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**From the Rainbow Nation
to the
Land of the Long White Cloud:
Migration, Gender and Biography**

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

**Massey University, Albany,
New Zealand.**

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2007

Abstract

This thesis contributes to and extends two well-established traditions in sociology: firstly, it uses a biographical approach to study the experience of international migration; and secondly, it generates theory from the lived texture of individual lives. Specifically, the research uses the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) to describe, analyse and theorise the gendered experience of migration from ‘the rainbow nation’ of South Africa, to New Zealand, ‘the land of the long white cloud’. The thesis follows and further develops BNIM’s sociobiographic approach, integrating a stronger sociological focus, and emphasising the feminist values of transparency, reflexivity and an attention to power differences between the researcher and her interviewees. In-depth interviews based on a single narrative-seeking question are conducted with South African migrants from several divergent groups, and are then used as the foundation for a process of intensive researcher-led group analysis. From this meticulous analytical process the researcher produces three detailed individual case studies. It is argued that in order to comprehend the significance of broad social phenomena such as migration and gender, it is imperative to have an appreciation of their meaning in the context of individual lives.

Noting the occurrence of migration-related disruption across each of the case studies, the thesis uses the concept of biographical disruption to generate an innovative analytic vocabulary and a model that together describe and represent the gendered biographical experience of international migration. The research also uses the analytic language and the model to illustrate the impact of migration on the gender dynamics of migrants’ intimate relationships. It does this by considering one of the pivotal tensions through which gender dynamics are reconstructed in the context of migration, the tension between migrants’ productive and reproductive responsibilities. The language and the model theorise the resolution of this tension in a number of ways, thus extending the terms of the debate about the impact of migration on gender dynamics beyond the current binary conceptualisation of emancipation or subjugation. The utility of the language and the model in their depiction of the overall biographical experience of migration, and the illustration of the effect of migration on gender dynamics is demonstrated in the thesis through their application to each of the individual case studies.

Acknowledgements

Although writing this thesis has often been a solitary experience, its completion has nonetheless required the support of many people. I would like to thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Ann Dupuis and Professor Paul Spoonley, for their attentive and skilful guidance. I am particularly grateful to Ann, who often assumed responsibility for my supervision when Paul's other work commitments took him off campus or out of New Zealand. Ann responded quickly and thoughtfully to numerous emails, read endless drafts, gave honest, sensitive feedback and provided me with encouragement and emotional sustenance when I most needed them. Grateful thanks are also extended to Joy Oehlers for her generous assistance with my bibliography, and to Sue Claridge for her expert computer help.

Penny Lysnar has been my constant friend and supporter throughout my years of study. I owe her an enormous debt of gratitude for her time, her energy, her intellectual engagement with my work and her wonderful sense of humour. Similarly, I am very grateful to Patrick Firkin, who introduced me to narrative methods, inspired me with his original ideas, and responded patiently to my numerous requests for methodological assistance and advice. Tom Wengraf and Prue Chamberlayne also deserve my thanks. Not only did they facilitate the methods course I attended in the United Kingdom, but they also welcomed me into their home and gave freely of their time and knowledge long after the course was complete. I would like to thank each of the members of my analysis panels for their scholarly curiosity and the gift of their honest and thoughtful contributions. I am also greatly indebted to each of the South African migrants who gave so generously of themselves during our interviews. Quite simply, this thesis would not have been possible without them.

My doctoral study has greatly impacted the lives of those closest to me. I am grateful to my mother, Jan Kissane, who always believed I could do anything, and to my father, Giuseppe Di Maio, who told me my first 'migration story'. I am also deeply grateful to my friends, siblings and extended family for their love, their patience and their tolerance of my frequent physical and mental absences. I wish to thank my wonderful daughters, Rebecca Sian and Jessica Hope, for reminding me every day about the most important things in life. I am most indebted, however, to my husband, Hugh Meares. He gave me

both the courage and inspiration necessary to begin this project, and the love and encouragement required to finish it. He put my needs before his own on countless occasions, woke without complaint before dawn to the sound of my keyboard, and shouldered almost complete responsibility for the financial maintenance of our family. Most particularly, he could always be trusted to pick up the pieces of my sanity and my self and bind them together with his infinite love and energy. He is my greatest strength.

Ethics Approval was granted by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC).

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Prologue	1
Introduction	1
My Story	3
Terminology	4
The Aims of the Thesis	5
The Recent History of International Migration to New Zealand	7
A Brief History of South African Migration to New Zealand	11
Conclusion	12
Conclusion	12
Chapter 1	
Literature Review – The Gender and Migration Story	17
Introduction	17
Part One	19
From Women and Migration to Gender and Migration	19
Stage One: Women and Migration	20
Stage Two: Gender, Difference and the Household Economy	21
The Turn to Qualitative Methods	21
The Shift in Focus from Women to Gender	22
Gender and Other Axes of Social Difference	23
Criticism of the Household Focus	24
Stage Three: Gender and Migration	24
Gendered Migrant Employment and Networks	25
Gendered Migrant Relationships with the State and Political Organisations	26
Gender – From a Fixed Dichotomy to a Fluid Relationship	27
Gender as Process and Structure	29
The Marginalisation of Gender in Migration Scholarship	30
Part Two	32
Why does Gender Matter?	32
Gender and Migration Policy	32
Gender, Migration and Family Relationships	34
Gender and Return Migration	36

