canada.

JANELLE

Age on Arrival in South Korea: Not given
Years in South Korea: 2005-present
Employment in South Korea: Public schools in a medium-sized city
History: Janelle had originally hoped to teach in Nova Scotia after finishing teacher's college, but the poor job market convinced her to come to South Korea. Although she wants to return to Canada, the lack of opportunity at home has prevented her from returning for the sake of financial stability.

CARMEN

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 28
Years in South Korea: 2009-2010, 2011-2012
Employment in South Korea: Public school in a large city, then an isolated international school.

History: Carmen originally came to South Korea in order to improve her chances of getting into teacher's college. Though originally from Nova Scotia, she now lives in Ontario where the poor job market convinced her to take a second contract in South Korea. Since her return, she has found contract work as a teacher.

TYLER

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 24
Years in South Korea: 2004-2010
Employment in South Korea: Hagwon in a medium-sized city, then a university in a large city, and finally as a journalist.
History: A childhood friend convinced Tyler to leave Newfoundland for South Korea after his job with the Canadian Forces ended. Tyler's had a difficult time adjusting to life in Canada, though he had more luck that most finding a job. He currently works as a radio journalist, although he says that getting employment in journalism in Canada would have been impossible without his Korean experience.

JENNIFER

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 26
Years in South Korea: 2011-2012
Employment in South Korea: Hagwon in a large city.
History: Jennifer worked as an educational assistant for three years, then as a hairstylist, before leaving Ontario for South Korea. She has returned to work as a hairstylist and plans to attend teacher's college.

SOFIA

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 26
Years in South Korea: 2010-present
Employment in South Korea: Public school in a large city.
History: Sofia graduated from teacher's college but has only been able to low-paying part-time teaching jobs in Nova Scotia. She also spent a year teaching ESL in Japan before a friend convinced her to come to South Korea.

ALEXANDRA

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 29
Years in South Korea: 2009-2010, 2011, 2012-present
Employment in South Korea: Hagwon in a small town, then a public school in a small town.
History: Alexandra worked with troubled children in the United States for four years but was unable to find work in Canada after returning home. A Korean company found her resume online and hired her. Although she has attempted to find work in Canada, she has been unable to and has returned to South Korea.

WALDO

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 22
Years in South Korea: 2005, 2006-2008, 2011
Employment in South Korea: Hagwons and camps in large cities.
History: Waldo left Nova Scotia for South Korea with his girlfriend after graduating from teacher's college due to the extremely poor teaching market in Nova Scotia. He has since found employment as a teacher in Canada but returns to South Korea occasionally to work at summer and winter camps.

JEREMIAH

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 23
Years in South Korea: 2005-2007
Employment in South Korea: Hagwon in a medium-sized city.
History: Jeremiah came to South Korea with his wife immediately after finishing university. Since his return to Canada he has worked several short-term teaching related positions and plans to do a Master's degree in ESL teaching to make himself more employable. He currently lives in Ontario.

CARLEE

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 32
Years in South Korea: 2005-2011
Employment in South Korea: Public school in a small city, a rural public school, then at community center teaching adults, and finally a university language center.
History: Carlee worked in a literacy program for the federal government but quit after five years when she saw there were no opportunities to advance. She taught for a year in Japan before moving to South Korea and currently works in Malaysia as a teaching mentor. Although she still considers Canada to be her home, she has no plans to return permanently.

SEAN

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 23
Years in South Korea: 2005-2008
Employment in South Korea: Hagwon in a medium-sized city, later a high school and university.
History: Sean left Ontario for South Korea after graduating from university and not knowing what to do with her degree. She returned to Canada due to the transient ESL teaching jobs and homesickness. She has since worked various part-time and contract positions in education.

KATHERINE

Age on Arrival in South Korea: 25
Years in South Korea: 2007-2011
Employment in South Korea: A teacher's college in a medium-sized city, then an international school in a large city.
History: Originally from Alberta, Katherine wanted to be an academic and was afraid of teaching, but after finishing her Master's degree realized life in academia wasn't viable. She has completed another degree and now works in contract positions as a librarian in Quebec.