Migration, Mobility and Transnational Families: The Case of Indian Women Migrating to South Africa

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Abstract

The history of labour migration to South Africa spans centuries. More recently flows of skilled and unskilled, documented and undocumented migration to South Africa have reached significant proportions. While men have predominated in the flows of migration streams to South Africa, the feminisation of migration has increased the visibility and role of women in the migration context. The impact of migration on the lives of skilled married women has been given little attention in the migration literature. Characterised as trailing spouses in the broader migration literature, the article explores, through a life-course framework, how skilled Indian women renegotiate their lives when leaving secure jobs to follow their spouses to a foreign country. Attention is given to how mobility is negotiated between the spouses, the impact of mobility on the family and the influence of transnationalism on the migrants and their families in South Africa. The article is based on exploratory research using qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with married skilled Indian women who migrated as co-dependents to South Africa.

Introduction

South Africa is a migrant receiving country. The history of labour migration to South Africa has been well-documented, with men receiving attention as primary agents in migrating streams (Crush and Williams 2010; Harington et al. 2004). The role of female migrants and *skilled female* migrants (my emphasis) has received scant attention in the South African context (Jinnah 2017; Polzer 2008; Posel and Casale 2003). The purpose of the article is to examine how skilled Indian women migrate to South Africa and renegotiate their lives when leaving secure permanent positions to follow their husbands to a foreign country. While the lure of upward mobility is a factor in the migration

process, attention is given to how mobility is negotiated between the spouses, the impact of mobility on the family and the influence of transnational migration on families.

In the current era of rapid global change, skilled migration represents one of the more "acceptable" forms of migration (Raghuram 2004). The volume of scholarship on gender and migration has focused greater attention on women in the semi-skilled and unskilled sectors of employment (Cox and Watt 2002; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009), and undocumented work (IOM 2013; Polzer 2008), rather than skilled migration. The migration of skilled labourers is not only beneficial for migrants but has positive spinoffs for sending countries in the form of remittances and for the receiving countries in the inflow of human, economic and cultural capital. The "transnational family" is representative of the global fluidity of migration (Skrbiš 2008, 231), stretching across borders, boundaries and continents. Emerging as a trend amongst India's middle class, "the transnational family is buffered by India's liberal migration policy that supports the temporary migration of highly skilled workers" (Roos 2013, 147). Neglected in the body of literature in the Global North is how migration reconfigures family relationships in the case of mobile skilled migrants (Kofman and Raghuram 2006; Kõu and Bailey 2017; Kõu et al. 2015; Roos 2013). Little is known about the accompanying spouses and the role they play in the reunification, settlement and integration of the family in the receiving country.

The migration literature depicts the image of the accompanying wife, commonly viewed as "tied migrants" or "trailing spouses," as a muted, invisible spouse. Family reunification migration from India, where wives and children migrate to join men, has received little to no attention (Rugunanan 2017). In this article, I examine the narratives of skilled Indian migrant women who accompany their spouses to South Africa as dependent migrants. My findings challenge the view of "trailing spouses" and purport that joining spouses play an active role in family migration decisions. I argue that these migrants show agency in the renegotiation of their roles and lives in the host country of South Africa. This study further scrutinises how gender relations are reproduced in these transnational spaces and whether migratory strategies challenge the hegemony of traditional and patriarchal households.

Using a life-course approach to understand skilled Indian female migration to South Africa, life domains such as education, marriage, employment and the household are examined. The article uses exploratory research where qualitative interviews were conducted with 10 married Indian women. The women sampled are professional and semi-skilled and the article demonstrates how they "re-imagine" their lives given the impact of mobility on family life in the receiving country. The first part of the article contextualises transnationalism and provides a short review of high-skilled migration and gender. Thereafter an overview of the life-course approach is discussed. A description of the methodology and data collection follows. Next, the findings are discussed in terms of the life-course framework and the conclusions are presented.

Literature Review

In 2019, women comprised slightly less than half of all international migrants worldwide. In North America, women constituted 51.8% of all international migrants; in Europe they accounted for 51.4%. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of women migrants was lower at 47.5% (UN DESA 2019). Post 1994, migration streams to South Africa increased with international migrants and refugees from other African countries and from South Asia. Sub-Saharan countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe became feeder countries of migration into South Africa. Migrants from South Asia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal and China seek South Africa as a popular destination country. Push factors for leaving the host country include political uncertainty, civil wars, poverty, famine and unemployment (Rugunanan 2016; 2017). Studies on women migrating in the sub-Saharan context have grown substantially in the last few decades. Traditional male-dominated patterns of migration have been replaced by independent and single female migration to South Africa (Huynh et al. 2012; Jinnah 2013a; Kihato 2007; Meyer 2019).

