

The Return Migration of Indian Women in Durban, Kwazulu Natal

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ABSTRACT The presence of professional women in global migration streams challenges dominant discourse on women's place in contemporary global society. They further problematize the rhetoric of Third World migrant women as representing 'lesser skilled', recipients of welfare, family migrants or 'trailing wives' and prompt an appreciation of the multitudinous ways in which their migration trajectories intersect with increasing global labour participation and the reconfiguration of family networks. By examining the transnational migration strategies of a group of married professional Indian women in Durban specifically, this paper attempts to stimulate thought on the 'place' of such women in post-apartheid South African society. A snapshot account of the historical background of Indian women in South Africa, together with the recent voices of the autonomous migration of married Indian women professionals, makes visible the agency of the women in changing historical adversity into advantage. This factor together with changing local political, economic and social conditions has seen a steady growth in the migration of such a group, between South Africa and overseas destinations of the First World in particular. The sojourn between two or more nations has implications for understanding the experience of return – migration and the roles and obligations of the married women within the natal as well as the marital household.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about a sample of Indian, married women transmigrants, who have risen above many limitations to empower themselves and the local¹ household by fulfilling personal, career and monetary aspirations. It is an attempt to show how the women have turned historical adversity into advantage - by being agents in their own emancipation from discriminatory state legislation, as well as socially restrictive patriarchal controls through the auspices of transnational migration. It refers to the to-ing and fro-ing movement of professional Indian women between Durban², South Africa and overseas destinations and their dual/multiple existence within and between these settings. By focussing on their return visit(s) to South Africa, we are able to examine the time and space in-between the 'here' and 'there' processes of transnationalism. I attempt to contribute to a growing body of literature on the transformative relationship between the social and spatial within the specific context of transnational Indian women in post-apartheid South Africa.

This study is based on in-depth interviews and e-questionnaires conducted during PhD research, of 25 professional, married Indian women migrants from Durban - who worked predomi-

nantly in the United Kingdom for varying periods of time between 2004 and 2007. The overlap between 'professional' and 'service occupation' categories becomes slippery terrain when definitions of these include tertiary education qualifications as a measure of expertise and occupational status. The categories of 'service occupation' and 'profession' and their respective niches in global labour flows, indicates that the two categories be viewed as a continuum rather than mutually distinct. The first part of the paper addresses background details on the sample and recent theorizing on what return migration has come to signify in varied contexts. The latter part contextualizes the narratives of four South African Indian women's experience of 'return' in relation to the dynamics embedded in childcare, kinship obligations and social networks.

PART 1

BACKGROUND

The women constituted a range of professional and service occupations including : nurses, teachers, beauty therapists, business women, optometrists, speech and hearing therapists, medical doctors and college/university lecturers.

Of the 25 women, 13 women (52%) were autonomous migrants whose decision to work overseas were pioneering efforts to do so in their immediate and extended families. The women's ages ranged from between 23 and 57 years. Their diverse generational, religious and class backgrounds presented a heterogeneous sample. However, their shared ethnicity, marital status, career aspirations and discontent in the political milieu of post-apartheid South Africa formed the basis for their deliberate decisions to work overseas.

Since the arrival of Indians in South Africa in 1860 and the later arrival of passenger Indians, Indian women have had to endure numerous hardships and discriminatory practices. Their discontents are foregrounded in colonialism and the brutal indentured labour system together with social sanctions imported from the Indian sub-continent concerning Indian womanhood, the racial discrimination and gender inequalities of an apartheid state. And presently, restrictive affirmative action policies in post-apartheid South Africa have placed further constraints to their economic progress. Given that Indian women entered tertiary education in significant numbers since the 1950's, their visible rise into the professions by the 1970's is a relatively recent historical occurrence (Singh 2006). Even more recent is their departure for overseas work opportunities initiated by the global demand for particular areas of occupational expertise – a phenomenon particularly noticeable since 1994, when South Africa became a democracy. It is in acknowledgement of this historical timeline that their agency as daughters, wives, mothers and working women can truly be understood.

