

TABLE RONDE / ROUND TABLE

Staking Narrative Claims: A Round Table
on *Creating Societies: Immigrant Lives in
Canada* by Dirk Hoerder

ACCLAIMED migration scholar Dirk Hoerder of the University of Bremen published *Creating Societies: Immigrant Lives in Canada* in 1999. Despite the importance of the book's subject, the reputation of the author, and the prestige of the publisher (McGill-Queen's University Press), *Creating Societies* has not received widespread attention among migration scholars or more broadly among those in the field of social history. A round table on the book conducted at the European Social Sciences History Conference in Berlin in 2004 sought to showcase this study to an interdisciplinary and international audience. The session was chaired by Sylvia Hahn (University of Salzburg), who had developed the idea of the round table, and featured comments by three other migration historians: Nora Faires (Western Michigan University), Leslie Page Moch (Michigan State University), and Leo Lucassen (University of Amsterdam). Dirk Hoerder responded to the comments at the lively and well-attended session; his revised remarks are included here with those of the other participants.

Sylvia Hahn, University of Salzburg:

When I started reading Dirk Hoerder's book, *Creating Societies: Immigrant Lives in Canada*, I found myself quickly and thoroughly absorbed by the lively life-stories of the immigrants he presents. Hoerder takes us on a journey across Canada with the immigrants, and this travelogue is worked out on two levels — regional and historical/chronological. It starts on the east coast of Canada, where most of the early generations of immigrants landed and where their migration journeys across Canada began. It continues through time and across regions towards the west coast, which finally became the major centre of migration during the later waves of migration at the end of the twentieth century. The only thing I found missing on this interesting journey, with all the different female and male immigrants from various countries and continents, was a map that would have given those of us among the book's readers who have no mental map of Canada some help in locating the many stops on this road across the continent.

It was fascinating to follow the tracks of the immigrants in a double sense

— on their migratory trails, way stations, and passageways across Canada on one side and through their immigrant lives and different life cycles on the other. As a migration historian working mainly with quantitative sources, I was enthralled by Hoerder's way of writing a migration history based nearly exclusively on qualitative material — on life-writings such as autobiographies and letters of female and male immigrants. Using such "soft" sources for writing migration history opens up different and new views onto the world of migration in general and the everyday struggles and the worlds of the migrants in particular. Beyond the different kinds of immigration and internal migration within Canada, we also learn about the networks with which immigrants were involved, the "mental maps" that were "not geographical but relational", the difficulties of adjusting in the new environment, the burdens of bound labour, or the changing roles within generations. The generational issues especially stressed by Hoerder as he takes up the role of children within immigrant families, the stresses and solidarity created by the dependency of parents on their children's help (for example, with regard to language skills and income), have not generally received much attention so far in migration history, but they seem to provide a very interesting avenue for further research.

This example is only one of many ideas and issues developed by Hoerder that should be considered and picked up in future studies. Of course, this wonderful history of immigration to Canada as a whole naturally led us to the idea of organizing a panel at the 2004 European Social Science History Conference in Berlin so that we could have the chance to discuss this marvellous book, both with the author and with other leading migration historians.

Nora Faires, Western Michigan University:

Throughout *Creating Societies: Immigrant Lives in Canada*, Dirk Hoerder keeps the nation at a distance. For him, the project of nation-making, an historiographical staple (literally in the case of a leading Canadian tradition), occurs as a backdrop, while matters more proximate and personal to individual migrants take centre stage. Perhaps his most concise rationale for this discursive and methodological strategy appears in the introductory note to another of this prolific author's works. In his nearly 800-page synthesis, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium*, Hoerder writes, "From the point of view of individuals, societies consist of regional economies and culture and, after migration, of religious, craft, or ethnic networks."¹ In another recent work with the provocative title "How the Intimate Lives of Subaltern Men, Women and Children Confound the Nation's Master Narratives", he contrasts the form of analysis undergirding that essay, and by extension *Creative Societies*, with "an older form of social history ... pri-

1 Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. xix.

marily concerned with global processes, demographic shifts, or local communities".²

The cover image of *Creating Societies* offers an apt illustration of this decentring of the state and structures of power and refocusing on the migrant. The caption for the black and white photography reads, "Immigrants arriving at Winnipeg station, MB, ca. 1909."³ The "master narrative" of Canadian nation-making has privileged the railroad, especially its planners, financiers, and governmental supporters, often considering the immigrants who rode it to their new homes primarily as necessary additions to an economy short on labour but as potentially problematic building blocks of a developing polity. In the cover photograph the iconic railroad appears in the background. The foreground depicts a crowd, mostly men, awaiting newcomers. A score of women wearing aprons and shawls and men in dark clothing have just disembarked, those waiting to greet them clad much like those arriving. A few officials of the railroad or the government appear as well, yet the photograph suggests immigration virtually unmediated by the state. As Hoerder points out, in Canadian public memory no space compares to that of the American immigrant debarkation areas of Ellis Island or Angel Island, even if the Winnipeg railway station was sometimes referred to as Canada's immigrant "gateway". Taken from above and at a considerable distance, the photograph does not allow the viewer to make out any faces, rendering the immigrants devoid of individuality.