This body of literature gives importance to agency by pinpointing the manner in which women make decisions and plan for their families' future well-being. Studies documenting women's agency in their migration journeys include works by Bozzoli and Nkotsoe (1991), Kihato (2007), and Meyer (2019). Violence in the countries of origin contributed to independent female migration to South Africa (Jinnah 2013a; Rugunanan and Smit 2011; Schmoll, Spiteri, and Saïd 2011). Female migrants also use migration as a livelihood strategy (Camlin, Snow, and Hosegood 2014; Jinnah 2013b; Smit and Rugunanan 2014). More recently, studies have shown that while female migration does cause a reversal of breadwinner roles within the family unit, it also leads to a greater sense of autonomy, self-esteem and self-fulfilment for the migrant women in their families (Kuhlengisa 2013; Meyer 2019; Ntsoane 2015). With the rise in female migration there is a concomitant impact on families, the social and cultural fabric that migrants are located in, which, alongside the rapid diffusion of technology, is leading increasingly to transnational lives.

Transnational Migration

Scholars writing on transnational migration argue that traditional theories of migration fail to account for the transnational habits of migrants (Faist et al. 2013), pointing out that transnational migration occurs within "fluid social spaces" that are constantly being renegotiated as migrants become "embedded" in more than one place (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Transnationalism purports that migrants relate and connect with several nation states and/or communities and their habits result in the development of transnational communities. This supports the view that migrants move repeatedly, while migrants that are more affluent choose to return home in their senior years, thus maintaining dual citizenship. Family members who are breadwinners move repeatedly (Ley 2010), while business travellers adopt a "mobile transnational lifestyle" (Butt 2013, 10) as business prospects arise. Innovation and advancements in

the information and telecommunication and travel industries have revolutionised migration processes, reducing space and time necessary for travel. However, migrants also invest energy in retaining links with the homeland because of social exclusion and the limits of integration in the destination country (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Blanc 1994).

The Impact of Skilled Female Migration on the Self

Migration alters family patterns significantly and the transnational family characterises this global fluidity. Piper's (2008; 2010) research shows that the increase in the migration of Asian women results in transnationally split households where either one or both parents work abroad. Where women leave children behind, a case of "transnational motherhood" emerges (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). As wives or daughters assume the role of main breadwinner, this brings about a reversal of gender roles in the household (Piper 2008), with the male taking on household duties and caring for the children. Research shows that women view outmigration as a form of personal and economic freedom, as an escape from familial and marriage responsibilities (Dannecker 2007; Piper 2008), from unwanted marriages and abusive spouses and relationships (Krummel 2012; Piper 2010), empowering women to define their own life course as an escape from patriarchy (Kõu and Bailey 2017).

The visibility of female migration has led to a growth in the body of research on gender and international migration. The scale of research is balanced in favour of unskilled and more "feminised domains" of the labour market such as health care, domestic work, sex work, entertainment and manufacturing (Lutz 2010; Piper 2010). The nature of this type of work involves low wages, low status, minimal occupational mobility and security with little chance of collective organisation and is also regarded as "precarious work" (Cox and Watt 2002; Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009). On the other end of the scale, minimal attention has been given to the experiences of highly skilled migrant women (Kõu and Bailey 2017; Meare 2010; Roos 2013); the focus on professional and entrepreneurial women as part of the "transnational elites" is largely missing (Yeoh and Willis 2005).

Meares's (2010) study on how skilled migration affects women in Canada, which emphasises skills as a criterion for selecting migrants, reveals the negative effects of international migration on these women. In Salaff and Greve's (2004) research on skilled Chinese women, the women's careers were adversely impacted by migration compared to skilled Chinese men. Suto (2009) talks of "compromised careers" of educated female migrants while Man (2004) describes them as de-skilled. Meares (2010) also documents the negative impact international migration has on skilled migrant women in Europe. She concluded that international migration "damages" skilled migrant women's careers. Cooke (2007 cited in Meares 2010, 474) revealed that Chinese professional women were "under-employed and underpaid, or unemployed." Cooke (2001) and Man (2004) noted that some participants were unable to obtain work post-migration due to increased family responsibilities. In contrast, Liversage (2009)

found that some of her participants who were skilled in the natural sciences were able to retain their professional identity; some had to retrain themselves for employment in different areas of the labour market and yet others were relegated to the home with the gendered identity of the homemaker cast upon them.

