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‘Homes’ and being ‘at home’ in New Zealand: women’s place-making in internationalised higher education

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Research on students’ experiences in internationalised higher education largely assumes students’ autonomy and privileges their public selves. New Zealand research is no exception. Little attention has been paid to students’ lives beyond classroom contexts; how national policy and institutional practices shape students’ everyday experiences and ‘home’ lives similarly and differently. In addition, gender is afforded scant attention or considered only as a secondary concern, and people whose partners or family members are international students are invisible. This article endeavours to address the relative inattention to gender in international education research and the invisibility of women whose partners are international students. It draws on data from interviews with 17 women involved in a broader doctoral research project during 2005 and 2006. The women were either migrant or international students or had partners enrolled as international students. The article uses ‘home’ as a lens for examining women’s situated and transnational place-making and factors that promoted or precluded a sense of belonging in New Zealand. It draws connections between women’s accounts of ‘home’ and feeling ‘at home’, and broader politics, policies and institutional practices in New Zealand higher education.

Keywords: higher education; internationalisation; women; place-making; home; New Zealand

Introduction

‘Home’ is both a contested notion and a productive lens through which to consider broader social relations, politics and practices (Blunt and Varley 2004; Massey 1994, 2005). As ‘territory . . . for understanding the social and the spatial’ (Blunt 2005, 505) it has received considerable attention in disciplines such as feminist and cultural geography; sociology and cultural, postcolonial, migration and women’s studies (see Ahmed 1999; Asher 2009; Blunt and Varley 2004; Collins 2009; Douglas 1991; Dyck 2005; McDowell 1999; Massey 1994, 2005; Noble 2002, 2005). ‘Home’ is used in reference to security, attachment and belonging; a strong sense of self; and decolonised self-awareness, albeit, shaped by historical and ongoing colonisation (Asher 2009; Jahneke 2002). It is also used more ambivalently in reference to the disciplining of bodies and reproduction of embodied expectations; and protection from ‘outside’ surveillance of one’s body and bodily activities (Douglas 1991). Some scholars describe ‘home’ as a site of gendered oppression, marked by masculinist distinctions between private and public spheres, and the associated devaluing of domestic (mainly women’s) labour (Massey 1994; McDowell 1999). Feminist and cultural theorists highlight the complex meanings of home for diasporic and transnational peoples who negotiate and recreate lives in new or multiple places.
However it is understood, the meaning of ‘home’ is ‘material and symbolic’, fluid, shifting and complex (Blunt and Varley 2004, 3). As Blunt and Varley (2004, 3) argue, ‘home’ is: a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear . . . invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life . . . located on thresholds between memory and nostalgia for the past, everyday life in the present and future dreams and fears.

Although ‘home’ is often used in everyday parlance in reference to privacy and separation from public worlds, it is (in a material and symbolic sense) integrally linked to broader socio-political relations (Allon 1997; Blunt and Varley 2004). Johnson (1996) argues for the importance of recognising the links between politics and ‘home’ as complex rather than straightforward. For example, she troubles the binary association of ‘home’ with oppression (versus freedom), tradition (versus modernity) and dependency (versus self-determination). Johnson calls for attention to human agency in relation to imagined and material ‘homes’ and the broader relations that shape them. Similarly, Dyck (2005, 240) suggests a need for dual attention to both the politics that shape our experiences and ideas of ‘home’ and ‘how “home” is made as both a material and a symbolic site of belonging’.

After Johnson (1996, 461) and de Certeau (1984, 117), I am concerned in this article with ‘home’ as an ‘active practising of place’ for a group of women involved in my doctoral research project during 2005 and 2006. The project, conducted in a small New Zealand city, centred on the development of an intercultural social group for women in collaboration with staff from a university international office (see Anderson 2005, 2008a). My role in the group was as co-facilitator, participant observer and interviewer. Interviewees were (self-selected) group participants and included eight ‘international students’, nine ‘New Zealand students’ and three women whose partners were ‘international students’ in higher education institutions. I conducted 28 interviews in total including eight repeat interviews with women who remained in the city during both years of the project. Seventeen of the women interviewed had lived in New Zealand for 7 years or less and spoke extensively during interviews about ‘homes’ and feeling ‘at home’ or otherwise in New Zealand and in other countries. It is their accounts that form the basis of this article.