Aspirations to Work Overseas

The transnational experiences of the sample between South Africa and first world destinations represents a novel social reality among people of Indian origin in Durban, that is the culmination of several 'push' factors (in order of importance):

- To live in a relatively crime-free society. Crimes such as car hijackings, armed burglaries, attempted murder, rape and abduction have earned South Africa the reputation of a world leader in violent crime (Van Rooyen 2000).
- Escape the frustrations of an affirmative action policy³ which as per common

perception of the Indian South African people prejudices the employment of Indian professionals in state institutions, as well as low salaries and high taxation in South Africa a desire to emigrate⁴ for two main reasons:

1. to lay the foundation for a better and safer future for their children
 2. to a lack of confidence in the South African government
- poor professional opportunities and poor potential for professional growth in under-resourced work environments such as the deterioration of state health and education institutions which are characterized by poor basic facilities, under-staffing and low salaries

Understanding Return Migration

Further to being transnational migrants, the women were also return migrants, whose return to South Africa prompted this research at a particular juncture in their migration trajectory. Hence, I view the transnational returnee as an actor within the 'space' of a circular migratory movement between countries/continents, whether this return is temporary or permanent. Circular migration patterns represent an age-old pattern of mobility and the terms return, repeat, rotating, multiple, seasonal, cyclical, shuttling or circuit-based modes of migration have become accepted terms for migration flows between homelands and places of work – underscoring the self-perpetuating nature of migration (Vertovec 2007).

Since I have contextualized the transmigratory experiences of the women in my sample against the background of the evolving theorizing of return migrants, it is not out of place to discuss the various theoretical perspectives on return migration and show how return has multiple meanings in different contexts for the returnees (see Cassarino 2004). Their experiences relating to kinship obligations, childcare and social networks – which I present in the form of case studies, reflect processes of agency within the wider context of transnationalism and the specific context of return.

In the 1970's the theories of return migration viewed the returnee as a migrant who returned home because of a failed migration experience that did not accomplish the desired outcome (Cassarino 2004). This focus shifted by the 1990's,

from the individual independence of the migrant to mutual interdependence by recognition of the family/household as integral to the process of migration and the migration decision (Stark 1991). Return then was understood as a successful experience abroad where the migrant accomplished the goals of higher income and the accumulation of savings while remitting part of their income to the household. The 'failure and success paradigm' of returnees however, proved too simplistic as further studies indicated that return was not only a personal issue but was also influenced by social and contextual factors. The reality of the migrant's socio-economic context as well as the returnees expectations (Gmelch 1980) were also significant variables in this process. Further to this, time and space factors were integral to an understanding of return migration. Time for instance, included such aspects as the influence of the duration of stay abroad, professional advancement and associated social change in the home country as crucial elements. Space refers to the impact of the local context in the home country on the returnee's expectations as well as the high expectations of family and friends, each time the returnee visited home. Some studies (see Colton 1993; Byron and Condon 1996; Lewis and Williams 1986) showed that despite the higher living standards of returnees and their families, traditional values, gender relations and other embedded behavioural patterns seldom changed and were often reinforced further. Within transnational migration theory, return occurs when sufficient resources (financial and informational) are accumulated and when conditions at home are favourable. In adapting back to their home environment, returnees use their acquired skills to distinguish themselves from locals and renegotiate their position in society in novel ways. As transnationals, the hybrid identities of migrants and their overseas mobility shape the way in which the returnee initiates new projects by way of mutual obligations, opportunities and expectations within the family, the wider kinship circle and the diaspora formed by recognition of common ethnic group belonging (Cassarino 2004). Social network theory complemented this perspective by acknowledging the role of the migrant's involvement and membership in social networks Laumann et al. (1983) which articulates in two ways, namely:

1. return migrants are social actors involved in long term relations between network mem-

bers that may be communal (e. g. Friends or family networks), or associative, in which case a selective group of actors share relationships in terms of membership (eg. Professional networks) and

2. return migrants engage with these varying network structures which offer different opportunities, orientations and mechanisms that often influence their behaviour.

Social network theory in the context of return migration therefore considers social and economic networks as being more than just the attributes of ethnicity and kinship to also include a commonality of interests between actors from different backgrounds.