Some of these findings cohere with those of Yeoh and Willis (2005) who examined Singaporean women in China. They found that a process of "re-domestication" occurs when skilled women who migrated with their husbands withdraw from the labour force in the absence of paid domestic staff to give attention to the home and children. An interesting finding from their study revealed that in the case where women were lead migrants and husbands followed their entrepreneurial wives, domestic labour was diverted to others, mainly other women, and *not* the husband. Additionally, their study reveals that international migration does little to break down home-country norms of domestic labour; instead, these are reaffirmed in international spaces.

Roos (2013) makes the argument that the main or lead actor in migration, typically male, should not be seen in isolation from the wider family and social base from which the individual comes. The choice to migrate impacts on the broader household of the individual, be it accompanying or left-behind children or the elderly parents, but more importantly, on "spouses having to make difficult career choices" (Williams and Baláž 2008), especially those in skilled professions. The binary terminology of "principal" and "dependant" migrants in itself creates assumptions of active (read male) and passive roles (read female) in the migration process (Roos 2013). "Dependants" are imagined to hold subordinate positions within household dynamics or are thought to be culturally obliged to sacrifice their careers "for the sake of the family" (Roos 2013, 148). Findings from this article contradict the view of skilled Indian women migrants as subservient.

Migration to South Africa

Africa's history of migration surges with continental and intercontinental movements framed by post-colonial regimes, forces of globalisation and the endless quests for cheap labour (Adepoju 2008). Detrimental socio-economic and environmental conditions overridden by escalating population rates, unstable political economies, ethnic wars, poverty and rising unemployment levels drive the migration process, forcing migrants off the land in search of a better life elsewhere. Streams of migrants made their way to South Africa post-1994, after the end of apartheid, seen by many as the land of hope and opportunity.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Gauteng remains the economic and cultural hub. It serves as an important portal for migration into southern Africa, providing close access to metropoles such as Tshwane and Ekurhuleni in Gauteng and is an easy transit point to Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe (CDE 2008). South Africa remains the fifth largest host in the world to refugees and asylum seekers on the continent. The percentage of Indian migrants arriving in the country remained at 1% from 2011 to 2015 (DHA 2016, 27). In terms of country of origin, China accounted for the highest number

of applications, followed by Zimbabwe, India, Pakistan and Nigeria (DHA 2016, 27). The participation of foreigners in the South African economy is a sensitive issue given the country's high unemployment rate and decreasing job creation. Historical legacies of inequality in education contribute to the shortages of skilled workers in many sectors of the economy. Foreigners' access to the labour market has contributed to heightened tensions in the country and noted xenophobic attacks in 2008, 2015, 2017 and more recently in 2019 on foreign nationals. Restrictive immigration regulations create undocumented migrants, and while efforts to attract skilled migrants have intensified (Budlender 2014), lower skilled migrants do not have a visa they can apply for and so have to find other ways to enter the country. Many are also forced into illegality due to the corrupt and weak Department of Home Affairs structures.

From 1860 to 1911, over 150 000 immigrants from India arrived as indentured labour to work on the sugar plantations in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (Bhana and Brain 1990, 15). Women of Indian descent were indentured and "passenger" workers and were restricted by their contractual obligations to labour within the confines of harsh plantation life (Desai and Vahed 2008). They originated mainly from Southern India, parts of Northern India and were mainly Tamil, Telegu and Hindi speaking Hindus. Hiralal (2013) records that even then, the immigrant women were resilient in the face of adversity and were instrumental in retaining their religious identity in the diaspora. Post 2000, waves of migrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh steadily made their way to South Africa. Global labour demands and opportunities have increased the career-based mobilities of the educated middle-class in India (Roos 2013, 147). Supported by a liberal migration policy that encourages the temporary migration of highly skilled workers, the possibility of upward mobility acts as a motivating factor. The role of South Asian women in these migration flows to South Africa is largely unexamined (Rugunanan 2017).

