Migration, Home and Belonging: South African Migrant Women in Hamilton, New Zealand

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Abstract
In the traditional settler migration model, the term 'home' commonly refers to migrants' country of origin. In today's highly globalised world however, migrants can have ongoing attachment to their societies of origin and destination and thus can have different perceptions of what the term 'home' means. This article examines how six South African women who came to New Zealand between 1998 and 2007 actively created a sense of home in their new country through everyday domestic practices, such as furnishing their homes with certain objects they brought from South Africa, grocery shopping at South African stores, and consuming South African food. While images of their South African home remained strong even after migrating, other elements such as safety, family, new social networks and New Zealand's outdoor lifestyle were also crucial for our participants' sense of home, and impact on their identity and sense of belonging. The article concludes with two points. First, migrants' subjective home-making experiences are just as important as objective labour market performance indicators in providing an understanding of migrant settlement outcomes. Second, there is an emerging transnational identity amongst some South African migrants whose changing understanding of home incorporates images, values and feelings from both their country of origin and their current place of residence.

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Introduction

The experience of leaving a place that one has called home for many years and settling in a new country challenges an individual to reflect on the meaning of ‘home’. In the traditional settler migration model, migration is a once-in-a-lifetime change of country of residence. Home is understood as a single localised place often associated with the migrant’s country of origin, as opposed to the place of destination, which remains ‘a strange land’ (Ahmed, 1999; Ahmed et al., 2003). However, in today’s highly globalised world, migrants can maintain intensive contacts and multi-stranded relations that link together their societies of origin and destination (Basch et al., 1994; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). As a consequence, it is questionable whether the old notion of home in dichotomised terms of a ‘here’ (or ‘home’) as opposed to a ‘there’ (or ‘away’) truly reflects migrants’ lived experiences (Ahmed, 1999; Brah, 1996).

The approaches used to conceptualise home are as varied as the disciplines that attempt to do so and often result in conflicting findings (for a review of the literature and theoretical debates concerning this topic, see, for example, Mallet, 2004). In this article, our focus is on consideration of what it means to be ‘at home’ for migrants themselves. We begin by investigating the use of objects in everyday life, such as furniture, as a form of migrant self-expression of being at home or not at home (Chapman and Hockey, 1999; Gurney, 1997; Salih, 2003). Prior to leaving their country of origin, migrants have to decide which objects to take with them and which to leave behind. These decisions are often influenced by many factors, such as the conditions of departure, financial means, the intended duration of their stay in the new country, as well as attachment to certain objects that are imbued with special meaning. In the process of migrating to and settling in a new place of residence, objects brought from the previous place of residence can play an important role in the active (re)creation of a home and can transform ‘spaces’, such as houses, into ‘places’ of home (Rapport and Dawson, 1998; Rensel, 1997; Salih, 2003; Weiss, 2005).

Just as domestic objects can evoke positive feelings of familiarity and a sense of stability to counter feelings of estrangement, disruption and dislocation in the new place of residence, food, habits and routines can also help migrants feel at home (Beer and Chen, 2007; Kershen, 2002; Petridou, 2001). Food can be a bridge to a new home. When migrants arrive at a new
place, familiar tastes and smells can help create new visceral associations between their country of origin and their new country (Longhurst et al., 2009). Besides, the consumption of food does not solely take place through eating, but also through the practice of grocery shopping (Mankekar, 2005). For migrants, the everyday experiences of buying food from 'home' often evokes feelings of nostalgia, memories of places, and authentic tastes and products that make them feel connected with it (Petridou, 2001). Approached this way, home can be understood as a 'lived experience' through everyday matters of people, and in this case, of migrants (Brah, 1996).

Social relations, namely family ties, networks of friends or other migrants can further contribute to the establishment of a sense of home in the country of destination. At the same time, however, ties to family members left behind and amongst members of the migrating group, can be a source of struggle and tension and thus can be counterproductive in the post-migration adjustment and re-creation of a sense of home (cf. Ward et al., 2001 on homesickness and intergenerational and gender-based conflict in migrating families).

