Professional Migrant Women Decentring Otherness: A Transnational Perspective

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Embraced by their ethnicity and gender many migrant women have negotiated their own spaces in the host country. Yet, much of the literature on migrant women focuses on those who are struggling to make ends meet with low levels of education and how this defines the construction of the Other. We contribute to the limited scholarship in management research on professional migrant women by illustrating how transnational processes play out in the lived experience of professional migrant Indian women in New Zealand, and how they invoke agency in decentring Otherness. This qualitative study foregrounds the navigation of asymmetrical power relations and the strategic deployment of ethnicity, education and caste affiliation, when confronted with processes of exclusion in the labour market. We argue for the need to highlight narratives of professional migrant women which reflect the agency and articulation of their voices, thus reworking notions of the Other in transnational space.

Introduction

Migrant women travel to different corners of the globe in search of a better life. In many instances migrant women face a triple discrimination due to their simultaneous gender, ethnicity and minority migrant status. While countries sign various forms of legislation, as for example the Human Rights Act of 1993 in New Zealand (NZ), the chasm between policies, legislation and good intentions is frequently rather wide. Yet migrant women choose to stay in the host country, as despite various forms of discrimination their general lifestyle is enhanced in comparison with their home countries (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011; Essers and Benschop, 2009; Pio, 2007, 2008). Often such women have navigated 'their selves' beyond the demands and expectations of both the majority (white) population, as well as their own migrant community, with shifts in power towards more reciprocal rather than hierarchical understandings.

There exists a rich burgeoning literature in the area of ethnic minorities at work, in employment (Anthias and Mehta, 2003; Kamenou, 2008; Phizacklea and Wolkowitz, 1995; Tatli, 2011) and in ethnic and transnational entrepreneurship (Kloosterman, Van Der Leun and Rath, 1999; Portes, Guarnizo and Haller, 2002). However, such literature primarily focuses on problems which migrant women face at work, but the way they create agency for themselves within their professional context has been researched very sparsely. Proudford and Nkomo (2006) write that organizational processes are not neutral to ethnicity; gender and racio-ethnic inequality persists in the workplace (Nkomo and Stewart, 2006). With regard to the relation between ethnicity and gender, Mirchandani and Butler (2006) discuss the significance of utilizing transnational anti-racist feminist perspectives for understanding and imple-

menting relevant diversity management practices. In tune with understanding, framing and changing practice and contextualized sites (Ozbilgin, 2010), as well as the increasing mobility of migrants, we are interested in interrogating the lived experience of professional migrant women as they negotiate circuits of power (Kaplan and Grewal, 2002). By circuits of power we mean power enactment through inclusion and exclusion in the zone of work as sites of resistance in the host country, and the influence of the personal lives of migrant women on their work. We utilize insights of transnational feminism to infuse new meanings into these sites of resistance, reframing understandings of professional migrant women, to inform and enhance organizational policies and practices (Zanoni, Janssens and Nkomo, 2010).

Transnationalism unsettles binary conceptions and foregrounds power, identity and subjectivity for transnational populations across national borders (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994). This approach seeks 'to recover the agency of marginalized peoples, and illustrate the ways in which particular groups are constructed in subordination' (Hyndman, 2004, p. 314). Hence we seek to shift the understanding of migrant women away from images of the 'Other' as uneducated, illiterate and passive women, to that of educated, increasingly mobile and socially aware migrant women. The term Other is employed in a broad and inclusive sense to encompass migrant women with visible diversity discriminators such as skin colour, modes of dressing and accent (Prasad, A., 2003; Prasad, P., 2006). Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which an in-group ('Us', the Self) constructs one or more dominated outgroups ('Them', Other), stigmatizing real or imagined differences (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997; Patil, 2011; Zwingel, 2012).

Based on our aim to explore how professional migrant women negotiate circuits of power as sites of resistance to decentre Otherness, we raise the following question in this paper. How do transnational processes play out in the lived experience of professional migrant Indian women in NZ, and what is their agency in decentring Otherness? Using insights from transnational feminism is appropriate in answering this question, as it gives voice to often 'silenced' (Calas, Smirich and Bourne, 2009) migrant women. In this context, we define professional migrant Indian women as women who are highly educated (uni-versity graduates/postgraduates) and skilled (professional qualifications such as in accounting, administration, art) and who have migrated to the host country with the intention of living there permanently, along with seeking work appropriate to their skills and qualifications (Pio, 2008). Some authors emphasize that managers have more functional roles and get work done through others, whereas professionals are more autonomous (Wheatley, Hardill and Philp, 2011). In line with the latter, we use the term professional.

Our writing is rooted in our positionality as 'undetached' researchers who are passionately and caringly engaged in transformative struggles of migrant women, with one researcher being an insider in being a migrant to NZ originating from the same country as the individuals in the paper. The life-story narratives, 'an intensely nuanced account' (Jamal, 2005), of three professional migrant women have been selected to illustrate layers of agency and voice. Accordingly, we seek to contribute to management research on professional migrant women, specifically the discourse on equality, diversity and inclusion.