Childcare, Kinship Obligations and Social Networks

Professional, married women transnationals differ from their single, unmarried counterparts in their marital household obligations – particularly in their childcare responsibilities and their roles as wives and mothers. In the sample, the overall concerns of the women were managing childcare arrangements in their absence and keeping regular contact through telecommunications with their children, spouses, parents and siblings. They expressed that 'virtual intimacy'⁵ (viz. communication via sms, im, mms, email, skype and viewcam) was integral in maintaining good family communication and was the most effective means of keeping a 'hands on' relationship in daily/weekly household dynamics - when living 'on the other side of the world'. The women perceived their children as coping better in their absence than their spouses were able to. Husbands often complained about being neglected and became possessive and controlling in the relationship. In their efforts to maintain the local status quo while they were abroad, some women had to give details about their routines and whereabouts on a daily basis to their spouses to allay fears of infidelity in the relationship. The women relied extensively on local kinship support structures in facilitating the care of children and on employed domestic helpers to take care of other household responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning. The women's remittances were integral to the maintenance and socio-economic mobility of the local household. They also made significant contributions towards the natal/parental household despite their responsibilities to the marital household.

PART II

The return experience has a range of social, emotional and financial connotations and implications for this sample. Being predominantly married women with children, 'hands-on' mothering and conjugal relations together with kinship obligations, took precedence during this period. Recurring themes in recent studies including notions of 'the good mother' (Keough 2006), emotional labour (Skribis 2008) and gift giving in transnational mothering (Fresnoza-Flot 2009), convey the familiarity of transnational family life experienced by migrant working mothers. The following four case-studies of a specialist nurse, a speech and hearing therapist, a beauty therapist and a lecturer/business woman, illuminate the emergence of a specific stream of migrant women who constitute a small but growing proportion of the Indian population in Durban. Their experiences are meant to illustrate the perception of the women and what their return visits mean as transnational mothers, wives and daughters.

Case Study 1

Sheela's case study highlights a range of issues including: the potential for professional women to earn far higher incomes overseas, the general disillusionment of the Indian parent with the potential for South Africa to offer opportunities to future generations of Indian youth, and that a transnational existence could reinforce gender hierarchies and subvert career aspirations even when it was 'for the common good of the household'.

Sheela, a 56 year old specialist paediatric nurse, left South Africa confident that her household would be adequately managed by her husband, 3 adult children (one aged 28 years and twins aged 25 years) and a very efficient domestic helper. Ideally, she would have liked to have worked for several 9 month periods in the UK, to remit money back home. She lived with an Irish family in London and worked at a private hospital for 9 months in 2004 before she felt the pressures of being away from home. While her husband was initially supportive of her move, he grew resentful of her absence and felt that she needed to be at home to manage their household. She attributed her children's dependency on their upbringing in which she

says she spoilt them by not allowing them to fend for themselves. "I raised them in the traditional Hindu way where the mother does everything for her children and husband. I did everything for them and they never lifted a finger...they are not self-sufficient...my boys are very dependent on me...overall I had no support from my husband and children".

Her husband was unwilling to leave South Africa nor his extended family, although Sheela was certain he would find employment. While overseas she was able to send home a substantial amount of money as she earned twice as much as her income in South Africa. A year after her return to South Africa, her husband passed away and her obligations to her family which included caring for her terminally ill father, constrained her from going abroad again. She has encouraged her children to travel and settle abroad as she believes they have greater opportunities outside South Africa. Sheela feels that her attempt at migration was a failure because it is difficult for Indian women to succeed if they do not have the support of their spouses and children. She believed that being the only female in a male-dominated household made it difficult to abandon the traditional Hindu and patriarchal attitude of her husband and sons – an environment which she herself had helped to build.