Specifically, the article examines how a group of women deployed the notion of ‘home’ during research interviews in relation to their everyday experiences in New Zealand higher education contexts. Following Tucker (2010), I am interested in women’s experiences as spatially located, within and in relation to specific localities (dwellings, cities and countries); and shifting notions of self, place and belonging. Throughout the article, I draw on Ahmed’s (1999, 341) understanding of ‘home’ in terms of ‘affect . . . how one feels’ in a place. A focus on the affective collapses the boundary between public and private, and highlights the relationship between selves, places and spaces (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2005; Panelli 2008; Thien 2005). Ahmed (1999, 341) likens ‘home’ to ‘skin’; the porous intersection between self and locality. She argues that:

the immersion of a self in a locality is hence not simply about inhabiting an already constituted space (from which one can simply depart and remain the same). Rather, the locality intrudes into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers. The lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other. (Ahmed 1999, 341)

More specifically, I draw on Ahmed’s (1999, 329) use of the term ‘estrangement’ as a way of conceptualising place-making for people who shift between and negotiate homes in
different localities. This is helpful for considering the interplay between agency and constraint in women’s reflections on and experiences of ‘home’.

Following Ahmed (1999), this article considers women’s accounts of shifting (material) homes, and how women spoke about or connected self, locality and home. The aims of the article are threefold. The first is to foreground women’s actual ‘storylines’ in an area that has been overlooked in higher education research (Kenway and Bullen 2003, 17). The second is to attend to the specificity of women’s lives and the factors that shaped their place-making in a higher education context (after Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo 2009; Rhee and Subreenduth 2006). The third is to draw connections between women’s accounts of ‘home’ and feeling ‘at home’ and higher education policies and practices in New Zealand. The remainder of the article is organised as follows. After outlining the study and the context in which it occurred, I consider relevant research concerned with women, internationalisation, higher education and New Zealand. I then discuss four ways in which ‘home’ appeared in women’s interview accounts: in a material sense as comfortable or uncomfortable; as facilitating or limiting a sense of agency; as fluid and shaped by a changing sense of self; and as regulated through broader notions of ‘nationhood’ and national belonging. After Casey (2001), I endeavour to maintain a dual focus throughout this section: ‘downward into body’ (women’s affective and material experiences of home) and ‘outward into landscape’ (broader policy and structural factors that shape women’s homes and sense of belonging). I conclude by reflecting on some implications for policy, practice and research in higher education.

Although 17 women’s accounts of and references to ‘home’ inform this article, not all of the women concerned are named below and three women (Xena, Rose and Anita) appear more frequently than others. Xena, Rose and Anita had accompanied their international student partners to New Zealand and spoke most extensively during interviews about ‘home’. Other women named throughout the article are those whose accounts best illustrate and complicate both themes and contradictions associated with ‘home’ that emerged in women’s interview accounts generally. They include both international students and New Zealand students who were recent migrants.

Contextualising the study

My doctoral research took place in New Zealand, a small Pacific Rim country shaped by British colonisation, biculturalism, and Pacific and Asian migration (Spoonley 1993; Spoonley and Butcher 2009). Internationalisation discourses are central to New Zealand’s contemporary ‘eduscape’ with the internationalisation of education seen as crucial to New Zealand’s economic and social participation in ‘a globalised world’ (Ministry of Education 2007, 1). A comprehensive analysis of internationalisation discourses, processes and higher education in New Zealand is not the purpose of this article and is available elsewhere (Butcher 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Larner 1998a, 1998b, 2003; Lewis 2005), but a contextual overview is necessary. In brief, at policy level and in educational institutions, lip-service is paid to ‘internationalised education’ as a means for increasing New Zealand students’ intercultural understanding and openness to other cultures (Ministry of Education 2007). However, internationalisation discourses reveal a primary concern with strengthening New Zealand’s economic well-being through developing ‘international linkages’ (Ministry of Education 2007, 9), attracting ‘human capital’ (4) and increasing revenue through the ‘export’ of education to (predominantly full-fee paying) international students (3, 9, 33; also see Anderson 2008b). ‘Export education’ is among New Zealand’s top five export industries (Butcher 2004b), estimated as
contributing more than two billion dollars annually to the New Zealand economy (Ministry of Education 2007).

Students enrolled in public higher education in New Zealand number just over 400,000 (Ministry of Education 2011). In 2009, around 92% of these were ‘New Zealand students’ (New Zealand citizens or permanent residents) and around 8%, ‘international students’. Slightly more than half of the New Zealand students (55%) and just under half of the international students (45%) were women. Notably, the descriptors ‘international’ and ‘New Zealand’ mask considerable ethnic heterogeneity. In 2009, 61% of New Zealand students identified as Pākehā, 17% as indigenous Māori, 12% as Asian, 6% as of Pacific Island heritage and 4% as belonging to ‘other’ ethnicities. Of the international student population, 67% came to New Zealand from countries in the Asia region; followed by Europe (11%); North America (9%); the Pacific (5%) and Middle East regions (5%); and Africa, Central and South America (3%). Almost 90% of international students in public higher education institutions are enrolled on a full-fee paying basis (Ministry of Education, personal communication, 24 February 2009).