Transnational feminist perspectives

Post-colonialism provides an important perspective for gaining a critical understanding of the hegemony of westernness in management practices (Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006; Kwek, 2003; Zwingel, 2012). It reveals the ethnocentric foundations of organizational policies and micro-politics of everyday practices shaped in the West and used to control Others. Transnational feminism, highly related to post-colonialism, was developed to challenge western feminist theorizations of gender relations as furthering the images and social experiences of mostly privileged women in the 'first world' (Calas and Smirich, 2006, p. 317). This perspective stresses how scattered gender hierarchies are in evidence through scattered transnational hegemonies (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994). By scattered we mean the continued enactment of nuanced power which follows migrant women in their migration journeys into the host country. Such scattering or dispersion could be the result of historical legacies, religious beliefs and culture, including 'the place' of migrant women as interpreted by the zone of work. 'Trans' denotes 'across' and implies move-

ment of capital, labour and ideology resulting in scattered hegemonies (Alexander, 2005; Campt, 2011; Grewal and Kaplan, 1994). Transnational feminism opens up a view of the world from different subject positions and representations engaging with the possibilities of change at various levels including at the level of the particular, against various forms of discrimination and oppression (Calas and Smircich, 2006; Campt, 2011). Accordingly, transnational feminism is developed at the margins of feminism, and emphasizes three interrelated contentions: asymmetrical relationships of power, destabilizing of binaries and situatedness.

Transnational feminism encourages focus on the asymmetrical relationships between first/third world, one-third/two-third worlds or north/south countries. It shows how colonization spans centuries of traffic such as labour and culture, which creolized or culturally diversified, violated and produced knowledge and images of how the female Other was to be constructed and discursively institutionalized (Das Gupta, 1997; Hosein, 2011; Massey, 2005; Mohanty, 2003; Trotz, 2007). Hence the female Other has to resist and/or negotiate the layers of history and meanings ascribed to migrant women in society and in organizations, or discursive institutionalizing, in order to create alternative meanings of the female Other.

Transnational feminism is useful to disrupt binaries and to analyse the situation of women in various parts of the world. It signals attention to destabilize rather than maintain boundaries of nation, race and gender (Grewal and Kaplan, 2000), giving primacy to the flow of culture and accounting for the dialectical tensions that continue to exist between centres and peripheries (Hegde, 1998). Applying ideas of transnational feminism to the experiences of professional Indian migrant women in NZ, we are able to unravel processes structuring gender and other social inequalities from local micro-processes to the extra-local broader social system, and hence to demonstrate such women's agency (Calas, Smircich and Bourne, 2009) to destabilize and resist binaries. Conway (2008) writes that many binaries such as local and global are socially constructed and relational and therefore local is not necessarily fixed, neither is global necessarily fluid and mobile. Yet, organizations and nations can both perpetuate gender hierarchies, as well as serve as agents for gender equality (Cuthroys, 2006).

Moreover, through reconceptualizing relations of ethnicity, gender and other differences (Mirchandani and Butler, 2006), transnational feminism seeks to explicitly deal with making visible the Other's knowledge (Calas and Smircich, 2006). Therefore, through exposing connections between the global, local and the complexities of specific contexts (Genovese, 2011), transnational feminism presents possibilities for a deeper understanding of how professional migrant women engage with Othering at work. It creates new ways of scrutinizing how women create their spaces as they move away from the margins in negotiating gender hierarchies and hegemonic practices (Mendoza, 2002; Zwingel, 2012).

As Calas and Smircich (2006, p. 323) argue, 'global decision-making is coded "masculine" in specific ways, and the men who make decisions under this code, are immediate beneficiaries of most of the wealth and power thus produced'. For many Indian women, gender, ethnicity, caste, class and nationality 'represent unequal locations, within a web of relationships that transcend political borders and scale the global and intimate simultaneously' (Mountz and Hyndman, 2006, p. 460). As Pratt and Yeoh (2003, p. 162) note, 'traversing transnational space seems to be a hegemonically masculine enterprise where men and women remain complicit in the reproduction of patriarchy beyond national borders'. We are curious how such reproductions of patriarchy, transnationally, impact professional Indian migrant women in NZ. Patriarchy is often defined from a western orientation as a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women (Walby, 1990). However, this may not be the interpretation for other cultures who may see patriarchy as less oppressive and more a space of security (Pio, 2007). In a transnational age, gender and nation are not hermetically sealed but permeable and interwoven (Mohanty, 2002; Shohat, 2002). Thus a woman's role in the family, as enacted in her home country, may not drastically change when she migrates to the host country. Hence despite the rank of number 5 in the global gender gap report for NZ and number 113 for India (World Economic Forum, 2008), migrant Indian women have to negotiate their 'rank' in NZ. Therefore there is potential permeability to the notions of gender when crossing borders, for while geographical borders are sealed, gender has the potential for being unsealed.