The 'Good Mother' Trope

Sheela justified her decision to work overseas, as a means of expediting the payment of debts incurred by the household. She explained to her family that by making this sacrifice, it would rapidly improve their quality of life. This justification was a recurring sentiment among the mothers in the sample and affirms that in cultures where women are considered the repositories of tradition and morality, mothers in particular are known to 'suffer' and 'sacrifice' for the benefit of family honour. By positioning herself as a 'good' mother who would work abroad for the economic interests of the family, the notion of motherhood defended her action to leave the country for a short period only. The idea of 'motherhood as the foundation of the family' becomes somewhat a constraining factor in the women's assertion of their new identities as 'good worker-mother-migrant'. In Sheela's case, the loss of her physical presence in maintaining the social order (household lore) led to the abandonment of her

plans for the sake of her family. This was a sacrifice on her part but was perceived by her family as consistent with the logic of the 'good mother' and in this instance, the self sacrificing 'good Hindu mother'. Sheela's narrative resonates with the idea of the 'new Hindu woman' espoused by some writers (an example is given below) in recent constructions of Hindu diasporic identity. Such ideals and perceptions on Hindu women may be challenged by many in India as the day-to-day reality of women's agency takes many courses which cannot be circumscribed in definite moulds.

"This new Hindu woman may be well educated or intellectual, may have a career outside the home, may be an influential member or even decision-maker within her family and community; even so, she is still a woman who must meet the archetype of 'wife and mother' that has been created and reinforced through traditional discourses – i.e a woman who is virtuous, obedient, devoted and loyal. True, the new Hindu woman is strong but her strength lies in embracing and restoring the glories of an ancient past by wholeheartedly molding herself to fit her womanly role as dutiful wife and selfless mother" (Narayan 2006: 12).

Keough's (2006: 450) ethnographic research of Gagauz Moldovan (Eastern Europe) migrant women also shows how the women:

"...employ the trope of the 'sacrificing mother' as the key to the social order to justify their labour for themselves and their children. Yet it is their participation in and justification of this labour through such a discursive trope that implicates them in wider nets of oppression".

Man's (2004: 5) study of skilled Chinese women immigrants and their experiences in Canada also aptly indicates that:

"Cultural ideology and structural support reinforces the social construction of womanhood that defines a woman by her child-rearing and domestic abilities. The image of the 'loving mother' and 'ideal wife' is so powerful that women, regardless of ethnicity, race and class are unable to deconstruct that image."

Sheela had to come to terms with the fact that the socially perceived parameters of her social reality had been challenged and could not withstand the changes inherent in living across continents. Being close to the age of retirement, she did not consider it worthwhile to pursue working overseas in the future. Her obligation to care for her ailing father and maintain family

solidarity after the death of her spouse also prevented her from following these aspirations.

Case Study 2

Anna, a 40 year old speech and hearing therapist, found it a necessity to work overseas when her husband could not find employment locally due to Affirmative Action legislation which prejudiced him as an Indian male. Her ability to earn in pounds as the primary breadwinner enabled the sustaining of two local households.

Anna found employment in the UK through a recruitment agency and had worked for 18 months abroad. In this time, she had made 2 return visits to South Africa. Her husband was also planning to seek employment for himself in the UK and if successful, the couple hoped that their 11 year old son would be able to join them a few years thereafter. Anna was sceptical of this scenario because of her awareness of how difficult it was for professionals to find suitable employment in the UK. She knew of many instances where professionals had to work for lengthy periods of time in telesales or at MacDonald's before finding 'a real job' related to their expertise. However, Anna was equally frustrated by his prospects of working in South Africa because Affirmative Action policies marginalized minority groups such as Indians. She said, "Then (during apartheid), we were not white enough, now (post-apartheid South Africa) we are not black enough". Anna was the primary breadwinner in the marital household and also contributed towards the parental household because of the integral role her parents played in the care of her child. Her main objective was to remit to maintain the daily functioning of the household and save towards the education of her son. This would not be possible if she worked in South Africa. Anna maintained that local state hospitals were in crisis due to staff shortages (health professionals, doctors and nurses were leaving the country), as well as being poorly resourced with inadequate facilities and technology – which made it difficult to progress beyond a certain level for health practitioners such as herself.

Anna's responsibility as sole breadwinner indicated the necessity of earning in a foreign currency to sustain the household(s) during local economic uncertainty. Personally, she could not foresee the family emigrating because of restrictive changes affecting foreigners wishing to

obtain citizenship in the UK. Her predicament had led to a complete reversal of roles in her marriage where she went out to work and her husband stayed at home with their child. She found the situation pressurizing and was anxious for her husband to find employment and alleviate some of her financial commitments.

