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**Acculturation Trajectories and
Quality of Life in
South African Immigrants Living in
New Zealand**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Clinical Psychology,

at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand.

Kara-Lise Duxfield

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*To my parents: Pieter and Bernadene:
Ultimately it is because of you that our migration journey began and
I credit our success as migrants to your faith, courage and perseverance.*

Abstract

Contemporary migration research using quantitative methods is limited by the use of variable-centred analysis, static measures of acculturation and a focus on negative outcomes. The current study sought to gain the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to migration research. The aim of this study was to explore the acculturation trajectories and quality of life in a group of South African immigrants living in New Zealand. The benefits of qualitative analysis were retained in the current study by a focus on case-centred rather than variable-centred analysis, incorporating a temporal perspective to capture migration experiences over time (trajectories) and using semi-structured interview data to examine individual experiences of migration. However, this study also employed quantitative analysis in the form of cluster analysis of interview data to detect shared acculturation patterns within subgroups of cases. Following this, thematic analysis was used to explore individual cases within these subgroups which were used to form profiles of shared acculturation trajectories.

Participants in this study were a snowball sample of 50 South African immigrants, aged 18 years and over, who had lived in New Zealand for up to 11 years. Participants were asked to complete a one hour semi-structured interview, a short socio-demographic questionnaire and the World Health Organisation Quality of Life measure (WHOQOL-100). The interview focused on migration experiences in the pre-, early, mid and current phases of migration and the main focus of interviews was motivations for migration, employment experiences, social support, stress and coping at different phases of migration.

The two primary forms of analysis in this study were profiling cases and thematic analysis. Following cluster analysis of the interview data, selected clusters were characterised using interview, quality of life and socio-demographic variables at discrete phases of the trajectory. Clusters which were exemplars of three emergent meta-themes, child-focused, social support and employment, were selected and profiles were generated and interpreted following thematic analysis. The three types of profiles generated were: profiles of selected clusters of cases at discrete phases of the trajectory,

primarily quantitative profiles of these same clusters of cases across the complete trajectory, and a qualitative elaboration of profiles of cases who shared similar trajectories.

This study highlights the possibility of exploring both shared and idiosyncratic experiences within samples of immigrants. The profiles of acculturation trajectories highlight some important issues for South African immigrants living in New Zealand, including pre-migration contextual issues, employment experiences, financial stress, and participation in South African communities. Key findings of this study were the importance of children in motivations for migration, evidence of various levels of employment satisfaction in early migration although often employment satisfaction increased in later phases of migration, and finally this study showed important differences between Afrikaans and English-speaking South African immigrants with regards to their social support experiences and preferences. This study offers an approach to migration research which uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition this study provides an alternative approach to migration research which is case-based, acknowledges the complexity and temporal aspects of acculturation, and examines the broad consequences of migration.

Acknowledgements

Academic study, particularly research, has often been described as a journey. In my view this journey holds some parallels to the process of migration; inevitable highs and lows, the need for determination and commitment and the essential ingredient of support from family and friends. The nature of this study also entailed many actual journeys across the North Island interviewing participants. Like the initial stages of migration, I felt both excitement and apprehension. To my delight I found the reception of my participants reflected the same experience many described when arriving in New Zealand; a warm welcome and friendly hospitality. Thank you for every cup of Rooibos, the ‘melk tert’, the encouragement and most valuable of all; your time, energy and the honesty with which you told your stories. It is my sincere hope that your migration stories, portrayed in this study, will benefit those who are contemplating or starting the migration journey.

At the start of this study I believed I understood much about the transition which takes place during migration. However, I did not anticipate the rich and unique experiences that my participants would relay. I came to a new appreciation of migration stories and witnessed the value of being given an opportunity to remember and share these experiences. I have learned that the migration journey is unfolding and that the decision to move from your country of origin will continue to impact on your life in ways that are hard to anticipate. I have also learned that no matter how well acculturated we become, our origin and roots remain.

There are a considerable number of people who have supported me with this academic chapter of my life. I will attempt to convey my gratitude here briefly; however, I hope to do so more fully in person. To my indispensable supervisors: *I feel privileged to have worked under your excellent guidance over the past three and a half years of academic study.* Dr Jo Taylor: *Your calm, sincere, while always encouraging approach to supervision has been much appreciated in both clinical and research aspects of my training. Thank you so much for the thorough and prompt feedback despite your own heavy workloads.* Associate Professor John Spicer: *You have been such an asset to this*

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Preface

This study examined acculturation trajectories of South African immigrants living in New Zealand and their current quality of life. The term ‘trajectory’, as used in this study, encompassed the experience of migrants over time. Acculturation trajectories were examined here by exploring migrants’ experiences at four phases of migration: pre, early, mid and current migration. The aim of the study was to examine the nature of acculturation trajectories and current quality of life of South African immigrants and to explore whether there were subgroups of South African immigrants in the sample.