Although western perceptions and characterizations of the Other may have considerable influence on the self-perception of the Other, the relationship need not take the form of simple acceptance – it sometimes includes 'strategic interests of internal imaging' (Sen, 2005, p. 155). This would imply that the Other is not necessarily disadvantaged by assigned images, such as lazy, native, incapable, ethnic, third world, incompetent and inferior (Mohanty, 1988), but can use such images in order to shift power positions with the dominant group, as we shall see in our empirical section. Shifts in power entail the Other seeking to gaze back at the powerful observer to challenge Anglo/Eurocentrism (Mackie, 2001). Such processes of gazing back, through reworking notions of the Other, will be empirically shown in the stories of Otherness in this paper.

Context of the study: Indian women in NZ

NZ is a small country encompassing many non-western migrants. In the NZ population of approximately 4.2 million, Europeans (often termed Pakeha) are the majority at 67.6%, Maori (indigenous people) are 14.6%, and the remaining 17.8% consist of Asians, Pacific peoples, Middle Eastern, Latin Americans and Africans (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). In the most recent 2006 census, Indians in NZ numbered 104,583 or 2.6% of the population. Contextualizing history allows exposing 'connections and disconnections' (Genovese, 2011, p. 103), showing shifting power relations (Tickner, 2001) and 'relations emerging from historical processes' (Calas and Smircich, 2006, p. 301). Hence we present a thumbnail sketch of NZ history with reference to Indian migrants.

Captain Cook's voyages to NZ in the 19th century resulted in large numbers of Anglo-Saxon/Europeans immigrating to NZ, eventually resulting in NZ as a colonized country with a white western majority. While the early immigrants were primarily white settlers, a few Indians came to NZ as servants of wealthy British, seafarers and self-initiated migrants. There were a number of exclusionary practices set in place with Immigration Restriction Acts which prevented those who did not have British ancestry from landing in NZ as there was a desire to keep NZ as the Britain of the south. Since India was a part of the British Empire, Indians travelled to NZ on British passports, but this travel document did not give them the same entitlements as 'white' British passport holders. Furthermore very few Indian women came to NZ in the 19th century (Pio, 2008).

The early Indians of the 19th and first half of the 20th century primarily came from rural areas of India and worked initially as scrub-cutters, drain-diggers, bottle-collectors, bricklayers and hawkers of fruit/vegetables. These Indians gradually bought land and became owners of market gardens, dairy farms and corner dairies or the mom and pop stores. A few Indian women started arriving in NZ in the early 20th century, although their numbers were very small, as different language and cultural norms were difficult, coupled with strict immigration laws. With changes in the immigration policies in the late 20th century, many Indians have flocked to NZ. In contrast to the 'earlier' Indians who came from rural areas, the more recent Indian migrants come from India's mega cities like Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad and many of them are highly qualified and skilled professionals; 6.6% of Indian women have a Master's degree compared with 1.94% of the total female population in NZ, and 21.8% of Indian women have a Bachelor's degree compared with 11.86% of the total female population in NZ (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). Yet, the most enduring image of the Indian migrant continues to be that of the dairy owners or the mom and pop stores (Pio, 2008).

Migrants from Asia have been reported to have experienced more employment discrimination compared with migrants from Europe, South Africa, North America and the Pacific (Dunstan, Boyd and Crichton, 2004). Yet, there is a strong need for NZ to become more Asia literate (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2007), indicating shifting power relations.

As the life-story excerpts in this paper are of professional Indian women, it is pertinent to note that India has 1.2 billion people, an area of 3,287,263 square kilometres, at least 18 major languages, 800 dialects, and more than five major religions (CIA, 2011). Hence Indian women cannot be treated as one general category. Neither can all women migrants be treated as one homogeneous category due to differences based on education, language, religion, employment and migration trajectories.

Methodology

Letting migrant women tell their own stories, rather than scholars telling migrant women's stories and filtering them through western/Eurocentric notions, can provide alternative images of the Other. Such stories, through the eyes of an often marginalized group, may shed light on the West's relationship to the Other. In contrast to projects which have effectively excluded non-westerners from being experts and owners of knowledge (Kwek, 2003), these migrant women may provide other systems of knowledge (Lal, 1999). This new knowledge may create new states of power, control and resistance for all constituencies involved, such as the zone of work which includes employers and organizations.