A Life-Course Framework

The life-course approach is useful to interpret how life trajectories evolve together with the life events of individuals over time and how social processes (Kõu et al. 2015, 1647) affect them. Elder (1994, 1) purports that families are core to the unfolding of one's life course and life domains such as education, marriage, employment and the household are intricately interwoven across one's life span. He further stresses that social forces shape the life course and its developmental consequences. Elder's perspective stresses that the life-course approach interrogates people's lives situated within structural, social, and cultural contexts. Giele and Elder's (1998) life-course framework provides a useful analytical tool to analyse the lives of Indian female migrants who have migrated to South Africa. The concept "location in time and place" considers the cultural backgrounds of individuals; the theme of "linked lives" combines family norms and cultural expectations and "individual agency" refers to the choices an individual makes and the importance they attach to certain aspects or roles in their lives (Dale, Lindley, and Dex 2006, 324).

By using the life-course approach, the agency of the migrants is understood in relation to their choice to travel to South Africa, its impact on employment and the household and their spouses. The article also examines the social and cultural contexts of the migrants as "cultural decision making processes" (Smith 2004, 265) impinge on the choices of the migrants. Robinson and Carey's (2000) study of Indian doctors in the United Kingdom confirms cultural and social motives for migration were more important than economic factors. Individuals are able to exercise human agency in their choices; their choices are "contingent on the opportunities and constraints of social structure and culture" (Elder 1994, 2). This article considers from a gender perspective the experiences of relocation of skilled Indian female migrants who accompanied their spouses to South Africa and argues that instead of the image of "trailing spouses," migration to South Africa empowers skilled Indian females.

Research Methods

A social constructionist lens allows one to reflect on how meaning is created and to examine how social members experience their world (Creswell 2009). From this perspective, a qualitative approach was suitable to interpret the personal experiences of married Indian women's migration to South Africa. To date little research has been conducted on migrant married Indian women in South Africa. There is an extensive body of research on African female migration to South Africa (Kihato 2007) and Chinese (Park 2010) and Indian immigrant women in the early twentieth century (Hiralal 2013). A qualitative approach allows the researcher greater flexibility to probe for clarity when needed (Neuman 2006). The inclusion criteria of the sample consisted of married Indian female nationals who are skilled and semi-skilled professionals and migrated to South Africa as co-dependents. The interviews took place during September 2012 to April 2013 and in the participants' homes, which were located mainly in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Their homes were in close access to their husbands' places of employment and established private schools.

The participants were sourced through a research associate who is married to an Indian national. Through her social network, she was able to identify research participants for the study. A purposeful sampling method was used as participants had to meet specific criteria and Indian female nationals are less publicly visible in Johannesburg (Rugunanan 2016). Most of the participants, except for two, held postgraduate degrees and could communicate easily in English. These interviews were conducted in Gujarati and translated into English by the researcher.

A semi-structured interview guide was used, which focused on the following themes: the choice to migrate, choice of destination, family relationships in country of origin, significance of having children, working experiences in India and South Africa and integration into South Africa. The analysis of the data involved a combination of iterative reading of the handwritten field notes together with listening to audio-taped interviews which were transcribed by the researcher. The data was analysed using NVivo 11 Pro software which is suitable to analyse unstructured qualitative data.

Demographic and background information for each participant was captured onto an Excel sheet and, together with the transcribed interviews, was then imported into NVivo. Prior to the start of the interviews, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study. Anonymity was assured through the use of pseudonyms, and permission to record the interviews was obtained from the participants. Prior to conducting the research, ethical clearance was received from the relevant institutional authorities. The positionality of the researcher, a South African Indian, needs to be considered. Language and access to the participants did not present problems. Participants found it easy to relate to the researcher based on commonality of ethnicity, but the research associate who acted as gatekeeper also kept detailed notes and we were able to compare notes after the interview to ensure that no biases occurred or that my positionality affected the responses in any way.

Profile of Participants

The married Indian women, whose ages ranged from 25 to 47 years, migrated as co-dependents when their husbands were sent by their companies to work in South Africa for a contract period. One of the participants had a diploma in hairdressing, five participants had bachelor's degrees and four of them had postgraduate degrees. Nine of the participants were fluent in English, while one was less comfortable conversing in English (at the time of the interview). The length of stay of the participants ranged from three to 25 years. Three of the participants were married in South Africa and seven were married in India. Most of the women were married in their 20s; the oldest was 31 at the time of marriage and the youngest 22. All the women entered into arranged marriages, although the degree of freedom the women had in choosing their partner differed. At the time of the interviews, seven of the 10 women had children. Five of the women were working in South Africa at the time, while five were not employed. One participant held South African citizenship, three had residence permits, three held work permits, and the rest varied between a study permit, spousal permits, and one was on a visitor's permit. Three main themes are explored in the next section: the cultural background of individuals and how it links to family norms and cultural expectations and the role of individual agency. It is acknowledged that generalisations cannot be made on the basis of the interviews conducted, and that culture and traditional practices among the sample of women interviewed are diverse and different, and further influenced by intersecting factors of class, caste, age, status and positionality in society.