Hoerder's book intends to add features to immigrants like those in this picture and to trace their biographies. To do so he draws on "life-writings" culled from published and archival sources of some 300 migrants who settled in Canada from the mid-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century. Relying on these autobiographies, memoirs, letters, and diaries, he proposes not only to craft a revised narrative that includes these specific immigrant authors but also to explicate aspects of the lives of those "called the inarticulate because they did not express themselves in writing" (p. 84). This proves something of a conundrum, one that goes beyond the issue of representativeness to the question of what such life-writings, stitched together over space and time, can tell us. Hoerder believes that "the sum of lives built and relationships established created a society" and that "only the sum of those life stories yields the story of a whole society" (p. 95).⁴

On one level this sympathetic, engaging, and far-reaching scholar of migration is absolutely right: human experience is the stuff of history. His well-crafted book testifies to that formulation, offering a cogent retelling of

2 Dirk Hoerder, "How the Intimate Lives of Subaltern Men, Women, and Children Confound the Nation's Master Narratives" in "Empires and Intimacies: Lessons from (Post) Colonial Studies: A Round Table", *Journal of American History*, vol. 88 (December 2001), p. 874.

3 The cover image is from the Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal.

4 See also Hoerder, "How the Intimate Lives Confound", p. 877.

Canadian immigration history. Yet, for me at least, the creation of societies entails more than the aggregation of individual lives: the whole does constitute more than the sum of its parts, whether that whole be the nation, the community, the regional culture (a unit of analysis fundamental to this book), or the immigrant group (a unit less commonly examined here). At certain moments, Hoerder would seem to agree. In examining evidence for the 1930s and 1940s, for example, he states, "The question answered by the life-writings is: How did the newcomers *participate* across cultural boundaries?" but also that the "open question is the connection of the immigrant worlds to national institutions" (p. 287). Hoerder's book demonstrates that immigrant reflections provide crucial testimony about such connections but it also suggests the limits of this evidence. To interpret how national institutions fortified, fostered, expanded, truncated, erased, absorbed, or appropriated elements of immigrant worlds and how these migrant worlds in turn came to constitute, disrupt, define, or redefine the nation requires stepping outside the immigrant narratives.

Like the photographer at the Winnipeg station, we must step back, looking at the immigrants from some distance, seeing them collectively, reincorporating into this wider view the train as product of labour and appropriated land, as well as officials of state and representatives of capital and the hulking girders of the train station, a superstructure that hovers above the scene and serves to remind us of ideologies and relations of power. Hoerder might eschew such a vantage point, regarding it as a retreat to a more old-fashioned social historical perspective. Instead, I would suggest that something akin to this perspective percolates throughout the book, as Hoerder sheds light on larger patterns and processes through analysing individuals' writings. The scholar who produced the panoramic *Cultures in Contact* may perforce read the creation of societies as more than the totality of personal life stories; he certainly understands the need to contextualize them systematically. Hence, in *Creating Societies* Hoerder uses the life histories to examine a wide range of issues of interest to scholars of migration to Canada and elsewhere, a few of which I highlight as providing particularly intriguing areas for future research.

This book incorporates a gendered perspective that affords insight into several related topics. For instance, Hoerder argues that on the Prairies immigrant men often had to "make do", becoming deskilled, while women developed "additional skills" as they confronted the task of settling on the frontier (p. 162). Similarly, in the life-writings he traces a pattern of family separation after migration, with men especially likely to leave their newly made homes, seeking work in cities or taking seasonal employment in agriculture, mining, lumbering, or on the railroad. Throughout, Hoerder attends to consumption as well as production, giving a sense of the zeal some immigrant men, women, and children had to participate in a market economy. He relates that one immigrant opened his store in a tiny Prairie town by holding a dance; the next day eager would-be customers themselves unpacked the

store's goods; and several weeks later, when the site of the store proved too distant from the newly completed railroad for easy delivery of new wares, townspeople moved the building, stock and all, closer to the station. Hoerder also discusses peddlers, seeing them as agents of "acculturation [for immigrants] in marketplace societies" in contrast to the "old world, where consumption was stratified by social convention" (p. 178). Yet, if access to an expanding consumer market proved "democratizing", as Hoerder argues, the peddler's visit or a trip to the country store could also prove divisive, especially along gender and generational lines, as family members quarrelled over the expenditure of meagre resources.