Emotional Labour

Anna's return visits were short in duration and were intense periods of reunification with her child and spouse. It was a time marked by a joyous arrival and a sad, guilt-ridden departure. She said that leaving her child behind was the most difficult part of working overseas but she had little choice when her husband became redundant.

"At some stage this will have to end...I cannot go on like this. It's emotionally draining to come and go when you have a young child. I have always wanted to work abroad for the experience of it and maybe under different circumstances, I would enjoy the experience more...it was an adventure initially but it's terrible to be away from my son and miss out on all **those** (his childhood) experiences".

Skribis (2008: 236) writes that the reason why emotions and transnational families are inseparable is twofold: firstly, that emotions connect individuals to families and secondly, that:

"Migration is invariably a process that dissociates individuals from their family and friendship networks, as well as from other socially significant referents that have strong emotional connotations...Migrant stories are linked with the experiences of adjustment, settlement, nostalgia, a shattered sense of belonging, renewal, loss, discrimination, abrupt endings, new beginnings and new opportunities – all potent sources of emotions."

Anna's case study reflects the emotional pendulum endured by mothers who leave their children behind and the unanticipated challenges of the migration process. It also presents insight into how, as mobile transnational mothers, what women set out to do, what they actually do and what they think they ought to do. Anna's role as breadwinner illustrates how transnational migration may empower women economically but constrains them in other ways, particularly mothers who have to sacrifice the physical and emotional component of childrearing. This makes the return visit an emotionally charged period of

time that is inextricably linked to the affirmation and nurturance of mother-child bonds and conjugal relations.

Case Study 3

Jessi's case study encapsulates the issues of crime and emigration as motivations for working overseas. Also of concern, was prioritizing her relationship with her daughter – who was becoming a young woman.

Jessi is a 39 year old beauty therapist who works for 9 month periods overseas, aboard cruise-liners for a UK based cosmetic company. Her most recent stint was to the Caribbean Islands and I interviewed her on one of her regular return visits to SA – between stints. She is a devout Christian who has a 13 year old daughter and was recently re-married. Her second husband and unmarried sister were her childcare support system in her absence. Having lived between the UK and SA for several years, she decided that leaving SA for good would be her next step. Jessi would have liked to emigrate but her daughter's stability and husband's local transport business were constraining factors. She also financially supported a mentally challenged brother and ailing father who lived with her. She was satisfied that her monthly remittances had stabilized previous household difficulties. Working overseas had enabled her to extend her house, buy a car for her sister to transport her daughter and pay off loans in a short space of time. Her main concerns for her child and husband were the extent to which drug syndicates had penetrated the local schools and taxi industry and the accompanying crime experienced in the Indian township where she lived. Her daughter had friends who were drug addicts and were living on the streets and her husband was being hijacked and burgled as a regular occurrence.

Transnational Mothering

Transnational parenting becomes challenging over a period of time when children's needs change and the primary caregiver is absent. Having been a single mother for 5 years prior to her re-marriage, Jessi wanted to be a consistent part of her only child's daily life. Jessi felt that her sister's role as caregiver in her absence had only partly fulfilled her parental obligation. The 'other mother' Ericka et al. (2003) role played by her sister

was based on reciprocity in the form of free accommodation and a small car which Jessi purchased for her use. Such practises are described by Hochschild (2001) as 'global care chains', whereby migrants and non-migrants are connected in terms of paid or unpaid care work. This was Jessi's fourth annual return visit to Durban, which she planned to coincide with her daughter's school holidays so that they could spend 'quality time together'. Her rationale for wanting to emigrate during her child's school-going years was to provide her with an international education⁶ which would enhance her career opportunities later on in life. Prioritizing her child's education, she believed, would lead to upward social mobility in the future.