Clearly, the things that can make migrants feel at home or not at home are varied, and can change over time, as are reflections about where home is. Migrants' home-making experiences can tell us a great deal about how well they are settling in, and adapting to, the society they have moved into and how socially cohesive this society is. Yet, successful settlement or integration is commonly measured through 'objective' indicators such as labour market outcomes, ability to match qualifications with jobs, income measures, home ownership, or the rate of improvement in non-English speaking migrants’ English proficiency (Fletcher, 1999; Khoo and McDonald, 2001). In this article we explore how six migrant women from South Africa created a sense of home in New Zealand through everyday domestic practices, and how their home-making processes provide an insight into the settlement and integration of this migrant group to contemporary New Zealand society.

Migration between South Africa and New Zealand is not a new phenomenon; however, it was not until the 1990s that migrant numbers began to rise rapidly. The political and economic turmoil following the transition to democracy in 1994 saw an increase in emigration from South
Africa. These events coincided with the introduction of the points-based system of migrant selection in New Zealand which enabled migrants to be selected on merit, such as work experience, age, recognised qualifications and proficiency in English language (Bedford, 2004). As a result, the volume of South African migration to New Zealand increased dramatically. In the ten years between 1986 and 1996, the South Africa-born population in New Zealand increased from 2,685 people to just over 11,000. The numbers continued to accelerate, to 26,061 in 2001 and then to 41,676 in 2006, making South Africa the sixth largest overseas-born group in New Zealand at the time of the latest census in 2006 (Statistics New Zealand, 2007a). It is important to note that these census birthplace population figures may not reflect the ‘real’ extent of immigration from South Africa as many ‘South Africans’ were born elsewhere: in the United Kingdom, or in other African and European countries (Trlin, 2010).

For these recent migrants from South Africa, emigration to New Zealand has largely been driven by a complex set of ‘push’ factors associated with increasing violence, crime and political instability, as well as a perceived drop in educational standards, employment and the quality of infrastructure (Barkhuizen, 2006; Barkhuizen & Knoch, 2005; Lucas et al., 2006; Trlin, 2010). South African migrants in New Zealand have a youthful age structure and most of them have completed vocational or university education in their country of origin (Ho et al., 2005). The majority of them have entered New Zealand as skilled migrants, and have achieved positive labour market outcomes. For example, their labour force participation rates are similar to those of New Zealand-born residents (Bedford, 2004; Ho et al., 2005). Studies related to their employment and housing experiences also show that this group of migrants have better outcomes compared to skilled migrants from China and India (Johnston et al., 2005, 2006). These results seemingly support a popular view that South African migrants are able to settle relatively easily in New Zealand due to their economic participation and assumed cultural proximity — as former British colonies, both countries have things in common including language, sports and driving conventions, to name a few. Nonetheless, the subjective migration and settlement experiences of this migrant group are not well researched or understood. In addition, concern over migrant settlement issues tends to concentrate on New Zealand’s largest city, Auckland. However, our study focuses on the experiences of women in one of New Zealand’s smaller
metropolitan centres, Hamilton, where the number of South African migrants (1,750) made up 1.4 percent of the city’s total population of 130,000 in 2006 (Statistics New Zealand, 2007b).

The remainder of this article is divided into five sections. The first section describes the methodological process used to carry out the research. In the next two sections we consider the role of furniture and other domestic objects, as well as food and the everyday practice of grocery shopping. The fourth section looks at what constitutes home, and discusses the complexities of our participants’ multiple belongings and transnational practices. Our findings suggest that in addition to memories and images of home in South Africa, elements such as safety, family, new social networks and New Zealand’s outdoor lifestyle are also crucial in our participants’ constructions of home. In conclusion, we argue that researching migrants’ home-making experiences is useful for deepening understanding of migrants’ settlement process and their sense of belonging to their country of origin as well as their current place of residence.