Paying considerable attention to the immigrants' engagement with the market and drawing on life histories of numerous entrepreneurs, on the whole Hoerder seems more interested in the ways in which immigrants were able to stand outside the system of capitalism that was transforming the worlds they left and those they entered. He is alert to labour protests, signs of working-class mutuality and radicalism, occasions of generosity. Even some of his entrepreneurs seem non-capitalist, even anti-capitalist, demonstrating solidarity with their customers, including their co-ethnics, out of more than commercial self-interest. Hoerder emphasizes a distinction he sees in the life stories of shopkeepers and business owners between those who accumulated and "those who remembered what they did, not what they acquired" (p. 175). Here the issue of memory intrudes perhaps more than usual, as those who used their countryfolks' needs to further their own material advancement may have been reluctant to admit as much. Nonetheless, Hoerder reminds us that immigrant entrepreneurs remain a key area for investigation and perhaps reinterpretation.

Creating Societies also invites us to reconsider issues of residential segregation and political mobilization. Hoerder's immigrant authors reveal that ethnic diversity characterized some of the "bloc" settlements on the Prairies, areas often regarded as homogeneous linguistic, religious, and immigrant communities. Hoerder shows that seemingly monolithic blocs of Russian Germans, Ukrainians, and Poles were heterogeneous from the outset and argues that such diversity had consequences for political formation as well as patterns of everyday life. On the Prairies especially, but also in ethnically diverse city wards, "old world animosities between ethnicities" did not preclude "inter-ethnic cooperation" as immigrants of various backgrounds experienced "democratization ... from the bottom up" (p. 193). With little or no experience of liberty in their former homelands and little knowledge or concern in their new one for "abstract notions of a free country and constitutional procedures", immigrants to Canada learned by doing, Hoerder contends, fashioning organizations for their own use that reshaped political understandings and ideals (p. 196). He posits that immigrants thereby went far toward "creating societies" in Canada. Notably, he contrasts this process of ethnic mobilization with that characteristic of immigrants in the United States, Canada's populous and powerful neighbour to the south. In the

United States, Hoerder believes, particular immigrant groups “reached institutional completeness and political strength earlier”, which in turn limited their willingness to cooperate with each other (p. 193).

Such explicit comparisons between Canada and the United States are few, although *Creating Societies* acknowledges that many, if not most, of the immigrants who tell their life stories inhabited a borderland that stretched across the international divide. Hoerder comments that “many settlers moved in the West as if no border between the United States and Canada existed” and in several instances traces immigrants’ traversal of the 49th parallel over the course of their lives (p. 145). Sometimes the border seemed to matter to them; other times not. An Icelandic ice-fisher, for example, simply relocated his business from Manitoba to North Dakota when Ontario-based firms cut into his business in Winnipeg; this immigrant later returned to Winnipeg, where he argued successfully that, because he was a Canadian citizen, he should be charged a lower licence fee than that levied on American firms operating in Manitoba. American as well as Canadian state policies reverberated throughout the regional borderland many of these immigrants inhabited. During the Depression, for example, United States President Franklin Roosevelt’s policy of rural electrification, designed to boost domestic employment and appeal to rural voters, led to demand for poles on which the electrical and telephone cables would be strung, creating jobs for immigrant logging crews in British Columbia.

In consequential respects, then, Hoerder’s immigrants participate in creating not Canadian regional societies but transnational ones. This transnational character and the overall proximity of the United States becomes more important, as Hoerder occasionally acknowledges but does not detail, when the story of extensive migration to Canada is placed in the context of simultaneous, often even more extensive out-migration from Canada. During the century that he discusses, millions of people left Canada for the United States; these out-migrants included native-born Canadians and immigrants, both those who quickly passed through Canada and those who stayed for years or decades only to settle in the nation to the south. Although this movement of population was two-way, the net flow was overwhelmingly in favour of the United States. Only around the turn of the century, with the “American” frontier reportedly at an end, was this pattern briefly reversed. Significantly, none of these immigrants to the “last best west” of the Prairie provinces figures in Hoerder’s account, though in parts of Alberta “Americans” outnumbered all other immigrants in the period before World War I. Perhaps, as members of the transnational borderland, such immigrants should not be considered immigrants at all? Hoerder’s fine study helps to cast this, as so many other questions, into clearer relief.

On the whole, *Creating Societies* puts forward an optimistic view of the immigrant experience in Canada, emphasizing the contributions and adaptations ordinary people made as they went about their lives in a new world. Hoerder concludes that, while immigrants faced myriad hardships, those

who recounted their stories demonstrated a “flexible” life project. Some of the life writers he cites seem less sanguine — a war bride entitled her account *It Could Have Been Worse*; an earlier Polish immigrant chose the title *A Difficult Life*. Yet other migrants seem to have agreed with Canada’s promoters, who dubbed it the “land of the second chance”.

Dirk Hoerder’s respect for these immigrants as individuals gives their life stories a second chance, whatever their authors’ fates. His commitment to rendering visible and voiced those too infrequently seen and heard in historical accounts offers other scholars an opportunity to learn much more about migration to Canada — and to appreciate the accomplishment of *Creating Societies*.