Gift - Giving

Jessi's daughter associated her mother's return with designer clothes and accessories, shopping and 'showing off' to her teenage friends and cousins, in the latest London fashion trends. Such 'gift giving' on the return visit had become the norm in Jessi's household and the expectation among all household members to receive a 'goodie bag' had come to symbolize Jessi's compensation for her physical absence. Similarly, Fresnoza-Flot's (2009: 258) study of the transnational mothering strategies of Filipino migrants in France elaborates how "these mothers use gifts to symbolize gratitude and upward social mobility, to express maternal love, and to affirm their place and existence in the family". Such a practice was considered entirely different from the monthly remittances Jessi sent to maintain the basic needs of the household. Such gifts were small items and souvenirs which Jessi collected at the various ports at which she stopped during the cruise-liner's journey. For her sister, the gifts included unusual perfumes, scented oils, silk scarves or local handicrafts. For her father, brother and husband the items were generally chocolate, preserved fruit and t-shirts unavailable in South Africa. Jessi said that this was her way of sharing her travel experiences and overseas existence with her family. Fresnoza-Flot (2009) alludes to other migrant worker communities among which this practise of gift giving and reinforcing kinship solidarity is referred to in local terms, such as the *balikbayan box* (Kivisto 2001) sent to the Philippines, *omiyage* (Park 2000) in Japan and *sunmul* (Pigliasso 2005) in Korea.

The 'Cost' of Return

To facilitate her annual return visit, Jessi had to earn additional money overseas to compensate the loss of income of the two month period spent in Durban. To do this, she also worked as an au pair (child minder) for 2 families she had befriended on board the cruise-liners. The families with whom she had a long-standing rapport, paid for all her food and accommodation expenses while she lived with them. During this time she was able to earn and save money simultaneously. Jessi could be viewed as an 'accidental navigator' (Ho 2009), a migrant who prolonged their migration trajectory through chance strategies. Despite being highly skilled migrants, their skills set did not necessarily reflect their expertise nor their educational qualifications. Her chance encounter with au pair work to supplement her income on return visits to South Africa did not require her expertise in beauty therapy and training. She had also considered diverse employment opportunities in other countries, if they were feasible (depending on financial considerations and visa requirements) but had not as yet pursued any. She had reached a point in her migration trajectory where each return visit further affirmed her desire to emigrate. While Jessi was certain that she would continue to go back to London to benefit from earning in pounds, she did not know when her family would actually join her. She was also concerned about the impact her continual periods of absence had on her new marriage. While her spouse was supportive of her working abroad and understood that without such financial security they would face a lesser quality of life, Jessi was afraid that their waning personal communication and his declining presence as a father figure in the household was becoming problematic. She confided that having spent so much time on her own overseas, she often wondered if she would be able to live in the household on a daily basis fulfilling the expectations of mother and particularly, wife. She especially felt the tensions associated with these roles during her return visits when she had to adjust to the demands of the household.

Community Initiative

Jessi had initiated a women's group through her church, where she taught beauty therapy

skills to mostly Indian women in the local community. They learned hair styling, massage and make-up skills which they could use for either personal benefit or to start home-based enterprises (hair/beauty salons) from which they could economically empower themselves. Through this community project, she also assisted young Indian girls who on completion of school were aspiring to become beauty therapists. Those who were already qualified came to her for assistance with their employment applications and for advice on how to secure work with the same international company as herself. Through her vast travel experience and expertise, Jessi was sought by other women in the local community as a role model who could advise them on working overseas. Although she was only involved in the project during her return visits, those women who she had taught initially were now training other women in the community and those women who found employment in London often made it a point of keeping in contact with her. She was regarded as someone who had 'made it' and whose success was evident in the material possessions she owned (two cars and a council house that was converted into a modern, luxurious five bedroom structure), her association with an overseas based career and a growing local transport business owned by her husband. She had renegotiated her position in society, from being perceived as a struggling single mother to an international career women who had improved the status of herself and her family. Jessi's initiative of 'giving back' to the community is consistent with the development of the homeland by migrants who contribute remittances and social capital (time knowledge and/or skills) towards the upliftment of non-migrants who remain behind. While Jessi's life was one of upliftment from working to middle class status, the situation of the respondent below demonstrates the effort required to sustain and consolidate a middle to upper class status.

Case Study 4

Priyal's lifestyle was an exception in the sample but is becoming the norm among successful and wealthy South African transnationals. Her case study indicates the kinship obligations of a young daughter and sister to her family in South Africa as well as her dependence on this kinship support for childcare during her stay in Durban, South Africa.