Research on Home-Making Experiences

This study drew on findings from the first author’s Master’s thesis and involved repeat interviews of six South African women resident in Hamilton in 2007. The research participants were recruited through contacts at the University of Waikato, the Waikato Migrant Resource Centre, the Hamilton City Council as well as the South African Immigration Community Trust. Although there are only a small number of South African migrants in Hamilton, they are not a particularly ‘visible’ population because the majority of them are white and their residential pattern is rather dispersed. Therefore, multiple contact points were used to ensure that information about the research reached as many prospective participants in the South African community as possible. Initially, we hoped to have at least one participant from each of South Africa’s five ethnic groups but we were unable to find any participants belonging to the ‘Black African’ and the ‘Indian/Asian’ groups. Despite this limitation, the participants were a diverse group in terms of age groups, years of residence in New Zealand, living arrangements and employment status (see Table 1).
Table 1:  List of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Years living in NZ**</th>
<th>Living arrangements</th>
<th>Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Afrikaner</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Husband, two children</td>
<td>Owns a café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>Afrikaner</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Husband, one son</td>
<td>Works in a welfare organizati on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Afrikaner</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Husband, three children</td>
<td>Tertiary teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>Afrikaner</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lives alone</td>
<td>Tertiary student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>English South African</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Husband, one son</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Tertiary teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Pseudonyms have been used
** At the time of the study (2007)

Because the research is about home, migration motivations, social relationships, beliefs and meanings, we were mindful of the need to proceed with caution. Asking participants to talk about and reflect on home, in particular, meant touching on very personal feelings — feelings that might not always be positive because strong, negative memories could also be recalled. Therefore, several steps were taken to gain research participants’ confidence and trust. Prior to the interviews, contact was made with each prospective participant to explain the purpose of the research and to clarify any questions regarding the interview process (such as using a tape recorder, to which all women agreed). It was also important to explain to them why the researchers were interested in the research topic. The fact that both researchers are migrants to New Zealand (from Germany and Hong Kong) was a useful factor in establishing empathy and building good rapport with the participants.

The first interview with each participant generally lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and occurred in places where they felt comfortable and able to express themselves, such as their home or a private corner at their workplaces. Interviews were semi-structured; open-ended questions were used to give the women as much freedom as possible to explore meanings and topics that were important to them. At the beginning of the interviews we asked the women to talk about their life in South Africa, when and why
they decided to migrate to New Zealand, and what their general feelings were about their migration to Hamilton and so on. Each woman had her own way of approaching the topics and adjusting to the interview situation. We then went on to explore more sensitive topics relating to the concept of home, such as what made each participant feel at home in New Zealand, what objects they brought from South Africa to decorate their new homes, what role food played in creating a new home, and whether their understanding of home had altered in any way. The interviews were conducted in a conversational style, which meant that at times they asked the researchers questions, such as when they came to New Zealand themselves.

Following the interviews the audiotapes were transcribed. Each woman was then sent a copy of the transcript to read and asked to provide feedback about the accuracy of the transcription. They were also given an opportunity to make further comments, or erase any material that they did not want to be used. This proved useful in terms of maintaining contact, reinforcing their trust in us, and above all, empowering them to retain their ‘voice’ in the research process.

A variety of fieldwork strategies were used. Besides interviews with participants, the researchers were invited to attend an ‘everyday’ dinner and a social gathering as well as participant-observation sessions at some of the participants’ homes and workplaces. However, it should be noted that the participant-observation sessions were carried out to ascertain what material and decorative arrangements were being used in homes or at the workplace, as opposed to person-orientated behaviours. In other words, we just “hung out” (Bernard, 2006, p. 345) with participants so that we could develop some insight and understanding into the lived experiences of our participants.