Leslie Page Moch, Michigan State University:

Creating Societies is seated in the intriguing epistemological premise that we can write a national history through life-writings (letters, diaries, autobiographies, oral histories, travel accounts, and memoirs), in this case the life-writings of newcomers to Canada. Indeed, one of the most powerful elements of the study comes at the beginning, where Dirk Hoerder points out the value of life-writings and the identities they reveal, an assertion that eloquently resonates throughout the book and myriad tales of friendship, betrayal, solidarity, and disappointment. The reader travels geographically and temporally from the seventeenth-century Maritime provinces to contemporary British Columbia: the study ends with a section on the years of exclusion after World War I and those most recent years of multiculturalism as policy.

This book is a labour of love. I believe it holds a special place for Hoerder precisely because it is rooted in the human experience. For that reason, one of my responses to *Creating Societies* was to reflect on its relationship to *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium*, Hoerder’s much broader history based not on individual stories, but rather on his knowledge about the large-scale trends on seven continents over a 1,000-year period. Perhaps *Creating Societies* kept Hoerder sane while he wrote the very large study because it kept him in touch with the individual experience of mobility. In any case, the two works clearly come from the same scholar: both excoriate the powerful and the brutality of the capital; neither allows the reader to stray from the suffering of those who could not protect themselves; and both lament the obliteration of the domestic and women’s experience. For example, when describing the grocery stores where health information and recipes were exchanged among Jewish immigrants to Montreal, he writes in *Creating Societies*, “This was the women’s sphere in which, in contrast to formal, male-dominated organizations, no minutes were kept. Historians thus only get one side of the story” (p. 84). Even in the 582 pages of *Cultures in Contact*, Hoerder allowed (or perhaps insisted upon) the stories of individuals; the works were both large in scale, but even the most general study invokes the individual experience. This is the author’s impulse. The geographical rhythm of *Creating Societies*, tied to the history of a frontier society,

keeps the focus on the experiential rather than on thorny questions of assimilation and acculturation. Yet Hoerder is far from that old Zionist saw, “a land without people for a people without land”; rather he understands First Nations peoples in the context of ongoing relationships between European and First Nations societies. Nonetheless, as sociologists of immigration to the United States have moved from studies around the concepts of assimilation and questions of melting pot and salad bowl, they have become attached to a concept that may be of use to a discussion of *Creating Societies* — that of insertion into particular contexts of reception — the political context, the economic context, and the context of the ethnic community.⁵ What does Hoerder tell us about these contexts for newcomers to Canada? They can be of some use to us in interpreting the copious information in *Creating Societies* and help us to contextualize what we read.

For example, the political contexts of immigration normally address state policies, and indeed the state encouraged, if not recruited, many of Hoerder’s immigrants, and many were called by the lovely Canadian Pacific Railroad posters; moreover, on the “push” side, some like the Dutch government sponsored “assisted emigration” to get the poor out of the country (p. 127).⁶ When we look at relations to the state, however, we learn in this book what aspects of the state were most important in the eyes of newcomers: the postal system and the schools. At the post office, they could find letters from home and send letters and remittances of their own if things went well; the schools would teach their children English and other skills to cope with Canadian society. As Hoerder writes, the “undersides of settlement and national building” revealed by life-writings — such as suicide and madness from loneliness and despair on the Prairies — “never entered national lore” (p. 153). This, then, is light shed on the political context of reception from a new angle, that is, from below.

When we look at the “economic contexts” of reception, the immigrant life-writings reveal a much less tidy and more disappointing picture of the labour market for immigrants, even though it sometimes involves outright recruitment to work in Canada or “assisted emigration” from home. Some recruitment letters were false; work that paid was scarce and often sought by rumour. Many writings contain phrases such as, “I heard there would be work, and so I went.” In such fluid and often frontier societies, with booms and busts, with farms and towns that thrived but also failed, there were few incidences of the ethnic enclaves and opportunities for ethnic entrepreneurs that have bred an entire sub-field on ethnic entrepreneurship in the cities of the contemporary United States.⁷

5 See, for example, Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 84–88.

6 For recruitment, see also Serge Courville, *Immigration, colonisation et propagande : du rêve américain au rêve colonial* (Quebec: Éditions Multimondes, 2002).