Priyal was a 33 year old lecturer by profession, whose staff contract had been discontinued due to the trend of Africanization affecting local tertiary education institutions. The preference for academics of African descent is part of addressing racial imbalances characteristic of university structures since the apartheid era. Mechanisms to address the predominance of female Indian lecturers in higher education had resulted in fewer permanent Indian staff appointments or redeployment in these institutions. Since the birth of her second child Priyal decided to start a small furniture assembling business with her brother. When her dentist husband decided to join a clinic in London, she decided that she would also move there with the children. Her transnational experiences did not involve her profession as such but rather the overseeing of the family business and family owned properties in South Africa. She has taken on these responsibilities since the death of her father and to financially assist her mother. Periodic visits to Durban of 3 to 4 months in duration meant that she had to return with her young children. Priyal said that her return visits were more like a relocation because she was moving her children from one home to another, settling for a while, then returning to the other home. When she was in Durban, her retired mother and 'nanny' took full care of her children while she attended to business matters but overseas, that responsibility was entirely her own. She viewed her Durban visits as her 'leisure' time and her overseas way of life as 'hard work' – with no family support and no maid. Her family obligations and family business interests in South Africa kept her to-ing and fro-ing movement a challenging lifestyle. She would have liked her mother and brother to emigrate but they were certain that they would not leave South Africa. Her mother did not mind the idea of spending her time equally between her two children however, when Priyal decided to lead a more settled life in the UK.

Kinship Obligations

Return to Priyal, was equivalent to a 'house move' because of the demands of moving young children and the three month duration of her stay in Durban. Locally, she was the business woman as well as dutiful daughter and sister and while in the UK she was a full-time housewife and mother. Her husband's working hours and travelling throughout the UK had made her appreciate South

African family life and her return visits to Durban helped to fulfil the longing for family relationships that do not exist there. She viewed her return as fulfilling the 'lack' she experienced abroad - providing the balance she needed in the duality of her lifestyle. Both "spaces" of her life had different connotations and were distinct signifiers of 'here' and 'there'. Both spaces showed the tension in living across national boundaries and the effort required to maintain and nurture long distance relationships. Priyal's loneliness overseas was temporarily averted by a social network of predominantly South African Indian friends which included her husband's South African Indian colleagues. Priyal said that her husband was supportive of her spending time in Durban with her family and their children because it 'took the weight off him' concerning parenting and family obligations which he could not fulfil with his work demands and travelling. Return was also a time to connect with family through invitations to weddings and other gatherings. Less formal activities ranged from 'girls night out' with friends, 'sleep overs' with cousins, and occasional picnics at the beach with relatives. The recognition of overseas family members at these occasions (particularly weddings) gave a celebrity-like status to 'overseas connections'.

Performance of Rituals

Returning home is also a time in which rituals and prayers are performed, particularly those concerning specific rites of passage and the children's well-being. Priyal chose to conduct these religious obligations in Durban because she associated 'home' and her mother's presence in these activities as integral to 'doing things properly'. Her mother's role in summoning the family priest, the buying of the necessary prayer goods and the overseeing of the cooking and sweetmeat preparation, made her physical presence inseparable from these activities. Priyal was also able to invite her grandparents to such occasions and in this way obtain their blessings. While Priyal did perform certain prayers and observed significant religious days/periods in the UK, she did the most important rituals in a far more elaborate manner in Durban.

Local/global Networking

Socializing during her return visits was also a

mechanism for Priyal not only to nurture local networks but also to keep in contact with local clients. A large proportion of her clientele (suppliers and customers) emanated from within the networks of family members and their business associates. She would reciprocate local business lunches/dinners in Durban by hosting and accommodating the same family members and their friends in the UK, to ensure an ongoing dialogue and rapport in her business dealings. Although the family business was based in Durban, the spaces within which her business networking occurred, traversed national boundaries. This transnational interaction revolved around reciprocal social obligations based on an extension of local kinship networks into a global arena/space. While these occasions were few and sporadic, Priyal recognized their significance in the long-term success of the family business.

CONCLUSION

The diversity of the meanings associated with return in the sample elaborate the complexity and dynamism of women's migration experiences.