In order to produce knowledge based on our understanding of transnational feminism, a narrative approach was applied. The narrative approach refers to the interpretation, analysis and deconstruction of stories from the field (Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1999). Narratives provide a way to study how professional migrant women, in their daily lives, relate and respond to the discourses on Otherness and accordingly give women a voice providing a way to develop sites of resistance. Narrative research with its epistemology in social constructivism acknowledges a multiplicity of textured realities situated in specific times and places with an emphasis on subjectivity, layers and how stories reveal people's worlds (Crotty, 1998; Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007). The focus is on interpretation and the understanding of meaning (Dillard and Okpalaoka, 2011). Life-stories, the kind of narratives we gathered, echo gender and ethnic constructions in society and show how such interrelated processes of gender and ethnicity are experienced by formerly neglected groups of women (McAdams, 1997). Applying a narrative approach and thus providing marginalized women a platform to 'speak back' (Calas and Smircich, 2006) to western audiences is in line with transnational feminism.

The first author is a scholar of colour, a non-European migrant woman living in Auckland, NZ, and the second author is a European woman living in Europe. Over a period of three years, the first author gathered 50 life-stories of migrant women in NZ, all legally resident, who had been employed or had their own business in NZ. The first author used the snowballing technique to acquire 50 interviewees throughout various parts of NZ. All the open ended interviews were conducted in English, averaged 90 min and pertained to the women's lived-in and lived-through migratory experiences, including their challenging and facilitative experiences relating to work, the persons from whom they sought guidance and how they saw their future. The interview questions (see the Appendix) were rather broad and open so that the actual experiences such as decentring Otherness emerged without direction on the part of the interviewer.

The interviews were transcribed, and summaries were created of each interviewee based on the transcription and field notes. Many of the women were contacted again to further clarify aspects of their transcripts. Based on an extensive discussion on the life-stories in the data set, we decided to use the three stories that were most illustrative, multi-faceted life-stories of decentring Otherness. These three stories can be viewed as the strongest exemplars revealing rather distinct styles of agency relation to transnationalism and gender. Moreover, by choosing three different professional backgrounds, we show the diversity of our sample (Kakuru and Paradza, 2007).

Following a categorical content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998) all transcripts were read and coded by the first author to find common themes and patterns across all interviews, but also possible contrasting patterns. The codes were as follows: being a wife/mother/sister/daughter, feminine aspects, masculinity; being a migrant, having an accent, color, language, different dress; and employment, education, caste, skills, societal perceptions, profits, due diligence. These codes, derived from the respective theoretical concepts gender, migration and work, were then grouped in tree diagrams in order to distil broader themes. Upon the first analysis, three themes emerged, resulting from a thorough discussion with the co-author: slotted as the Other, negotiating power and sourcing strength.

After this we selected the most illustrative quotes matching those themes. The analysis and presentation of the findings follows an interpretive paradigm where the world is experienced through the lived reality or lived world – the *lebenswelt* of the participant in this study. Sandberg (2005, p. 52) writes that 'truth achieved within interpretive approaches will never be one final and unambiguous truth but rather is an ongoing and

open process of knowledge claims correcting each other'. Thus, we recognize that this research is located within a specific geographical and historical time frame defined by the context within which it occurs. Therefore, we are not claiming to provide the truth on professional migrant women's experiences, but through our interpretation, we hint at possible and multiple truths. Consequently, our research is not intended to be generalizable and transferable to all professional migrant women. However, we urge reflection on the challenges in unpacking notions of Otherness to move thinking on the Other to a more nuanced rendering of difference.

In this context it is also significant to note that 'our multiple and shifting contextual identities and agendas shape the knowledges we produce' (Nagar, 2002, p. 180). The gender and ethnicity of the first author could conceivably have facilitated the process of information sharing by the migrant women who may have viewed these similarities as catalysts in speaking about asymmetrical power relations and oppressive structures (Narayan, 2004). Her identity, as well as the fact that both authors are highly engaged in multicultural societal research, may have added to a less western interpretation.

Life-stories of otherness

In interrogating the lived experience of professional migrant women and how they decentre Otherness, we present three life-stories, using pseudonyms for confidentiality reasons. The three life-stories pertain to Sapna (45 years), Sue (40 years) and Gayatri (50 years), all born in various Indian megacities. Sapna and Gayatri belong to the Hindu religion (Vaishya and Brahmin castes respectively) where the four major castes are Brahmin (priestly), Kshatriya (warrior), Vaishya (business) and Shudra (servile, menial workers). Sue is a Christian. All three women, while receiving emotional support from their husbands, first entered employment in NZ and then started their own business. While all three women are fluent in English and all are graduates, Gayatri did not speak English when she came to NZ 15 years ago.

Although the women had been in employment prior to starting their business, neither Sue nor Gayatri had been employed prior to coming to NZ. However, Sapna had worked as a manager in

an organization in India with 70 employees. Currently, Sapna has a café, Sue has a business in manufacturing and marketing beauty products, and Gayatri's business is real estate and managing properties in NZ. All three are financially successful. In weaving transnational insights to illustrate the complication of Otherness, our analysis of three life-stories is presented below based on three interwoven themes: slotted as the Other, negotiating power and sourcing strength.