7 See, for example, Ivan Light and Steven J. Gold, *Ethnic Economies* (San Diego, CA: Academic, 2000).

Likewise, the context of ethnic communities in reception offered much less comfort in the form of compatriots and shared background (or even shared language, in some cases), to say nothing of ethnic community, than they do in today's world cities. Indeed, Hoerder insists on the diversity among immigrants and the importance of cultures in interaction in the frontier, woodland, and farming communities of Canada; he emphasizes the heterogeneity of settlements. This is not exclusively a part of life in the Western Hemisphere, for the multinational work crews of turn-of-the-century cities in Western Europe had as much trouble with communication as some of the Canadian crews and some of the work crews in Europe since 1960.⁸ Nonetheless, this was a far cry, in terms of ethnic community, from the cities of today's Europe and the Americas, where substantial ethnic communities offer support, formal and informal social organizations, familiar food, and, if not work, leads to jobs. Hoerder captures urban ethnic communities at their starting points, like those formed around Italian *grosserias* in Montreal (offering the kind of history that sociology cries out for). He reminds us that, despite fights and misunderstandings, "the experience of solidarity on the job regardless of cultural background permeates immigrant industrial laborers' life-writings". This was also true of harvest labourers — in one instance Italians and Poles, working side by side, together revolted against a particularly cruel supervisor by constructing a coffin in which they confined him (after three days of confinement this supervisor was rescued by his employers, released, and sent away) (pp. 81–82).

The state, the economy, and ethnic communities are all vivid in *Creating Societies*, but they appear not as elements in a theoretical and systematic survey of Canadian history, but rather through stories. Hoerder uses a full telling of a well-recorded life, as in the case of Polish Jew Leah Rosenberg (pp. 82–84). He also employs partial life stories — first one, then another, then a third to drive home a point, a trend, or a kind of experience: Eric Duncan from the Shetlands, gone to Vancouver Island; his Swedish wife Anna; sailor John Johnson from Norway; Susan Moir, born in Ceylon to a Dutch-Scottish family; then her husband-to-be, Scotsman John Fall Allison, with whom she had 14 children. Together their stories reveal a roof collapsed under snow, a house destroyed by fire, all livestock stolen, and a house destroyed by flood. In the end, Hoerder reports, "they rebuilt their lives, raised children, received visitors, held public office" (pp. 220–222). Readers may sometimes feel quite as if a crowd of humanity surrounds them, each with a story to tell — something like one feels at rush hour in the Moscow or Paris metro, the New York subway, or the Berlin U-Bahn. One story becomes a bit difficult to discern from the other tales of woe, such as that of Klaus DeJong, whose early

8 John Berger and Jean Mohr, *A Seventh Man: Migrant Workers in Europe* (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 162; Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe, 1600–1900* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 189; Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe Since 1650* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), pp. 179–185.

years of excruciating poverty in the northern Netherlands were only matched by those of his love, Betje. DeJong had 11 hungry years in various work gangs in North America before he went home to find that Betje had never received his letters because they had been “kept by her employer”. In the end, the couple married and returned to Canada, where they became successful market gardeners in Winnipeg (pp. 127–128).

I believe it was Dirk Hoerder’s intention to do exactly that: to communicate to the reader voices from the tide of humanity that came to Canada and did more or less well, with a great deal of suffering up front. They taught him to report poetically that in sod houses “beds mouldered, provisions spoiled. Under these circumstances women gave birth and raised children, men lived and died, children played and laboured” (p. 152). Hoerder wants us to hear every voice and to appreciate and discern the individual experience, the suffering, and the solidarity. After all, having just written about the whole world over a thousand years’ time, he himself needed to humanize larger histories with individual voices. And so do we, because these voices poke at our placid insights and tidy theories — which always need a nudge — by testing them against human experience. This is what one can take away from *Creating Societies*.

Leo Lucassen, University of Amsterdam:

Creating Societies is an ambitious book. It sets out to answer the question of how immigrants came to terms with the nation-building process in Canada in the period from the 1840s until the 1940s. In so doing, it proposes an alternative history of nation-building from below, instead of the standard accounts from above. In particular it criticizes the stylized standard tale in which Canada emerges from two more or less homogeneous ethno-national groups, the English and the French, and replaces this tale with a much more nuanced and diverse picture. More specifically, Dirk Hoerder asks himself how newcomers participated over cultural boundaries, how transcultural practices were established, and what happened to the mainly British top of society (p. 287).

He does all this by using hundreds of autobiographies, letters, and similar materials in which migrants express their subjective views on their lives in Canada. The result is an interesting view from below through the eyes of the migrants, which in itself makes the book worthwhile reading, as so often we lack this perspective. As the questions indicate, Hoerder has more ambitions than to offer an overview of various life stories; he uses these manifold voices to answer larger questions on nation-building and cultural interaction. Again, these are highly relevant issues for migration scholars, especially because they offer us an opportunity to get away from the dominant but one-sided, top-down perspectives.

By looking at diverse regions and periods, Hoerder convincingly shows that the stereotypical, bipolar French-English interpretation is misleading in at least two respects: it ignores the many other cultural influences on the

emergence of Canada as a nation, not least that of First Nations and migrants from various Asian origins; equally important, the idea that there ever were such things as well-defined, homogeneous English and French ethnic groups is open to question. In this sense *Creating Societies* takes an important step in making people more aware of Canada's multicultural, or at least many-cultured, past, while avoiding the all-too-frequent trap of reifying ethnicity. Time and again Hoerder stresses the dynamics of intercultural contacts and the ever-changing nature of ethnic identities and concludes that, in the course of time, homogenization of people from various backgrounds into a national Canadian identity has taken place. Analysing census results from 1988, he writes that "Canada is less diverse than it appears to some" (p. 294). *Creating Societies* therefore does not offer a naive multiculturalist political message, stating that we have always been and always will be diverse, but — implicitly — acknowledges the force of assimilation over time, although Hoerder does not use or like the term.