Migration Decisions and the Cultural Backgrounds of Individuals

Contrary to the notion of trailing spouses, the joining spouses in this study played an active role in the choice to migrate to South Africa. Their agency is not only evident in decision-making about the choice to migrate, but reveals itself in their choice of spouses as well, who were either in positions of employment in South Africa or were actively seeking to migrate. Manohar (2013, 195) reminds us of the pressure placed on "conforming to heteronormativ[e]" norms of marriage and motherhood among Indian women which results in a satisfied, more complete woman, reinforcing the "gendered

hierarchies of power" (Mahler and Pessar 2001, 445). It is, thus, not surprising that the idea of an arranged marriage was one of the main themes that emerged in the study. All of the women agreed to the cultural pressures of an arranged marriage but strategically chose partners who were willing to migrate to developed countries. These were economic migrants, seeking to enhance their social mobility; thus the women were willing to sacrifice their careers in lieu of advancing their husbands' career trajectories.

The Choice of a Life Partner

Acceding to parental pressure and cultural norms, the women counterbalanced this by fulfilling their own desires for upward mobility and travel by choosing to marry non-resident Indians or Indian men working in international companies. In the Indian context, cultural practices influence marriage rites and the prevalence of traditional arranged marriages remains the norm, albeit in different guises. In practice, significant family elders, other family members, friends, work colleagues, newspapers, even an industry spawned by professional marriage brokers, work to secure a strategic and compatible union (Walton-Roberts 2004). The power of the internet has breached this threshold, where the online viewing of prospective brides and grooms fast track the search for a suitable marriage partner. The occupational status of prospective grooms, and brides, is a determining factor in the choice of a partner to maintain or improve social mobility (Kõu et al. 2015; Walton-Roberts 2004).

A significant finding was that Indian women were becoming better educated, with parents putting pressure on them to finish undergraduate and pursue postgraduate studies, adding to the tension of delaying the marriage age. This has led to the creation of a more competitive labour market where jobs were scarce. An interesting dynamic is that while the women embrace the opportunity for advancement in terms of knowledge, they are obedient to the parents' persuasion of entering into an arranged marriage. Views among the female participants in this study indicate that from an early age they were groomed or socialised into traditional practices of arranged marriages. Arya said she was "ok" with the idea of the arranged marriage as her parents had "in a loving way, prepared me for it." Her parents had instilled in her from young the idea of an arranged marriage by saying "no one falls in love with a girl on the road," indicating one who is of lose morals. Arya married at the age of 23. She informed her father that she purposefully wanted to marry a non-resident Indian (NRI), but that she had wanted to go abroad *purely for economic reasons*.

Chetna also confirmed Arya's view of arranged marriages. From young they were socialised with this thinking: "yes we are accustomed to it. We were told from young that you will have an arranged marriage." This was a non-negotiable point. In Chetna's case, they would get a chance to communicate with the prospective groom for about 10–15 minutes. If they found the person interesting the parents were given the green light; if not, the search would continue. Chetna was allowed to have some say in the choice of her groom. She was also unused to interracial marriages as is the case in South Africa. She said that marrying "out" was not an option and not recommended. Besides, her

parents would also not approve of such a union and as it would be seen to bestow shame on the family.

Chetna's experience was slightly different from Bhindu's, who narrates how she and her husband merely "met" each other through the viewing of each other's photographs. Their parents were instrumental in the choice of suitable marriage partners; consequently, she and her future husband were left with little choice but to agree with their decision. Chanda, a 25-year-old Indian national from Hyderabad, maintains that people are under a misconception and that arranged marriages are not as rigid as perceived. Potential men and women of marriageable age would obtain photos of a pool of eligible partners. Once they had identified a potential candidate, measures were put in place to communicate further. If there was mutual interest, the parents would be informed and the process would continue. Other factors contribute to this decision, such as family background, education level of prospective partner, willingness to migrate, etc. While Chanda insists that power ultimately resides with the individual in making the final choice, personally she preferred her parents to look for a partner for her because they were much more knowledgeable about such issues, again deferring to the power of the parents but also to traditional cultural practices.