Slotted as the other

In this section we show how professional Indian migrant women are constructed as the Other by people in NZ, based on perceptions of Indian women as unable to speak English, low levels of education, ethnic dress, submissive and so on. Such perceptions of the Other are due to the images of early Indians who came from rural backgrounds in India which seem difficult to shake off for people in NZ, despite the influx of professional Indian women since the 1990s. Sapna says:

> We have chosen to live in an area where there are many rich NZ Europeans rather than with Indians . . . Pakeha [whites] are surprised when I say where my home is located . . . it is good to mix and this is an opportunity . . . I am often asked if I speak and understand English . . . I laugh and say yes. I am very clever and learnt it on the plane while coming to NZ . . . when we decided to start our business I was determined that it should not be a typical ethnic business such as selling ethnic products or an Indian restaurant.

Apparently, many myths exist amongst NZ people concerning their colonial past and how colonization has influenced 'native' men and women; accordingly, they have constructed an image of the female Other as being illiterate and less educated. In doing so, they add to asymmetrical societal power relations (Calas and Smircich, 2006). Yet, to rupture Otherness, Sapna deliberately chooses to stay in a non-Indian neighbourhood, exerting her agency (Hyndman, 2004) and flouting images of Indians who may only be able to stay in 'ethnic' areas. By cynically answering she learnt English on the plane to NZ, she gains more agency, and hence she subtly and locationally changes societal power relations. In entering the zone of work in NZ and insisting her business

should not be a typical ethnic business, and thus serving continental food to her ethnically diverse clientele, she seems to disrupt the binary of the West–East and male–female. Accordingly, she adds to reworking the image of the female Other.

Also Sue and Gayatri sought to change perceptions of how Indian women are perceived. Sue said:

> when I went for interviews, I was often asked, 'So when did you change your name?' Apparently people in organizations think that I have deliberately changed my name . . . they like names similar to theirs or Anglo-Saxon names . . .

While applying for jobs organizations thought Sue had deliberately changed her name to an Anglo-Saxon name on shifting to NZ in order to avoid being slotted as a migrant Indian woman. This implies a western, ethnocentric management approach, in expecting migrants to adapt (parts of) their identity when they seek work. The Othering that Sue experienced indicates how images of the Other are institutionalized (Mendoza, 2002; Sen, 2005) within organizations.

Gayatri elaborates:

> I could not speak English in the early days when I came to NZ, and this meant that I often could not understand what the supervisor said . . . I remember the supervisor called me 'bloody Indian' . . . I did not go back to work the next day and left that job . . .

Evidently, Gayatri was being Othered, and even discriminated against (being called 'bloody Indian'), since she did not speak the language of the 'superior' western supervisor well enough. She did not go back to work the next day as she did not want to be discriminated against because she was Indian. In the life-stories of the three women, we see difference within difference in being slotted as the Other; although Sapna and Sue speak English it is assumed that they do not know English, whereas for Gayatri because she cannot speak English she is being Othered. This indicates that (NZ) organizations are not neutral to ethnicity and gender (Proudford and Nkomo, 2006) and such non-neutrality seems to be part of the discourse that creates asymmetrical power relations (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997).

Negotiating power

Negotiating power involves fracturing notions of the Other – being a businesswoman – to create alternative perceptions of professional migrant women, as for example modes of dress, and utilizing the legal systems of the host country. Gayatri states:

> I continued to wear ethnic garments and keep my hair in an Indian style as I wanted to show them that Indian women can make a success of who they are . . . I employ about 20 workmen so that my properties are managed well . . . Initially, some of the men refused to work with me as they said how would an Indian woman know anything about plumbing and carpentry? But my response was 'Try me and see how much I know and how much I pay!' and believe me a number of contractors have been with me for more than seven years. . . .

By continuing to keep an 'Indian' appearance as a female 'boss', she seems to intentionally use the image of the female Other to locally shift power positions with the dominant group – NZ customers ('them'). Gayatri seems to be strategically using internal imaging (Sen, 2005) to move away from socially constructed binaries (Conway, 2008). By wearing Indian dress, she appears to subvert the idea of business capability only being linked with western dress. We also see clearly femininity and being the Other played out in the zone of work and the male workers finding it difficult to shift their thinking of Indian women. Yet, by provoking her male employees ('try me') Gayatri is utilizing the gender equality in NZ to make her gendered role permeable (Shohat, 2002). The fact that she stresses that some contractors have stayed with her for more than seven years demonstrates her pride in managing male workers as an Indian woman. This indicates that gender roles need not necessarily be sealed (Mohanty, 2002) when one crosses countries.