All women were interviewed two to three times. Because the participants appeared to place trust in us, the follow-up interviews allowed us to explore sensitive issues in greater depth (these were often related to post-migration difficulties in their personal and family lives), as well as to fill gaps in our data and verify interpretations drawn from previous interviews. Emerging themes relating to the meaning of home were identified and are discussed below.
Furniture

All women in this study left South Africa at a time when the country was undergoing dramatic change (Davenport and Saunders, 2000; Sparks, 2003). Increasing crime rates and growing uncertainty about the country’s future were mentioned as the main push factors that the decision to leave South Africa in the post apartheid period had been made. Although not all of them had gained permanent residence status when first arriving in New Zealand, they had brought objects from South Africa to decorate their new homes. Ellen, Jane, Linda and Ruth (and their husbands and children) had all decided to leave South Africa permanently at the time of their migration to New Zealand. Ellen brought with her most of their furniture together with domestic items such as cups, plates and cutlery. She only sold electronic devices (computers and CD-players) because she thought they were incompatible in New Zealand.

We brought the furniture … because we were told that the furniture here is very expensive and we were also told that it is very comforting to have your own things here and … I mean, we just decided to take everything we could in a container. I think a container is about the size of a garage, so there was only one double bed that couldn’t fit in there but the rest could go … When you come here, nothing is familiar. The grocery isn’t familiar, the labour is not familiar, the people are not familiar, the church is not familiar, the doctor is not familiar … Yeah, I think in the beginning, anything that is familiar is something to hold on, just remind you of your roots.

Creating a sense of familiarity, in order to counter the disruption their migration caused was also particularly important to Jane, who migrated with two young children. Just like Ellen, one of Jane's strategies was to create an environment that visually resembled the familiarity of the South African home they left behind.

In those years there were very few South Africans [in New Zealand] and you don’t have your belongings, your furniture, to remember you of your place. So, to make you feel at home … And it’s important for the kids. The kids need to have familiar things around them.
Initially, the women’s decision to bring or send objects from South Africa to New Zealand was based on financial implications. The cost of buying new furniture in New Zealand was perceived as higher than shipping their furniture from South Africa. However, after their belongings arrived in New Zealand (which took up to three months after their migration), the significance and importance these familiar objects held were highlighted. Ruth described her feelings as follows:

I tell you, I can recall the day our furniture … cos you know when you’re new here … the day that your things arrive from South Africa, it’s like Christmas. You’re so excited; it’s just the fact that they are familiar things. So yes, there is something about bringing things with you. It’s a good feeling when you get things that you are familiar with … when everything else is so unfamiliar.

Ruth and her husband brought with them a large amount of furniture and decorative objects from South Africa. When we visited their home, Ruth told a story about almost every object in her home, where they purchased it, who gave it to them, and what meaning it held for them. All of these objects were very well looked after and many were prominently placed. The only item that was missing in the kitchen was their South African fridge. Ruth told us that this fridge exceeded New Zealand fridge sizes and therefore it was unable to be fitted into the kitchen space. She bought a new fridge in New Zealand, and stored the old fridge in the garage. Ruth’s old fridge had a lock on the door. She explained that during the apartheid period in South Africa, most fridges in South Africa had a lock not only to prevent burglaries, but also to make sure that black and coloured servants did not steal food from their bosses. Ruth identifies herself and her husband as Coloured South Africans. A strong advocate for democracy and equality, Ruth constantly displayed ambivalent feelings about her decision to leave South Africa. She told us ‘if it hadn’t been for the violence, we would have stayed in South Africa’. The fridge held special meaning for her because it served as a reminder of apartheid South Africa.

Ellen, too, has kept almost all her furniture from South Africa even six years after her move to New Zealand. During the initial period of her settlement in New Zealand, these familiar objects helped her counter feelings of alienation and discontinuity in the new environment. Today, her
feelings towards them have changed and only a table still holds special meaning to her.

I’m not feeling that much about it anymore. This table I do because … it was made by one of my husband’s children and he died. So the table will go everywhere, but the rest … not really.