The Choice to Migrate

One of the benefits of the life-course approach is that it allows us to understand the intersecting trajectories of the female migrants at imperative junctions in their lives: making the decision to marry and agreeing to migrate. All of the women, at the point of choosing their partner, were also committing to follow their husbands' decision to migrate.

Arya had decided early in her life that she wanted to temporarily migrate for economic reasons and obviously for travel purposes. Her potential husband had already been working for a company that was expanding into developing countries. His first posting was to a country in South America, but he considered this environment as unsuitable for his young family due to language and other personal issues. Just as he was considering leaving international business, a post in South Africa became available. Arya said, "Everyone told him that it is very nice here, you will save a lot unless you are hell bent on blowing your salary." Arya informed us that the company that her husband works for provides better pay in a developing country and makes available better facilities than those provided for in India. The choice of an English-speaking country featured strongly in their decision to come to South Africa. Arya's choice of a marriage partner was strategic and feeds into her own wishes to travel abroad. The motivation to migrate is then purely for economic benefits.

Upon deciding to marry her husband, Chanda was informed of his intention to return to work in South Africa as part of his contractual obligations for his company. Her view when hearing that it was South Africa was "oh, South Africa why not some other country? … The IT industry is not as developed like the US and UK." Chanda explained

that everyone wants to go to the United States (US), particularly as the IT industry is already well developed. Nobody wants to come to developing countries. Her husband assured her that South Africa was similar to the US and that everything was fine in South Africa, albeit for security concerns.

Deepa worked as an IT training specialist in India. Ten days after getting married she followed her husband to South Africa. She said, "No, I came because I got married, there's a tradition that you go with your husband so I came with him. He was already working here. So I left my job in India and I joined him here." Deepa had always had aspirations of migrating out of the country. She explained, "Yes I always wanted to. The company I was working for before wanted me to go to Australia and train there and then to Brazil and other countries, but my parents always wanted me to marry first and then go out. They never wanted me to go alone." Indian parents are very protective of their daughters and do not want them travelling as single, unmarried women, mostly to protect the reputation of their young, single daughter, lest she bring dishonour to the family name. South Africa was also not Deepa's first choice to migrate to and she expressed reluctance upon hearing of this. The findings, similar to what Kõu and Bailey (2017) found, also show that cultural and social restrictions affected the mobility of single, unmarried Indian women to migrate independently, hence forcing them to succumb to cultural traditions of marriage that allowed them to migrate. More importantly, the findings illustrate that contemporary migration, like historical migrations, is gendered. That cultural and social norms restrict gender mobility demonstrates that masculine and feminine identities still prevail and to a large extent determine how mobility is gendered. Little attention would be given to a single male migrating as opposed to a single woman. This point gives credence to the argument that geo-political factors shape migratory decisions, e.g. in India where conservative attitudes still prevail and even in Africa, where the migration of Somali males is accepted, but the independent migration of Somali women is frowned upon (Meyer and Rugunanan 2020).

Agency and the Many Forms of Gendered Labour

From the 10 women interviewed, five were working in South Africa at the time and five were not. Out of the five women who were not working, one has a work permit, three were on a dependent's visa and one had a resident's permit. For some of the participants, it was their choice not to work in South Africa, preferring instead to focus on their children's integration into society and overseeing the domestic production of labour in the household. For some of the participants, having the correct permit and a critical skill allowed them to be employed. Their citizenship status also dictated their employability in South Africa. For those who were employed, their statuses varied between resident permit, study permit, temporary work permit, and citizenship. For those who chose not to work, their statuses varied between dependent's visa, temporary work permit, resident permit and temporary residency.

The Choice to Work

Deepa mentioned that in India she spent most of her time away from her family while at college or university and was thus used to being away from them. However, being in a strange country with no friends to rely on, with additional challenges of searching for employment and sorting out her work permit, proved to be taxing and lonely for her. Working in South Africa opened doors and she started meeting new people. Deepa, unlike the participants who were not working, seems to have benefitted from this experience as it exposed her to new South African friends who shared their knowledge about how to access the best places to buy food and spices and more importantly where to access religious sites of worship in the Gauteng region. Deepa compared her views of work in India to her experiences in South Africa. She said that the work environment in India is very pressurised and the working culture is much stricter. In contrast, South Africa is more relaxed and one can learn at a more leisurely pace than in the pressurised environment of India.