Two Major Themes	37
The Emancipation Narrative	37
Paid Employment	39
Gender and Migration Theory	41
Neoclassical Migration Theory	42
Structural Migration Theory	43
Migration Systems Theory	44
Structuration Theory	45
Transnationalism	45
Gender and Migration – The New Zealand Story	47
Women and Migration	47
Gender and Migration	48
Research on the South African Community in New Zealand	49
Conclusion	51
 Chapter 2	
Methodology – The Research Story	53
Introduction	53
Part One	56
The Narrative Biographical Approach	56
History of BNIM	58
Intellectual Biography of BNIM	58
BNIM and SOSTRIS	60
BNIM and Migration Research	62
Part Two	65
Why Biography and Why BNIM?	65
Processes of Change and Transition	66
Social and Historical Context	67
The Lived Texture of Individual Lives	69
Structure and Agency	71
The Flexibility of the Method	72
Conclusion	73
 Chapter 3	
Methodology – The Research Story Continued	75
Introduction	75
Part One	76
The Selection of Participants	76
Why South Africans?	76
The Selection Process	78

The Interview Process	80
A Brief Overview	80
The Interviews	80
The Single Narrative-Seeking Question	81
The First Session	83
The Gestalt	84
The Second Session	85
Debriefing	87
The Third Session	88
The Transcription Process	90
Part Two	93
The Analysis Process	93
Background and Overview	93
The Creation of the Biographical Data Chronology (BDC)	95
The Creation of the Told Story Sequentialisation (TSS)	95
BNIM Interpretive Panels	98
Datum by Datum Analysis	98
BNIM Analysis Training	100
Choosing Three Case Studies	100
Biographical Data Analysis (BDA)	102
Thematic Field Analysis (TFA)	108
Microanalysis of Verbatim Text	112
Facilitating Panel Analysis	114
The Final Stages of Analysis	118
Part 3	121
The Ethics of Working with BNIM	121
Introduction and Overview	121
Avoid Deceit	122
Do No Harm	124
Maintain Confidentiality	128
‘Giving Back’ to the Participants	129
Conclusion	130
The Presentation and Generalisation of Research Outcomes	130
 Chapter 4	
Ellen	132
The Migration History	132
The Migration Story	139

Chapter 5	
Sam	149
The Migration History	149
The Migration Story	156
 Chapter 6	
Lorato	165
The Migration History	165
The Migration Story	173
 Chapter 7	
Reflexivity – the Interview Story	182
Introduction	182
Part One	183
Reflexivity	183
In Support of a Reflexive Stance	183
Five Reasons	184
Reflexive Priorities	184
Reflexivity - The Story So Far	185
Part Two	185
Reflexivity and Social Location	185
Gender	185
Age	186
Education	188
Part Three	189
Reflexivity and the Defended Subject	189
Untangling the Tension around Ethnicity, 'Race' and Apartheid	189
The Defended Subject	190
Ethnicity, 'Race' and Apartheid	190
Stereotypes, Discourses and Anxiety	192
New Zealand and South Africa	193
My Ethnicity	193
'Race', Racism and Ethnicity in New Zealand	194
Negotiating Stereotypes and Discourses	194
Our Stories, Our Selves	195
Conclusion	196

Chapter 8	
Disruption, Continuity and Gender: The Biographical Meaning of Migration	198
Introduction	198
Biographical Disruption and Biographical Work	200
Biographical Disruption: A Developing Concept	202
Biographical Disruption and Migration	204
Disruption, Gender and the Biographical Meaning of Migration	209
Lorato	211
Ellen	214
Sam	216
Comparison of Cases	219
Disparate Motivations	220
A Spectrum of Voluntary versus Involuntary Migration	221
Life Stage	222
Gender Dynamics	223
Employment	223
The 'Inner Landscape'	224
Disruption and Continuity	224
Summary	225
The Model	225
Conclusion	231
 Chapter 9	
Employment and Household Management: An Analysis of the Impact of Migration on the Gender Dynamics in Intimate Relationships	232
Introduction	232
Sam	234
Ellen	238
Lorato	242
Comparison of Cases	245
Similarities and Differences	246
Summary	252
The Model	253
Conclusion	259

Epilogue	260
Introduction	260
The Aims and Contributions of the Thesis	260
Key Findings	264
Possibilities for Further Research	267
Final Thoughts	268
Appendices	
Appendix 1	269
Information Sheet	269
The Experience of Migration: A Biographical Narrative Approach	269
Appendix 2	272
Consent Form	272
Appendix 3	273
Questions from Session Three	273
Appendix 4	275
Example of Agenda for Group Analysis	275
Appendix 5	277
Participant Report	277
Bibliography	287

Table of Figures

Figure 1	Excerpt from Debriefing Notes: Interview 2	88
Figure 2	Excerpt from Transcription: Interview 3	91
Figure 3	Transcription Symbols	92
Figure 4	Stages of BNIM	94
Figure 5	Excerpt from BDC: Interview 1	95
Figure 6	The DARNE Textsorts	96
Figure 7	Excerpt from TSS: Interview 3	97
Figure 8	Excerpt from BDA: Interview 6	104
Figure 9	Excerpt from a Narrative Summary of the BDA: Interview 4	106
Figure 10	Excerpt from 'phases and turning points of the lived life': Interview 6	107
Figure 11	Excerpt from 'possible told stories': Interview 6	107
Figure 12	Excerpt from TFA: Interview 6	109
Figure 13	Excerpt from Microanalysis: Interview 6	113
Figure 14	Excerpt from the Comparison of the Lived Life/Told Story: Interview 4	119

Table of Models

Model 1	The Generic 'Migration Biography' Model	227
Model 2	Lorato's Migration Biography	228
Model 3	Ellen's Migration Biography	229
Model 4	Sam's Migration Biography	230
Model 5	The Generic 'Impact of Migration on Gender Dynamics' Model	255
Model 6	Sam - The Biographical Impact of Migration on Gender Dynamics	256
Model 7	Ellen - The Biographical Impact of Migration on Gender Dynamics	257
Model 8	Lorato - The Biographical Impact of Migration on Gender Dynamics	258