Lisa’s migration experience was different to that of Ruth, Ellen and Jane. At the time of her migration to New Zealand, Lisa was single and had just completed her doctoral studies. She gained a two-year contract to work in New Zealand and so she considered her move to be temporary. Lisa only brought some basic belongings, which included a piano, with her to New Zealand. Now, ten years later, she is married to a New Zealander and has three children. None of the things she brought from South Africa are kept, except the piano.

I hardly ever play anymore, though I’m always planning to. I sometimes feel that I should get rid of it, because we’re just basically carrying it around from house to house, but then again I do feel that this is something I brought over, the one thing that I still have and I should keep and so … I just hang on to it.

For Lisa, the piano has long changed its meaning. Like Ellen’s table and Ruth’s old fridge, these objects have become memory aids about places, events and people. At the same time, objects from South Africa represent something unique, something different from things in New Zealand.

One South African object that was repeatedly mentioned during the interviews was the biltong maker. Biltong, a South African speciality, is meat that gets dried in a box, the biltong maker. Jane and Ellen brought their biltong makers from South Africa and still use them regularly; Jane sells biltong she makes in the café she owns in Hamilton. Ruth did not bring a biltong maker, but she found another way to dry meat. Her brother built a biltong maker out of two cardboard boxes with a light bulb that provides the necessary heat to dry the meat properly. This self-made box shows the creativity of migrants, who can make things possible in a foreign environment where certain elements, in this case, a biltong maker, are not available (cf. Salih (2003) who observed similar practices in her study on transnational Moroccan migrant women).
All women in this study perceived their migration to New Zealand a major turning point in their lives. All had experienced periods of distress, variegated feelings of alienation and insecurity, and a loss of knowledge and routines. Hence, objects such as furniture, cooking utensils or a cardboard box converted into a biltong maker, evoked feelings of familiarity, continuity and safety, and helped the women gain a sense of being at home in their new environment.

**Tastes and Smells**

The struggle to find and prepare ‘tasty’ food in the country of destination can reflect the distance between past and present localities and the resultant longing for certain tastes and products (Beer & Chen, 2007; Petridou, 2001). In almost all interviews the ‘superior’ tastes of South African food products were mentioned in opposition to New Zealand-made groceries or dishes, and especially New Zealand-made sausages and meat, which were described as tasting ‘too bland’, ‘plain’, ‘watery’, not salty or spicy enough. Jane decided that the only way to change this was to open her own café.

> After we came here, we went to some cafés - because I love going to cafés or dining out – and we soon realised that almost nothing is homemade. I got tired of not finding a place that I really liked and so decided to open my own shop.

Although Jane did not advertise her café as specifically South African, the food on display in her shop is labelled in Afrikaans and English, and South African dishes like milk tarts, koeksisters and biltong, are sold. Her café in Hamilton provides her with a means to remedy homesickness by recreating her taste and memories of home, especially as she has not been able to return to South Africa since migrating to New Zealand eight years ago.

For Ellen, it is not just eating South African food but eating with other South African migrants that she enjoys most. When we first met her, she hosted a meeting of the South African Immigration Community Trust at her property. The evening started with some information on matters such as how to find a job and what kinds of social support are available in Hamilton. The highlight of the meeting, however, was the big braai (South African barbecue) with South African sausages and meat. Ellen told us how she felt about that evening:
… just makes you feel at home. It is like bringing a piece of home to the place where you are now. Everything about it. It is the taste, it is the way you do it, the way you talk to each other, you know, the way you do it, the jokes you make, it will be the same kind of jokes, so it’s all about that.

Lisa also had a longing for certain tastes of South Africa. In her first year in New Zealand, she had tried several times to bake a special type of South African biscuit but was disappointed when she failed to create the right taste each time. She also possessed a South African cookbook, which she kept for ‘special occasions’. But in her ‘ordinary’ days, eating food was not important to her. Lisa also told us that she could buy South African products at some bigger supermarkets in Hamilton, which have special shelves for South African groceries. There is also a South African butcher in Hamilton. All of the women knew of this butcher who, apart from selling meat, sells products like coffee, biscuits, rice and even toothpaste and washing powder. To Lisa, shopping at the South African butcher was different from just picking up some South African products from the supermarket. Shopping there presents an opportunity through which all the senses are engaged and the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of her previous place of residence can be recalled.