Sue negotiated her power in a different manner:

> I studied the legal systems in NZ online and took my supervisors to court because of their 'unprofessional behaviour' towards me and I won. Later when my own beauty products business grew and when I was involved in mergers and acquisitions, I sometimes found that men were very surprised to see they had to negotiate with an Indian woman. But hey, I am the best . . . as an Indian woman I know I am as good as or even better than other women, because I have a specific skill set and have developed my business competences with study, observation and experience . . . I will always ensure that I am not put in a

subservient position . . . I negotiate the system or very clearly state my competences. . . .

Sue refuses to be constructed as the subordinated person (Das Gupta, 1997; Hyndman, 2004). In her life-story, she has elaborated on unprofessional behaviour where her bosses would demean her through shouting and intimidation in the hope she would resign. In order to stand up for herself, she studied the legal systems in NZ online and fought back by taking them to court. She also emphasizes that because she had to work harder being an Indian woman she is perhaps even better than other women. She is very clear that she will negotiate the system to avoid a subservient position. Accordingly, while 'gazing back' at this NZ organization and challenging Anglo/Eurocentrism (Mackie, 2001), she changes the contours of a western understanding of migrant women.

Sapna left her former employment as she felt that she was made to do extra work as a supervisor without an appropriate role designation, and she says:

I do not have to take such nonsense from the whites . . . if I own the business. . . . In India I was a manager, so I do have managerial skills . . . sometimes a white client will be disgruntled and . . . he asks to see the manager. When I tell him that I am the owner-manager, he does not believe me as he probably thinks that a brown woman cannot be an owner and so I am lying. Yet, it is easier being a woman here than in India . . . one can move more freely outside the home . . .

Evidently the NZ organization she formerly worked for perpetuated gender hierarchies, and ethnicity may have also played a part in seeing Sapna as the Other woman. When she found that she could not decentre Otherness to the extent that she wanted, i.e. performing the role with the appropriate designation, she left. She resists the assigned image of the colonized as incapable and inferior, and thus seeks to shift dominant power positions by starting her own company so she 'does not have to take such nonsense from the whites'. Yet, being Othered as a brown woman who is being questioned about being the owner of a business indicates how masculinity and westernness transnationally and hegemonically still influence Sapna's work experiences or masculine coding for decision making (Calas and Smircich, 2006). Hence, the client's comment reflects the broadly gendered, societal expectations in NZ.

Nevertheless, compared with India Sapna experiences more freedom being a woman and she seems to have found a way to negotiate the often negative image of the female Other.

Sourcing strength

Sourcing strength involves locating and utilizing resources to create perceptions of professional migrant women that decentre being Othered, based on their specific Indian context within NZ. Sapna states:

My husband looks after most of the money matters . . . we come from a business caste . . . he takes the major decisions . . . he has more business experience . . . I consider myself a devoted wife . . . I think that I am an assertive Indian woman and I discuss business and politics with my husband and also with his friends. We have to learn some of the niceties from the Pakeha way of doing things in business, but use this information to add on to who we are because Indians are known for their intelligence; . . . and most importantly we must keep our Indianness. . . .

Sapna is careful how she accepts patriarchy and the caste system, both sources of strength rather than subjugation, for her husband has more extensive knowledge than her in business matters as do members of her caste. Hence she sees her husband's 'control' as helpful and a 'cushion to weather storms' in order to progress and negotiate systems of power in NZ, while at the same time interweaving her Indianness. Leaving the decisions to him also conforms to particular Indian gender norms (being a devoted wife); yet on the other hand she does not want to be cast only in a traditional Indian woman's role and thus emphasizes discussing business with her husband and his friends. Interestingly, a western point of view could see a contradiction in being a devoted Indian wife and assertive Indian woman, yet for Indian women such as Sapna this is not a dichotomy. Furthermore, regarding her business, Sapna draws strength from her learning capability and consciously recognizes that in order to do business successfully she has to apply internal imaging of the NZ culture. In other words brown skin, English speak, Pakeha thinking and Indian intelligence or a creolized image (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994) are almost intentionally developed by Sapna to be successful.

In contrast Gayatri narrates:

. . . as my confidence grew in English and in living in NZ, so did my desire to have my own business and gradually this led to issues between us [her and her husband] . . . I had to leave my husband in order to be truly me and what I value, for I refuse to be cast as a typical Indian woman in NZ . . . I am an Indian woman and that is who I am and wearing Indian dress is part of my culture.

As Gayatri moved towards greater confidence in herself and wanting to start her own business, we find patriarchy is in evidence as her husband did not seem happy with her desire for more independence. It seems Gayatri could not be herself, a 'non-typical' Indian woman, while being married to her husband. Leaving him, and his perception of an appropriate traditional Indian wife, she sources her strength to be a more independent woman. At the same time, emphasizing she is an Indian woman and wearing Indian clothes is part of her culture; she seems to make a statement that Indian women cannot be cast into one mould. Here, we see the challenge to deal with difference within difference.