To what extent, however, does this book enlarge our insight into the process of nation-building and the place of immigrants in it? Moreover, is this book indeed an alternative to top-down approaches, which not only tend to forget the many-cultured past but even more so ignore the role of migration? In this respect I am less convinced, although the book is certainly an interesting contribution and may be a point of inspiration for those who want to pursue this path.

One of the books I liked very much as a student of history, and which to a certain extent formed my view on historical processes, was the famous best-seller *Peasants into Frenchmen* by American historian Eugen Weber, first published in 1976.⁹ In this study Weber showed how France as a nation was crafted out of a many-cultured regional mosaic in the course of the nineteenth century. Even after the Napoleonic era people from various regions did not only speak very different dialects, but also barely considered themselves as "French". Loyalties were often local and at most regional. Felling oneself as a member of a national group was unthinkable to most. France, or Paris, was rather resented, because of the fact that the national state, up to that time, had only extracted (money or soldiers) without giving much in return. The French national identity was an abstract and remote concept, which did not constitute a central element for people in the provinces, and even the inhabitants of Paris defined themselves first and foremost as Parisians, something that may not have changed up until this day. Furthermore, Weber shows that, although France *de facto* had already been for centuries one country, much more divided the inhabitants than united them. Only in the course of the nineteenth century, after the transition from indirect to direct rule, did the process of nation-building really begin. Weber does not

⁹ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976).

analyse this process by looking at biographies or by restricting himself to ideology as such, but by describing an intermediate level: the way in which the central institutions of the French republican state at the local level, especially the army, the police, and the school, forged a country in which people learned the same language and systems for measurement and time, and came to share the same national symbols, the flag and *La Marseillaise*.

Weber has been criticized for being too top-down and paying not enough attention to the active role of the people involved, whereas others, like David Bell from Johns Hopkins University, have pushed back to the eighteenth century the period in which the idea of the nation became *en vogue*. The socializing role of institutions, like the school, tax collector, leisure and cultural organizations, the police, the shop, the factory, and the post office, nevertheless have not lost their salience.

Yet in *Creating Societies* these institutions do not really come to life. Hoerder does point to the role of schools (p. 285) and the post office (p. 13), but does not systematically analyse the relationship between these institutions and the way migrants shaped their lives in Canada. More attention is paid to the influence of discriminating and racist government policies, like the Canada First Movement and the repressive role of employers, often backed up by the state, but this often remains at a more general level, not mediated by specific institutions. The reason for the institutional silence is given by Hoerder himself, when he rightly argues that in most letters and autobiographies the persons are concerned with private and local issues and often tend to remain silent on the larger structures. Most people did not reflect on the socializing function of institutions, but wrote about their hard daily lives: how they earned money, looked for jobs, and endured hardships, including discrimination.

This brings us to the nature of the sources used. Hoerder has devoted an instructive and sensitive chapter to this topic and fully realizes the pros and cons of the life stories. He justly remarks that people often tend to be anecdotal in their writings and leave out the larger context. This phenomenon is well known. In a wonderful German television series that he undoubtedly knows, called *Heimat*, which portrayed the inhabitants of a small village under Nazi rule, politics, even Hitler, did not play a central role. Instead, people were preoccupied with prosaic day-to-day occurrences. From what we know now about this gruesome period in human history, it may seem shocking how small a role Nazi policies seemed to play in people's lives. When we want to learn more about the way migrants were socialized into Canadians and how they played an active role in shaping Canada, one may ask whether, for the purpose, these diaries and letters are the ideal source. This would be one of my questions to the author of *Creating Societies*. If the answer is yes, because these materials are all that is left to us, how could we reach more satisfying answers to the questions posed?

One way of at least partially solving this problem, I would suggest, is first of all to combine these sources with reflections from the perspective of non-

migrants (why not use also autobiographies of the Canadian-born?) and — maybe even more importantly — by looking for the institutional memories. Let me make myself clear: I am beyond the point of criticizing the book as such, but am suggesting how to pursue this line of research in the future. It seems to me that, instead of looking for more biographies of migrants, it could be worthwhile to study the archives of the institutional nation-builders, especially those operating at the local and regional level: the police, administrators, army, social services, and other entities that had to deal with migrants. Of course, we must be aware that these functionaries were prejudiced, but it is often surprising how much valuable information one can still find in their files about the active role of their “clients”, “victims”, or whatever one prefers to call them. I experienced this in my study of the social and economic history of travelling people in Western Europe, while using mainly police sources. A more relevant example is the research done by Dorothee Schneider into the files and archives of the Americanization movement in the United States, to which she also added testimonial evidence of the migrants who had to undergo these courses. By using these sources and having a keen eye for the role of migrants, she comes to a much more nuanced and diverse conclusion about the interaction of migrants and American society, among other things showing the active role of these newcomers in shaping America, not just as passive victims or objects of civilization.

