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Welcome Home?:
New Zealanders' Experiences of Return Migration

A thesis
presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Tracey Lee Watkins
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Abstract

There has been considerable public concern over the exodus of New Zealand citizens, with estimates of as many as one million New Zealanders living offshore. Consideration has been given to intentions of expatriates’ to return to New Zealand and to what might draw them ‘home’. There has been relatively little consideration, however, given to the approximately 24,000 New Zealanders who do return each year as Permanent and Long Term (PLT) arrivals, after 12 months or more overseas. Research that is available on the topic tends to focus on their recent return and, in particular, the experiences of PLT ‘Overseas Experience’ (OE) sojourners coming home from typically fewer than three years of residence outside of New Zealand. What is absent is a longer-term perspective that examines what becomes of the return migrant beyond the initial arrival period. What are the experiences of the extended PLT return migrants who I describe and define as New Zealanders returning from an ‘extended Overseas Residence’ (OR) of five or more years? This study seeks to redress these gaps and provide insights into the experiences of one of New Zealand’s least considered migrant groups and specifically those returning from five or more years extended OR. Using a multi-phased, multiple methodology research design, including pre-interview questionnaires and exercises, in-depth semi-structured interviews and post-interview video exercises, this study explores their decision to return, the integration challenges upon re-entry, return migration outcomes and what can be learnt from these experiences. The results of the research reveal that those migrants who return to New Zealand from extended OR do so under different circumstances and at a different life-stage to OE sojourners and, as a consequence, have distinctive re-entry and reintegration experiences and outcomes that are often quite different to other migrants who arrive in New Zealand. These findings provide the basis for the development of the argument that these returnees are a distinct migrant group who have specific integration challenges and settlement needs. This thesis concludes that there are opportunities for the government, Auckland Council and other local authorities, corporate New Zealand and the country in general to facilitate and encourage positive return migration experiences and outcomes, and suggests future research to duly consider this migrant group.
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