I like to go to the South African butcher, not so much because I love the food itself; I just like the familiarity, seeing things I remember from my childhood, and speaking my language. For that little while in the shop I feel as if I am back home, so I tend to stretch it out a bit. I guess food is an important part of one’s everyday cultural experience, so it is not so much the fact that South African food taste better (which it does) as the fact that it provides the opportunity to participate in one’s culture that makes you want to buy it.

Lisa’s experience can be described as food nostalgia; that is, a ‘rediscovery’ of products that are perceived as either authentically South African or as provoking strong memories of her past (James, 1996). All women reported nostalgic moments like Lisa’s, where the tastes and smells of certain food make them think of their South African upbringing or of people in South Africa. Yet, Lisa also appreciated that the experience of migration had opened up a whole new market of products for her to use. Now Lisa, as well as three other women, prepares South African dishes with
ingredients that are available in New Zealand, thus creating a whole new, creolised 'taste of home'.

**Home, Belonging and Transnational Practices**

So far our paper has been focused on how domestic objects brought from South Africa, food and everyday practices such as grocery shopping, have helped our participants re-create a home for themselves and their families in New Zealand. Some women, however, expressed their understanding of home by emphasising elements that they perceived as lacking in South Africa.

Carla was the youngest woman we interviewed. She told us she decided to come to New Zealand to pursue her doctoral studies because she felt bored in her country of birth. Carla enjoys outdoor activities and travelling, but it was hard for her to do these things in South Africa because she felt unsafe there. After studying in Hamilton for one year, Carla returned to South Africa to visit family and friends. She was surprised she did not feel at home there.

> I think New Zealand is my home now. Like I said, I was there for three weeks and during the second week I started missing New Zealand…

It was the feeling of being safe, the outdoor lifestyle and the general way of life in New Zealand that Carla missed — the three things she said she values most in her understanding of being at-home. All of the other participants also referred to the constant threat of crime and violence they experienced in South Africa and associated this situation with not feeling at home in their home country. Ruth said:

> My husband and I didn’t have real violence affecting us directly, but we had it happening to friends. They were held up in their houses, and things like, a friend of mine was raped in her house, because that’s what they do. They break in and if there’s a woman that’s what they do … and you live with a dog, with burglar bars, with high walls, you know, glass at the top and all of these things …

New Zealand is the country where Ruth and the other women feel it is safe to live and raise their children.
We wanted something quiet and peaceful and I know that that sounds boring, but when you’ve got so much violence around you, you want that.

For Linda, it was the white South African values in her home country that she wanted to break away from. These values were mentioned repeatedly in the three interviews we had with her — they were described as ‘conservative’, ‘strict’, having a high level of ‘formality’ and ‘hierarchies’, ‘being so ambitious and wanting to win’, and wanting to do ‘better than anybody’ (cf. Sparks, 2003 on perceptions of South African values). Linda felt she did not fit into her country of birth. When she became pregnant and thought more seriously about how she wanted to raise her son, it became apparent that her values were very different from the values of her parents and the people in her immediate environment. The move to New Zealand offered her the opportunity to start a new life and to be able to raise her son her way.

I mean we talk to him as a person and I mean we don’t smack him. We explain to him that he has done wrong. And you know, my parents sort of think that for disciplining they need to be smacked kind of thing, cos that was what it was like when we were young, but he’s different in the way that he is comfortable speaking what he feels, you know.

One of the first things Linda described to us when we met was about the day that she, her husband and her son became New Zealand citizens, describing it as one of the most important days in her life. She stressed repeatedly that she is a ‘Kiwi¹ now, and that she felt at home in New Zealand.