In conclusion, I like this book very much because of the perspective it takes and the questions it poses, but see it as a first step on this road, which in my opinion should be followed by contextualizing the information from these wonderful sources. Such context can be achieved not only by sketching the larger regional, temporal, and political picture, as Hoerder has done in this book, but also by bringing in the intermediate level, the meso level that Hoerder has advocated, only defined more institutionally than socially. This is the level at which the state is shaped and negotiated on a daily basis and at which the migrants had their own input.

Dirk Hoerder, University of Bremen:

One of the migrants, prominent in my narrative on creating Canadian societies, entitled his story “I Never Wondered!” I, however, did wonder how my approach would be received and am pleased with the thoughtful comments of the participants in the European Social Science History Conference panel. They, and session organizer Sylvia Hahn, have raised far more questions than I am able to answer. In this response, I consider the concept of regions, the role of the state, the issue of actors in state institutions, and the special historiographic attention paid to them. I re-emphasize the relationship of theory and subjective sources such as life-writings and, finally, I ask how historians’ approaches and their own life experiences may be related.

The book is called *Creating Societies* because I, indeed, see the state, and even more so the nation, as distant. Looking back, however, I realize that I had more levels in mind than I made explicit in the written text. I also realize

that readers of the book have mental maps of socio-geographic spaces that may differ from mine and vary from reader to reader. I pursue a regional-chronological approach from the Maritimes through the southern parts of Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia, to which I would add the lumbering and mining North as a distinct region. These regions, a staple of Canadian public discourse, emerge out of large numbers of adjacent and overlapping local spaces, in which people form their social networks and earn a living. Such spaces of economic resources and cultural networks may be smaller or larger than the five regions from the Maritimes to British Columbia: Nova Scotia mining, a St. Lawrence valley and Ontario Irish space, a transcontinental lumbering belt, a string of small mining communities across the continent, a southwestern Ontario farming region distinct from that of the distant Prairie as well as from that of Quebec. Economic spaces might have needed explicit delineation and “delimitation”. The Prairies, as a published review noted, loom large in my account. Do they? They loom large in Canadian collective memory and in the reviewer’s personal memory, while “Eastern” or “Central” Canada invoke no such associations. I have not intended to give them pre-eminence over other social spaces in Canada. Similarly, the St. Lawrence river, as a mighty stream penetrating the continent, looms large in traditional continental approaches. Analytically, the Gaspé section, that of the many small industrial and commercial towns between Rivière-du-Loup and Kingston, and the former section of the rapids need to be analysed in terms of social and economic history rather than in terms of some vague imagery. Such overlapping meso-regions were visible to me but might have warranted more emphasis in the text.

The whole, that is the Canadian state, is present beginning in 1867, but in my perspective the state provides a frame: open immigration and, later, laws permitting immigration (as well as emigration). This state — and to some degree the United States — is vastly different from European states. The latter are characterized by institutional presence in each and every locality: policemen, state-church ministers and priests, administrators-bureaucrats. In Canada, this was the case only in clerical-notable Quebec society. Thus, to the 1920s, the state remained distant. Creating of societies was possible not because of an open frame and populationist policies, but because of the absence of local incarnations of the state. State-building and nation-building in immigrant societies, with local pre-immigration populations being deprived of a voice, was different from state-formation in Europe or Asia. Political theory, taking France and Britain as model cases of nation-state development, has yet to come to terms with this.

The twentieth-century Canadian state, from the mobilization of all of its resources from 1914 onward, does play an important role — in *Creating Societies* this role appears in those chapters dealing with the period since the 1920s. If I wrote a history from the state perspective, I would also not simply deal with the whole but with institutional spaces and their “inhabitants”, the administrators. The “Ottawa men” were different from provincial leaders; in