Sue, primarily wearing western garments as she is Christian, states:

In the early stages of my business, I relied heavily on my husband for the management, but in all the years of my business I was clear that I am the CEO, and hence everyone in the organization including my husband needs to follow what I finally decide . . . we are blessed to be part of a helpful church and this gives me hope and also strength particularly when things are tough . . . as a business woman I have to always be on my toes and I want to keep ahead and also see that my home is a happy one . . . and business successful . . . but this does mean that I am not a typical Indian wife as I am a working woman. . . .

Here we see how Sue struggles with patriarchal elements in her environment and moves between dependence and independence with reference to her husband. On the one hand she relies heavily on her husband for some business aspects and feels she has to be faithful to being a 'typical Indian wife', and therefore she continues making sure her home is a happy one, even if it is difficult to combine with her business. On the other hand she is firm about the fact that, being the female CEO, she is in charge. Although we see some tension in combining the image of a typical Indian wife and female CEO, Sue seems to be able to integrate both roles as she states her home is

happy and business successful. She hints at sourcing her strength from her church and its community fellowship. Again we see difference within difference in the case of professional Indian migrant women and the way they acquire agency within transnational space (Zwingel, 2012).

Discussion

Due to migration, gender, class, caste, age and sexuality function within a complex interweave of relationships. Breaking down divides and destabilizing boundaries of nation, race and gender in transnationalism 'signals attention to uneven and dissimilar circuits of culture and capital' (Grewal and Kaplan, 2000, p. 2). Immigration has resulted in problematic categories that are often negative with associations such as illiterate, subjugated and low skilled for non-western migrant women.

In this paper, through analysing excerpts of the life-stories of three women, we have explored how professional migrant Indian women in NZ negotiate circuits of power as sites of resistance to decentre Otherness. We have explored how transnational processes play out in the lived experience of professional migrant Indian women in NZ, and how they acquire agency in decentring Otherness.

All three women first sought employment and then built their own business through actively creating agency for themselves and seeking to decentre Otherness. The women's excerpts constantly illustrate their awareness of being Othered and resisting this through a strategic deployment of ethnicity, education and caste affiliation. The women also seem to be aware of 'blessings' of gender equality and transparency in NZ. In the zone of work, Sapna's café, Gayatri's real estate and Sue's beauty products have been very successful financially, but they have had to constantly assert themselves on an 'almost daily basis' to fracture being Othered. All three women, to some extent, strategically internally image (Sen, 2005) aspects of NZ 'ways', to disrupt the western/non-western binary. Yet each woman does this differently and has a different dominant style of agency (Calas, Smirich and Bourne, 2009), which is not necessarily her only style of agency.

For example, Sapna seems to be deliberately integrating the Indian and western ways of doing business. She acquires her agency by trying to

work within the system: she uses the niceties of the Pakeha, but also the traditional caste and gendered relations within the Indian community. Although she does not accept being Othered as she has actively moved away from discriminative practices, she is careful about not explicitly fighting the hegemonic systems of western Othering, nor the patriarchal Indian community. In this sense, her dominant style of agency is subtle, integrative reform.

In contrast, Sue's dominant style of agency is that of a fighter, who is prepared to go into combat to stand up for herself as a professional Indian migrant woman. Accordingly, she utilizes the legal systems of NZ to avoid being Othered. Sue is very explicit in how she negotiates the system, stressing her awareness of her e and her position as a female Indian CEO. Hence she emphasizes these facts, and ensures that she quickly moves out of positions of subservience as a female Other.

Finally Gayatri takes an in-between position and applies a non-conformist provocative style of agency. She persists in displaying an ethnic appearance, through wearing Indian garments and dressing her hair in an Indian style, within a context where such an image might contradict professionalism from a western perspective. Thus she makes a statement that such images can overlap. Moreover, she is provocative when she says 'try me' in referring to her competence and knowledge in real estate as well as her ability to pay well. Her non-conformity is also illustrated by leaving her husband in order to be herself: an Indian woman on her own terms.

By utilizing the lens of transnational feminism, we contribute to the limited scholarship on professional migrant women in management research, specifically the discourse on equality, diversity and inclusion, in three ways.

First, we have shown that these professional migrant women are very aware of the alleged images of the female Other being gendered and ethnicized, and strategically use this knowledge to rework and disrupt such images to their advantage. For instance, different images, such as migrant women in ethnic dress and migrant women in western dress (Mendoza, 2002; Mohanty, 2002), can be useful to demystify and re-examine inequalities and discursive Otherness that marginalized women face in terms of ethnicity and gender at work. These women are not passive recipients of being Othered, but active agents in changing the circuits of power in the zone of work. They use entrepreneurship along with their education to move away from the margins while negotiating gender hierarchies and hegemonic practices.