You see, for my husband and I, we always wanted to fit in. We wanted to come here and make this our home; that was our intention and then, when we got our citizenship, with the seal of approval on it, to know that we are Kiwis and I think because we don’t have any ties, or anything that wants us or that would make us go back to South Africa. And because it is our home, you know, it’s our home.

For Linda, being a Kiwi was mainly grounded in feelings of belonging to New Zealand, and the adoption of Kiwi values such as egalitarianism and informality. However, the women in our study negotiated different scales of belonging to their country of origin and their current place of residence.
Jane felt that her belonging still lay in South Africa, despite her positive employment outcomes. The biggest problem Jane faced in New Zealand was the perceived change in the value system of her children — that is, their adoption of Kiwi values such as informality and ‘being extremely laid back’, which she described as equivalent to ‘disrespectful’ and ‘unambitious’, and are contradictory to South African values. Jane’s desire for her children to preserve the values of the old society often created tension between herself and her children, and complicated her adjustment to the new society. Jane constantly weighed the pros and cons of New Zealand and South Africa. Although she felt her loyalties still lay in her country of origin, she did not want to live there anymore. As a result, keeping the furniture she brought from South Africa was a way of reproducing her home in New Zealand, and opening her café was a retail reproduction of home.

For Ruth, Ellen and Lisa, home is not just ‘here’ or ‘there’, but both. They felt that having a sense of belonging to New Zealand did not mean that their attachments to their country of origin had diminished. Ruth explained:

If somebody asked me ‘What is home?’ I would say ‘New Zealand.’ Because I think that this is where I’m working, where my house is, you know, where I’m living. Where I am living at that time, that would be home for me … I’d say that New Zealand is my home, but there are things South African that you’ll always miss, so you bring that up and it’s about … it’s about food, it’s about places that you knew as you were growing up.

Ruth’s understanding of home is grounded in what Brah (1996, p. 4) describes as “an image of ‘home’ as the site of everyday lived experience”. This everyday experience not only comprises networks of friends, family or neighbours and the workplace, but also day-to-day routines and activities such as cooking, shopping, exercising and going out. No differentiation can be made between ‘here’ or ‘there’. Rather, it is a fusion of both (Ahmed, 1999). In one interview, during a discussion about food and cooking, Ruth made a comment that encapsulated her image of home:

At home [in New Zealand] I rather cook like at home [in South Africa], very spicy food.
Ellen’s feelings of being at-home were closely associated with loved ones. Home, therefore, is where the heart is.

For me, the thing that’s most important for me to feel at home, is just to have people that I love around me. For me, that’s home. Because I don’t have family there [in South Africa], I think it’s a lot easier for me to feel at home here. I would feel very unsettled if my mum and dad were still alive and still there. Yeah, for me the people are the most important thing and it’s really good to have my son over here.

Lisa is married to a New Zealander. She said it was through her relationship with her husband and becoming part of his extended family that she developed a sense of belonging to New Zealand. This feeling became even stronger after the birth of their three children and as her network of friends grew over the years. Yet, Lisa still has strong attachment to people and places in South Africa, and felt like she “needed to go back home” to see her parents, siblings and relatives, and “just to touch base” every two to three years.

I still need to go back often, a part of it is … is for my own sanity, but part of it is also for the sake of my family as well. I feel I owe it to them.

When asked what made going back to South Africa, even if it was just for a short period, feel like ‘going home’ for her, Lisa explained:

The familiarity, the history and all that. Like waking up in the morning and hearing birds chirping and then realising that that particular kind is bird chirping, in that particular way, is just something that you have missed. So it’s just the sound and the feel and the smell and of course the people.