In terms of space and time, the following configurations of return visits were evident. For the exception (Sheela), return was permanent – the end of migration plans – in the near or distant future. For most (as in the case of Anna and Jessi), the return visit spanned a period of between two weeks to three months in the origin country spent among family and friends. This was facilitated through a leave of absence taken from work (overseas), or was a period of time between working stints (not necessarily in the same job), with a certainty of going overseas again. For a few, return was an uncertain or unknown juncture in the migration trajectory wherein the potential for further migrations was influenced by a combination of variables including employment opportunities, financial and visa requirements as well as personal considerations (Priyal). In this instance, further overseas migration could occur in the near or distant future, or not at all.

The duration of the return visit was a key aspect in determining the women's priorities. The women's perception of the return visit presented itself as a specific time in which to engage in some or all of the following household and kinship commitments and activities:

1. a time of *reunification* with spouses, children and parents left behind in their absence and an emotionally intense period before leaving

the country again

2. a time to *reconnect* with friends as well as immediate and extended family through socializing at weddings, birthday parties and cultural events (eg. Diwali)
3. the *performance of particular rituals* or religious rites that required the presence of significant kin members such as parents and grandparents
4. a time to *assess* the progress made through remittances and personal investments and to *plan* future household objectives (eg. structural alterations to the house or household improvements, initiation or further development of local business/entrepreneurship interests, purchase of expensive items such as a car or investment in property)
5. a time to *consult* immediate family members (spouses, children and sometimes parents) on the migration plans of the return women migrant and/or the facilitation of the migration of other family members (including siblings, spouses, cousins) or friends
6. a time in which to initiate or develop *community projects* to uplift non-migrants by sharing expertise and time

Ghosh (2000: 185) elaborates that return “is largely influenced by the initial motivations for migration as well as by the duration of the stay abroad and particularly by the conditions under which the return takes place”. However, the case studies presented in this paper suggest that the diversity of returnees (including the sample of mothers) and their varied experiences requires that new variables be considered in explaining the return migration experience. The meaning of return for this sample of women was also largely influenced by the emergence of transnational family forms and evolving mothering strategies which require further attention in anthropological discourse and contemporary household dynamics in post-apartheid society.

NOTES

1. Local refers to the women’s households in Durban, South Africa
2. Durban is geographically situated on the east coast of South Africa and is the largest city in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. It has a population of 9million people, 85% of which is Black (of African origin), 5% White, 8.5% of Indian origin and 1.5% are Coloured (mixed racial descent). Pauw et al (2005: 2)
3. The key affirmative-action legislation in South Africa is the Employment Equity Act (EEA). Although the

act was passed in 1998, it only came into effect at the end of 1999 (Msimang 2000: 1). It is meant to redress historical injustices of the Apartheid era when Black South Africans were economically marginalized. While the category ‘Black’ encompasses the racial categories of African, Coloured and Indian – in practice, a preference for African candidates in employment operates to the detriment of Indians and Coloured minority groups. The perception that this policy prejudices them is a commonly held grievance amongst many Indian South Africans.

4. While 70000 South Africans are thought to have left the country between 1989-1992, the estimated number ballooned to over 166000 between 1998 and 2001. According to official statistics, over 16000 highly-skilled South Africans emigrated between 1994 and 2001 but the real number are probably three to four times higher (The Economist, August 2005). Official figures show that an estimated 400 000 South Africans living abroad, emigration has already cost the country about R285billion (Independent Online, 23 April 2004). The percentage of Indians within these statistics is unknown.
5. Virtual intimacy refers to the most recent digital technologies in transnational family communication which provides an ‘almost real’ substitute for the physical presence of family members. SMS, short message service; MMS, multimedia message service; IM, instant messaging (connecting in real time)
6. An international education in this context refers to a preference by some parents to educate their children abroad. The perception is that educating children overseas will lead to greater career opportunities in the future particularly because qualifications from South African tertiary institutions are not always considered on par and certain professionals have to write additional exams to meet overseas criteria. Entry into occupations such as medicine and law, for instance, are regulated (Myburgh 2004). There is also the perception that as students of a first-world country, their children would stand a better chance of being accepted into ‘world class’ postgraduate programmes than would a South African graduate

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