Working in India was regarded as "very hectic" by Chetna. Although she worked there for three years, she said that it was not very easy for a woman. Some women endure a nine-hour work shift that ends anywhere between 7:00pm to 8:00pm. The accessible use of public transport in the form of busses and auto rickshaws makes it easy to travel between work and home, something that is seriously lacking in South Africa. In South Africa though, she returned from work at 5:00pm, which allowed her to spend quality time with her children. Sonal also confirmed the conditions of the working lifestyle in India, given the compounding factors of competition for jobs, travel time to and from work, and heavy traffic congestion that can elongate the working day from 09:00am to past 19:00pm and this applies to women as well. She said that when women return home, they endure the "double shift" of having to maintain a family, prepare meals and go to work the next day. This is not ideal and where circumstances allow it, many women in India employ domestic workers to assist them with household chores.

The Choice Not to Work

Gender roles are firmly etched in South Asian families, with the family playing a pivotal role in this process. The central role of the mother in caring for the children was unquestioned. Arya mentioned that even if she was not financially stable, she would not have worked in India. She said in India, the "care for the child is considered to be the most important." It gives her some peace of mind that childcare in South Africa is very good, with clean childcare facilities where children are well taken care of. Although Chetna has a work permit and an engineering degree, she chooses not to work in South Africa. Chetna's main concern is the daily work of caring for her child. Her days are spent looking after her son. The same applies to Veena; her main concern is adjusting and integrating into South Africa. She stated, "right now I am only concentrating on my son getting to school or something. Then I can be free and … and if I have to work or something. Otherwise I don't see any need for me to work right now." Their socio-economic positionality impacts on their experiences in South Africa. These findings are

similar to Yeoh and Willis's (2005) view of "re-domestication" whereby skilled women who migrated with their husbands withdraw from the labour force to take on the primary role of nurturer/carer for their children in a foreign land.

For all the women, the wellbeing of their children was central to their roles as mothers and their identity as Indian women. Authors theorise the migration experiences of skilled women as involving de-skilling (Man 2004) and feminisation. Meares (2010) extends this body of work by examining how migrant women facilitate a balance between their work and home lives whilst manoeuvring between the practical and emotional demands of each. The loss of social networks and the absence of extra familial support that would have traditionally been provided by grandparents, in caring for their grandchildren, contributes to the increased burden of care and extra pressure on the mother as she navigates living in a new country, with its own ethnicised and racialised hierarchies and language constraints.

Linked Lives and the Importance of Family and Belonging

Even though some of the participants were initially reluctant to move to South Africa, they have since had a very positive experience of living in the country. Arya stressed that people were very tolerant in South Africa:

> I am very happy here. I do feel a person coming from a foreign land can live very comfortably here. And of course it is because [my husband] is getting paid properly here and his company has all these facilities for school. That is also a factor. Another factor is people here are dramatically tolerant of different types of people. In India people are not so tolerant.

Despite the tolerance and ease of living in South Africa, most of the participants indicated their desire to return to India in the future. From comments such as "I am going back, just not now. [When] I have enough money then I [will] go home but I [can]not stay here" it also becomes clear that economic reasons exist why these women (and/or their families) decided to leave India and come to South Africa. Upon asking one of the participants if they had any sense of belonging in South Africa, she was quick to respond "no." Her reasons for not having a sense of belonging to South Africa were shared by other participants: "maybe it's because I do not have relatives here. My husband's parents are also retired and moved back to India. We don't have any relatives here." She was not alone in mentioning the link between home/belonging and family. Another participant explained, "it is not my own country. Because my family is there, everything is there. So I miss India even more."

For the participants who had lived in South Africa for five years or less, the feeling of home appears to be quite different. Most of the participants wanted to return to India in the future. Only one participant indicated she would consider South Africa as her home in the future, but this decision appears to be based on the fact that her husband plans to stay in South Africa and as the good wife, she will remain here. She responded that she

does not view South Africa as her home now, but "in the future, yes, because my husband is planning to stay here." Deepa said that while she missed India, as it was the country she was born and raised in, she stresses that she misses her family even more. This feeling is most acute during celebratory events like festivals and the important event of Diwali, where all family members come together to celebrate. She explained that friends cannot replace family during holiday times and important festivals.