Migration has often been likened to the metaphor of transplanting a tree. As a young sapling, new root systems are vulnerable to the effects of harsh environmental conditions, yet often less affected by the process of transplantation. Trees of greater maturity typically have well-established root systems which have developed over the course of many years. At times, these roots are entangled with those of other nearby trees as they have become established and matured alongside each other. These strong, sturdy trees are well accustomed to their environment, having weathered many harsh conditions. Transplanting these trees, particularly to a markedly different environment, is a complex task. Their root systems need time to re-establish and some roots may be severed during transplantation. My experience as a South African emigrant to New Zealand was somewhat challenging in the initial stages. However, my new roots quickly developed and took to the new environment. The relocation of the mature trees in my family - my parents, grandmothers, and other extended family - was more challenging because of their deeply ingrained root systems. The challenge of relocation has been greater for them and part of them is likely to always remain in South Africa. As a South African immigrant, I have my own migration story and experience. I was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa, but raised in a predominantly English-speaking city called Pietermaritzburg. My family and I moved to New Zealand when I was eleven years old. We each had unique challenges and obstacles to overcome. As a young adolescent with an unmistakable South African accent, I was attempting to form an identity coupled with the uncertainty which accompanies a significant change of location and culture. In those first years, I longed to ‘fit in’ and be a ‘kiwi’ but each time I opened my mouth I was reminded that I was different. I was thankful that, at

least from the external appearance, I appeared the same. This awkward transition did not last long and after a year my kiwi accent sounded almost authentic, I was well integrated into high school, had good friends and was involved in a number of hobbies and sports. In those early days I had a longing to be part of the majority. Nowadays I am more appreciative of the unique experiences I have had as an immigrant and I can see this has shaped who I am today. While I have never looked back and I am grateful to be accepted as a New Zealander, I am always surprised to find a sense of familiarity and connection when I meet other South Africans.

As a training Clinical Psychologist, I am passionate and interested in people. The combination of my clinical training and experience, as well as time working in a therapeutic community has taught me that no one person experiences events in the same way. People are diverse and unique and while there is a sense of relief in finding others who are similar to us, we also long to know that we are different, that our story is unique and worth listening to. This study sought to identify both the similarities and differences within this sample of South African immigrants living in New Zealand. This approach stands in contrast to testing complex multivariate models using aggregated data which loses sight of the individual experience. However, this study also sought to identify similarities within the sample rather than pursuing a completely idiosyncratic level of analysis as often seen in case study research designs. Instead both similarities and differences were explored in order to highlight the diversity within the sample and provide a greater understanding of participant's experiences of migration. The method used in this study is one that aimed to honour this paradox; our desire for both commonality and individuality, our similar yet unique stories. The method also allowed participants to tell their migration story which was often not only beneficial for the purpose of this study but also facilitated opportunities for participants to reflect on and make sense of their experiences. These individual migration stories were coded and subgroups of participants were identified within the sample at different phases of migration using cluster analysis. A central focus of the study was then to further characterise the subgroups and to explore quality of life consequences of various migration experiences.

As a group of immigrants, many of us are grateful to live in a country of peace, safety, incredible scenic beauty, generous and friendly people. This gratitude however, should not be mistaken for a desire to renounce our origins. Our situation is unique in that we chose to leave but many feel they had no choice but to leave. Participants often conveyed experiences of loss and grief for the history, heritage and culture left behind in South Africa. While at times South African emigrants have been called traitors or deserters and accused of “jumping ship”, I believe the migration story of South African emigrants is one that reflects courage and bravery. The decision to leave South Africa does not equate to a people who are disconnected from their country or ashamed of who they are. South Africa is a country of vibrancy, richness, red soil, vast beauty and unique wildlife. The decision to leave South Africa often comes from the recognition that the next generation deserve more and that safety, security, freedom and quality of life are worth the many sacrifices encompassed in migration.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a global and national context for the study of migration with particular emphasis on the migration of South African immigrants to New Zealand. The second chapter includes definitions of key terminology used in migration research which helps clarify terms used in subsequent discussion. Chapter Two also provides a summary of key theoretical models and frameworks in migration literature. A detailed discussion of Berry’s (2006) model of acculturation strategies is provided here which is central to migration literature and research, and widely supported. This section also identifies other important migration theories, including some who challenge traditional, mainstream approaches to studying migration. In the second chapter several variables implicated in migration research are identified. A rationale for the use of quality of life outcomes is also provided in this closing section. Chapter Three provides a critical review of prominent migration studies. This chapter also includes review of migration studies conducted in New Zealand and research with South African immigrants. The final section of Chapter Three highlights the limitations of existing research which provide the rationale for the approach utilised in the current study. Following this, the aim and focus of the present study is presented. Chapter Four outlines the method of the current study including the study design, participants, materials and procedure, pilot study, and ethical considerations. There are three results chapters in this thesis which relate to the three types of profiles generated and

interpreted. Chapter Five provides the results of cluster analysis and profiles of selected clusters of cases at different phases of their trajectories. Chapter Six then provides the profiles of individual cases from within these clusters viewed from a whole trajectory perspective and Chapter Seven provides profiles of cases who shared similar trajectories. The final chapter, Chapter Eight includes a summary of this study, discussion of results, methodological caveats, recommendations for future research and concluding remarks about this study.