

**Exploring the Process of Adjustment to
Retrenchment:
Putting Home in its Place**

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Abstract

'Home' has been defined as a place of belonging, community, domesticity and safety as well as being materially significant as a major household cost and or investment and may be experienced as a haven from work and or a source of ontological security in an uncertain world (Giddens, 1991; Saunders, 1990). The experience of ontological security through homeownership may be constrained in times of high interest rates (Colic-Peister and Johnston 2010). Proponents of the risk society thesis (Beck, 1992) which holds that the first modernity's concern with scarcity and class is being supplanted by the second modernity's concern with risk and individualisation, point to globalisation as the driver behind the changing nature of work and in particular behind job insecurity. Flexible accumulation and labour market flexibility is the new mantra. A "job for life" once provided the orientation to and possibility of a sense of security within Fordism as did other institutions such as family, religion and 'home', in the latter case particularly through home ownership. When retrenchment arises decisions need to be made about career and finances and there may be positive and negative implications for current plans regarding housing and the meaning of home. What do you do when you don't belong at work anymore?

The labour market outcomes for individual workers following retrenchment have been the subject of considerable academic and policy research particularly by labour market analysts, psychologists concerned with the cognitive and affective dimensions of work and unemployment, by sociologists concerned with the role of work in sociality and geographers concerned with the spatial distribution of economic activity and employment. Media treatment of retrenchment invariably is couched in the language of 'moral panic' and casts retrenched workers, including those who volunteer for retrenchment packages, as being victims of uncaring companies and or governments. This form of media construction is often triggered when companies announce plant closures with little or no warning to the workers, the unions or the government. However very little research has been conducted which attempts to work across these disciplines by drawing attention to the interaction of processes of adjustment over time, within place

and across labour markets and within the context of structures of subjectification and or resistance, mediated by house and home.

How should we explain the housing decisions and attitudes of people during retrenchment given the plethora of theories regarding the role of home in the contemporary era and the variability in the individual circumstances of workers with respect to labour market success? This thesis contributes to a bridging of the adjustment to retrenchment and 'home' literatures through a longitudinal study of retrenchments within the automotive industry and asks how does home constrain and or enable the process of adjustment to retrenchment?. A mixed methods approach is used with an emphasis on the analysis of data on the subjective experience of adjustment in order to understand how meanings about home and work influence adjustment decision making. Data was analysed from an Australian Research Council (ARC) funded study on a sample of 372 workers retrenched following restructuring and plant closure at the Adelaide, Australia branch of a large multinational automotive industry company, announced in May 2004. This data comprised three telephone surveys at approximately one year apart, interspersed with two in depth interviews with a randomly selected subsample of 38 workers.

Using thematic, content and case study analysis the thesis identified the mechanisms through which home enabled and constrained adjustment and through which workers maintained a strong sense of home. The research found that retrenchment packages were essential for workers to be able to plan a meaningful future, demonstrating the importance of the manifest benefits of work in assessing the psychological implications of job loss; nevertheless workers missed the social interaction with former workmates. Retrenchment packages were used to reduce or pay out the mortgage which has less to do with strengthening workers' homeowner identities than it did with establishing financial security and a secure base for the post retrenchment world. Less than 10 per cent of workers relocated during the study period. Place attachment by workers was informed by a commitment to the existing local relationships and educational development of their children, connections with friends and relatives and the environmental amenity. The

thesis demonstrated how meanings of home can change for workers as a result of the retrenchment episode and how the sense of home anchors narratives of job loss and animates life biographies in the risk regime of employment

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed:

Date:

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ACIS	Automotive Competitiveness and Investment Scheme
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AHURI	Australian Housing and Research Institute
AIRC	Australian Industrial Relations Commission
AMWU	Amalgamated Metal Workers Union
ATO	Australian Tax Office
CBD	Central Business District
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
CITCA	Committee of Inquiry into Technological Change in Australia
DFI	Direct Foreign Investment
EBA	Enterprise Bargaining Agreements
GM	General Motors
HILDA	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
ICT	information, communication and technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
LATA	Labour Adjustment Training Arrangements
MMAL	Mitsubishi Motors Australia Limited
MMC	Mitsubishi Motors Corporation
NLAC	National Labour Advisory Council
TCF	Textile, Clothing and Footwear
TCR case	<i>The Termination, Change and Redundancy Case of 1984</i>
UK	United Kingdom
WA	Western Australia