the federal government, the actors in the immigration bureaucracy created discourses and spaces different from those in the labour department. Many English-language “national” leaders were incapable of communicating with the (often bilingual) French-language elites, whether of Quebec or western Métis culture. The state, too, is composed of many parts. The writings of eminent historians, reducing Canada to John A. MacDonald or the nation to the killing fields of World War I, do not take into account the complexity inherent in both the structures of society and state. Such stories’ underlying simplifying premises are “the nation gives birth to great men” and “the nation and the empire provide mass graves for heroic soldier-men”. Still, the framing policies of the federal government and the distinctions to the locally present and often repressive European regimes should have been developed more strongly in the book. Responding to Nora Faires and Leo Lucassen, I would place the conjunction of state formation and of creating local spaces in the 1920s: the many local societies were by then established and so were the federal institutions, albeit by different social groups; the wartime interventionist state became a conceptual starting point for a state intervening to alleviate social inequalities. To develop this hypothesis, I would argue that, like immigrant and long-settled Canadians, who negotiated their local spaces, the 1920s and 1930s federal elites negotiated rather than imposed a state-wide frame. In the process, concepts expressed in French did not receive adequate attention. People speaking other European, Asian, or Aboriginal languages received even less attention. It occurs to me that the “gypsies” whom Lucassen analyses and the American working men and women who have occupied the sensitive attention of Faires are constructed in terms of exclusion by the respective societies, while, racialization and hierarchization notwithstanding, the Canadian experience is one of negotiated inclusion. But this is a question, not yet even a hypothesis.

Leslie Page Moch, in emphasizing that I keep the focus on the “experiential” rather than on “assimilation and acculturation”, points to the basic motivation for my project: after dealing with migration, at first mainly in the Atlantic world, and realizing that the interpretations current from the 1950s to the 1970s (from Oscar Handlin’s “uprooted”, to “ethnic enclaves” and “cultural baggage”, to Milton Gordon’s “assimilation”) did not capture the experience of immigrants, I developed a model of acculturation that started from the need for material survival to social needs to political frames.¹⁰ This grounded theory did have a Euro- or Atlanto-centric bias, and thus I turned to worldwide migrations, a project out of which *Cultures in Contact* emerged, to test the theory against people’s life experiences. We had once called these people, to whom we as eager young scholars in the 1960s and

10 Dirk Hoerder, “From Migrants to Ethnic: Acculturation in a Societal Framework”, in Hoerder and Leslie Page Moch, eds., *European Migrants: Global and Local Perspectives* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), pp. 211–262.

1970s were giving the place in history denied them by our university teachers, “the inarticulate”. They were highly articulate, but, digging through the police and other government files (the use of which George Rudé pioneered and which I used for a study of common people in the American Revolution), we were often not listening to their voices. In the Canadian context, I could use the life-writings as a source since they were not a genre, as immigrant autobiographies are in the United States, and I could thus avoid the issue of national-cultural conventions of writing. While I am still convinced that the model of acculturation that I developed — and other scholars were grappling with similar issues — is valid, I learned from the migrants’ life-writings that their experiences were far more complex than I had thought. Thus Moch, herself a loving observer of Breton migrants in Paris, is correct when she says that writing *Creating Societies* was a labour of love. Is this a breach of professional ethics? Should not historians remain at a critical distance of their subjects? If I read the histories of a Creighton in Canada, a Treitschke in Germany, a Carlyle in Britain, it is clear that all were deeply enamoured — *en amour* — with a particular point of view but sold it as “objective”. We might better be open about our likes and dislikes.

This leads me to a personal reflection. Reading other people’s life-writings and being fully aware that the emerging book would be outside the received canons of Canadian history writing, nor would it be part of the new social and cultural history approaches, I considered my own life history. As might be expected, my socialization had an impact on how I approach nations, states, institutions, and individuals. Born in 1943, I lived for two years in the Nazi state planned to last a thousand years, then in the British occupation zone, then in the Federal Republic, and, much later, in the “reunified” but deeply divided Germany. It is somewhat of an overstatement to say that states around me were changed faster than my diapers, but this experience did imbue me with a distrust in structures — *longue durée* was something I would see in cultures. Because of war and shifting structures, all discourses and ideologies into which I was socialized never fit my experiences. I was born into a middle-class family that in World War I had lost the means for a comfortable class position but kept the class consciousness. In that first war the number of male members of the family had been reduced to a degree that gender ratios in my immediate environment never fit the gendered ascriptions of family life common to the time. Given housing shortages, the family lived during some of my formative years in a proletarian neighbourhood of a particular subculture. Never was it mentioned at school that this part of the city of Hamburg had until the 1880s been a centre of a Sephardic Portuguese-Amsterdam Jewish community. The institutions and ideologies in which I lived — all continuities from Nazi to post-World-War-II Germany notwithstanding — were highly ephemeral. Like migrants, who live in more than one society and negotiate cultural adaptations, I lived in several institutional contexts with quicksand ideologies, and I had to negotiate my own social space. With a transnational community of scholar-

friends and the intellectual exchange of symposia such as this one, I like this space.

Sylvie Hahn, in her introduction to the session, mentioned immigrant children who translated and translate between their parents' first culture and the receiving society or second culture. This topic was evident in some of the life-writings I read. It is fascinating, and I now turn in my research to the children of migrants and residents to understand how they negotiate social spaces in the frame of educational institutions and informed by the history of cultural interactions that we, as historians, provide. Their individual stories will add up to a story of the society as a whole in the future. In this intergenerational, future-oriented context, the question of placing children into social slots or of options that permit them to create new societies is still on the agenda, and it is addressed differently in different societies.