Veena said, "[I] really mis[s] my family back home, you know, but it's like I can't. I am married, I have to be with my husband." She would prefer to go back to India with her husband; she does not want to stay alone without him. Veena does not have a sense of belonging here as she said "it is not my own country. Because my family is there, everything is there. So I miss India more." Chetna expressed similar views. The absence of family members and relatives has left a gap that cannot be filled by her husband's extended circle of friends or replaced by familial affections that a family provides. She feels committed to stay because of her husband and feels that she does not have a choice in the matter.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper is located at the intersection of transnationalism, gender and migration, and explores the views of skilled Indian women who follow their professional husbands to South Africa as temporary migrants, using the lens of a life-course framework. Migration literature has given prominence to the male migrant as the head of the household while underplaying the role of women as migrants in their own right and giving little attention to family reunification.

Structuration theories recognise that migrants have some power to decide how to react to labour market demands and trends. The majority of the participants in this study indicated that they wanted to migrate out for economic reasons, preferably to Northern countries such as the USA; South Africa was not often their first choice of destination. The findings from the study support the household strategy model (Chant 1992), wherein men are considered the primary agents of migration and women choose to accompany their spouses even when it means sacrificing their own careers. Adhering to cultural norms of the families, the women acquiesced to their parents' dictates of marriage. For most of the participants, the choice to work in developed countries and earn a substantially higher income was aligned with their aspirations to increase their social mobility in the home country upon their return. On a deeper level, the study shows that agency is fluid and means different things to people as they embark on their life-course journeys. Some participants in this study were women who purposively chose potential marriage partners who would migrate out to increase their social mobility, but they had no part in the decision-making process regarding the choice of country of migration. Some participants gave up their careers willingly whilst settled in South Africa, allowing them the space to focus on their children's transition and integration into a new country.

The theme of linked lives shows how family norms and cultural expectations are intertwined. The women may have had little input in the decision to migrate because their future husbands had already accepted work offers or were migrants already, but the women in the study purposively chose potential marriage partners who would migrate out to increase their social mobility. Similar to Kõu et al.'s (2015) findings on skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands, the women adhere to the prescribed cultural age to marry, simultaneously embracing a professional career inclusive of family and employment commitments. They argued that migration can "facilitate and limit" the professional development of women (Kõu and Bailey 2017, 178). I argue that the women consciously give in to cultural dictates of marriage norms by choosing to marry an economic migrant and thereby increasing their social mobility. The women, subtly abiding by their parents and cultural norms of the system of arranged marriages, reduced their power and agency. However, for the participants in this study, while they forsook some rights and power in their family relationships, they exerted these in other ways to further their economic well-being. The choice of marriage partner is strategic and a partner is chosen with a similar or higher educational qualification to increase their chances of mobility. Similarly, the choice of destination country is strategic in order to ensure upward economic mobility. Thus, the study highlights the "fluidity in arranged marriages" as they are not static in that females have no decision—some women willingly enter this form of matrimony. Hence, there is a need to rethink the notions/concept of "arranged" marriages and rather to see the strategic use of it as a platform to advance socially and economically.

Jolly, Bell, and Narayanaswamy (2003, 8) describe migration as gendered work, where women are engaged in the process of networking and maintaining ties to the home country, as well as continuing with the practices and culture of the home country. The findings of this study support this view and the evidence shows how patriarchal norms and the culture of the home country continue to shape women's understanding of their own identities as Indian women. For some of the participants, giving up their careers is not unwelcome. At the same time, the role of the family and caring for the children began to take centre place. Similar to Kõu and Bailey (2017), I argue that the women in this study did not sacrifice their careers for the sake of advancing their husbands' careers. Instead they capitalised on the professional opportunities that migration created, whilst fulfilling their aspirations, either by becoming full-time homemakers and assisting with their child's integration in South African society or advancing their own careers. Even through their displays of agency, the women were still abiding by heteronormative discourses that dictate the need for marriage and children. But they subtly and imperceptibly use these discursive and cultural pressures to their own advantage, to fulfil their own aspirations.

The transnational gender division of labour widens the difference between men and women's roles; men in this study are seen as economic drivers with women as accompanying spouses whose identity is firmly ensconced in the traditional context of the ideal "Indian" women, as wife, mother and housewife. Some of the women preferred

to withdraw from the paid labour force to focus on production in the home front, with the emphasis on caring for their children. While the paper is exploratory and cannot be generalised in terms of caste and class, the findings suggest that gender relations are produced and reproduced in the transnational spaces between South Africa and India and migratory strategies renegotiate the hegemony of traditional and patriarchal practices of the home country in the host country. The findings also begin to explore to what extent notions of masculinity and femininity are reproduced in diasporic settings and yet challenged in a transnational context, which future research should examine.

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