Although Ruth and Carla had also made return trips to South Africa after moving to New Zealand, they found many places had changed, and said they felt more like visitors in their home country. Jane, Ellen and Linda have not returned to South Africa since they arrived in New Zealand six to eight years ago. Ellen’s parents have passed away; if they had still been alive she said she felt she would have been very unsettled if she hadn’t been able to travel back to see them. Linda’s parents and a sister migrated to New Zealand after her arrival. Because her main reason for leaving South Africa
was to break away from South African values, she had not felt it necessary to return to South Africa. However, when her son is older, Linda thought they would pay a visit to South Africa so they could show their son the places where she and her husband had grown up and met. However, Jane’s mother and siblings still live in South Africa, and this fact acts as a constant reminder of the physical distance between her country of origin and her current destination.

I miss my family extremely much. It sometimes scares me to think I’m not going to see them again. I haven’t seen them in all the seven years. That’s a scary thought, you know, you get to an age where you think, ‘Is it more important to be in a safe country, than to be with your family?’ That’s a sad thought.

While a physical return was not possible, these women maintained contact with family, relatives and friends back home through phone calls, text messages and emails. These transnational ties enable them to be simultaneously part of the communities in both their country of origin and their current home. This provides them with crucial emotional, ideological and material resources and support during the process of post-migration adjustment and settling.

Conclusion

Despite cultural proximity and positive labour market experiences, the stories that migrant women from South Africa tell about making home in New Zealand suggest that their post-migration adjustment and settlement has not been an easy process. Differences in everyday matters, communication etiquette and values, together with difficulties establishing friendships with local residents, were frequently mentioned as things that had complicated their settlement. The consumption of material goods plays an important role in their (re)creation of home. All women in our study placed strong emotional values on the objects they brought from South Africa, even though some were described as being highly impractical and almost never in use. These objects, together with other everyday domestic practices such as grocery shopping at South African stores, created feelings of familiarity and comfort which concomitantly aided settlement into their new home.
Family is crucial in the women’s constructions of home and belonging, regardless of whether they refer to the family back in their country of origin, the family in their current place of residence, or in both places. Migration disrupts family life and can create tensions and conflicts among members. Some women in this study had experienced distress, and feelings of ambivalence and guilt associated with emigration from South Africa. Creating lifestyles that they or their families are either familiar with or becoming accustomed to (e.g. the outdoors) but without the negatives of violence, crime and political instability is in part a strategy some women have used in the settlement process.

Migrants’ construction of home is an ongoing negotiation of transnational belonging and local attachments (cf. Ehrkamp, 2005). At the time of interviews, one woman in this study wanted to break off her linkages with South Africa, while another one felt that her belonging still lay in her country of origin. The remaining four women felt they had developed a sense of belonging to New Zealand and also held strong attachments to South Africa. They identified themselves as ‘South African Kiwis’, an emerging transnational identity that blends South African and New Zealand elements together.

In the transnationalism literature, transmigrants’ lives are characterised by “simultaneity” and transmigrants “develop and maintain multiple relationships … that span borders” (Basch et al., 1994, p.7). In our study, only three of the four South African transmigrants had made return visits to South Africa; however, all of them kept links with ‘home’ by relying on their memories and familiar object or tastes, consuming South African goods, and maintaining close contacts with family, relatives and friends in South Africa via telecommunication. It is interesting to note that not all transnational practices involve physical movements across borders of nation-states; some take place within the borders of the country of destination. One example is shopping at the South African butcher, who provides not only ‘nostalgic’ products that cater to the tastes and habits of fellow migrants but also an important space for socialising and conversation (cf. Ehrkamp, 2005). In other words, migrants can establish transnational belonging without travelling to the countries to which they feel they belong (see also de Bree et al., 2010).
The narratives of South African transmigrants in our study suggest that transnational practices help ease their uprooting feelings, which in turn facilitate their integration. Yet, some scholars argue that an ongoing connection with the home country prevents integration (Smith, 2001), and may encourage return migration (see, for example, Ley and Kobayashi, 2005; Sanderson, 2009). While return is not a popular option for the women in this study for the present moment, future work might consider what alternatives and outcomes might evolve over time.

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Notes

1. The term ‘Kiwi’ is commonly used to refer to New Zealanders.

References