Second, our paper illustrates how these women are not necessarily disadvantaged by traditional Indian beliefs such as patriarchy, and that an understanding of patriarchy from a western point of view can be limiting and can constrain the position and understanding of professional migrant women. Hence, following tradition does not mean that one cannot be professional and successful at work. In contrast, these women do not necessarily reproduce patriarchy but strategically use parts of it to their professional advantage. Accordingly, like authors such as Halford and Leonard (2001) state, migrant women are able to play an active role in the way they engage with their profession by continually resisting, reinterpreting and changing the norms and rules of patriarchy.

Third, through scrutinizing the dominant styles of agency we have tried to show how experiences, situations and ways of creating agency amongst professional Indian migrant women cannot be generalized. While the women are all Indian, they differentiate themselves from other Indian women, displaying difference within difference. Yet, by casting others as 'typical Indian women', they do not appear to demean these women but emphasize that Indian women cannot be boxed into fixed categories. Furthermore, echoing the work of Pio (2007), belonging to the business caste (Vaishya) facilitates migrant Indian women to invest in businesses that have a higher rate of success.

Utilizing theoretical insights from transnational feminism and analysing aspects of ethnicity and gender in the institutionalized image of the Other, our study has highlighted the strategic use of migrant cultures and knowledge of the way western societies operate, to resist, evade, rupture and rework fixed categories of the female Other (Patil, 2011; Sen, 2005). The three life-stories we have analysed illustrate that the women are mindful of the fact that they can and must navigate both the NZ zone of work and the Indian community. Thus, women can be strategic in how they locate themselves *vis-à-vis* their host society as they gaze back at individuals in

organizations and society in managing to decentre Otherness. Such gazing back may implicate changing perspectives with multiple centres and peripheries faced by migrant women, who are resisting scattered hegemonies as they cross borders and geographical locations (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994). These resistances can serve as enabling moments, changing the contours of an Anglo/Eurocentric understanding of migrants towards a more reciprocal rather than hierarchical understanding of professional migrant women.

Our work challenges contemporary discourses of migrant women, in expanding and unpacking the notion of such women as powerless, illiterate, passive and subjugated, but rather holds up the possibility of a more nuanced understanding of professional migrant women.

Conclusions

In anchoring our paper in transnational feminism, our objective has been to sensitize the field to the possibilities of fruitful dialogue on Otherness in the specific context of professional migrant women. We have emphasized the dilemmas they face in their daily experience, in particular the zone of work and how they handle the 'vigilant attention to the operation of privilege' (Sampaio, 2004, p. 199) or western hegemony (Campt, 2011; Genovese, 2011). We are mindful of the fact that while transnational feminism can be seen as global phenomena, it is also embedded in specific locations, and migration histories have often ensured persistence of Othering (Cuthroys, 2006). Hence it is important to emphasize situatedness, interdependence and interconnections (Hegde, 1998; Lal, 1999; Mohanty, 2003; Prasad, P., 2006). We believe that developing thick notions can be fruitful to sharpen understanding of professional migrant women living and working in first world countries.

We are conscious that this paper presents a few particular interpretations of professional migrant women's negotiation of transnational space, and other vantage points may offer varied interpretations. Yet, the women we presented set much store on their multiple experiences and facility in navigating more than one culture and deriving benefit from this process, and they have learned to think about gender and ethnicity in a context of changing boundaries (Calas and Smircich, 2006; Grewal and Kaplan, 2000; Zwingel, 2012). Such women resist being pigeon-holed into fixed categories, as they consciously and sometimes painfully move through their experiences to overcome and avoid the institutionalized view of the Other. Additionally, given the varied nature of Indians and the diverse experiences of professional migrant Indian women, the small number of life-stories we have utilized could be a limitation of this study in decentring Otherness. Some areas for future qualitative and quantitative research may include the investigation of how professional migrant women, in countries such as the USA and the European Union, facilitate re-looking at and reworking diversity policies and practices in their specific contextualized sites (Ozbilgin, 2010). Future research may also explore how organizations locate which groups are at the centre and which ones at the periphery and how this may need to change with changing global hegemonies in business.

Appendix: Interview questions

1. Tell me the story of how you started your business/entered the workforce in NZ. (Explore aspects pertaining to age, religion, caste, nature of business, number of employees, why this particular business, marital status, kind of family, i.e. single, joint; prior work/business experience)
2. What are/were some of the challenging aspects of your business?
3. How did you deal with the challenges? (Explore aspects as to why the challenges were dealt with in the particular way specified by the participant and the impact on the participant)
4. What are/were some of the facilitative experiences? (Explore aspects regarding why these specific experiences, how did these experiences impact the participant)
5. Why did you come to NZ? (Explore reasons for coming to NZ, who took the decision to migrate, legal status in NZ, number of years in NZ)
6. How do you see yourself in NZ? (Explore whether the participant would want to return to India, move out of NZ to another country, continue with the same work/business for the future)

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