The importance to the New Zealand economy of attracting and retaining international students has led to considerable New Zealand research concerned with their adaptation to and integration with New Zealanders and New Zealand educational contexts (Deloitte 2008; Ho et al. 2007; Ward and Masgoret 2004). Very little research has considered international and New Zealand students’ experiences of higher education alongside each other or interrogated the binary distinction between them (exceptions include Anderson 2008b; Collins 2006). Attention paid to women is scarce. Enrolment status (international versus local), ethnicity and culture are preferred as primary categories of analysis, with gender considered as a supplementary concern. Limited attention has been paid to students’ home lives and their affective sense of being ‘at home’ or belonging in New Zealand in relation to their educational experiences (although Campbell 2004 and Collins 2009 are notable exceptions).

People whose partners are international students are an invisible group of participants in New Zealand higher education. Although anecdotally, increasing numbers of international students bring accompanying partners (predominantly women) and/or families, these people are absent in higher education statistics and all but absent from academic scholarship. The mandatory Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students (Ministry of Education 2010) stipulates minimum standards for the care and protection of international students enrolled in New Zealand educational institutions but excludes students’ partners unless they too are enrolled as international students. The one New Zealand study that mentions women whose partners are studying does so in deficit terms, citing the view of university academic and support staff that these women are ‘particularly isolated’ due to their ‘shyness and lack of independence’ and because they are “‘stuck away’ at home’ (Scheyvens, Wild and Overton 2003, 319).

Internationally, studies that foreground women whose partners are international students are few in number and limited to the US context (De Verthelyi 1995; Sakamoto 2006; Schwartz and Kahne 1993; Tokoyawa 2006). In some respects, these studies also emphasise women’s disadvantage relative to their male partners. For example, studies suggest that the shift overseas is often initiated by the male partner; and that it often results in women’s occupational roles changing, or their ‘enforced … dependen[cy] status’ due to immigration policies, male partners’ intensified work and study commitments, and/or women’s loss of former employment (Sakamoto 2006, 569; also see De Verthelyi 1995; Schwartz and Kahne 1993). Studies note a lack of orientation support and increased financial constraints for women whose partners are studying (De Verthelyi 1995;
However, they also acknowledge women’s capability, agency and intentionality when negotiating life in new places. For example, De Verthelyi (1995) and Sakamoto (2006) describe how women in their studies developed personal projects in order to cope with and make the most of living in a new place. Other studies describe formal and informal social groups and/or support networks run or developed by women for women (Schwartz and Kahne 1993; Tokoyawa 2006). De Verthelyi (1995) notes several factors likely to support women’s place-making when accompanying a partner engaged in overseas study. These include access both to organised support groups and ‘autonomous peer group activities’; the provision of detailed pre-arrival information that is relevant to students’ partners and/or families; and ongoing orientation support (De Verthelyi 1995, 406).

My doctoral research was conceptualised in response to the inattention to gender and to international students’ partners and families in New Zealand higher education research. It was also aimed at interrogating the binary distinction between ‘international’ and ‘New Zealand’ students, or examining how ‘discourses, power hierarchies, and social relations’ shape their everyday lives both similarly and differently (Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo 2009, 37). Theoretically, the project was informed by a feminist commitment to recognising women’s lives as important (Reinharz 1992); attending to the ‘diversity of actual women’s lives and the ideological mechanisms’ that make some of them invisible (DeVault 1999, 30); and ‘develop[ing] critical and analytic perspectives that include women’ (Flores 2000, 688).

Selves, homes and being ‘at home’

Ahmed (1999, 341) argues that people who migrate between homes in one country and another experience a ‘splitting of home as place of origin and home as the sensory world of everyday experience’. She describes this ‘splitting’ as involving ‘the intrusion of an unexpected space into the body’ and ‘a partial shedding of the skin, a process that is uncomfortable’ (Ahmed 1999, 341). Since, as Ahmed (1999, 343) argues, home and self are implicated in each other, moving homes involves spatial and temporal dislocation; the disruption of ‘personal biographies’ and a sense of being ‘estranged’ or ‘out of place’. Ahmed (1999, 343) uses the term ‘estrangement’ to articulate a view of migration as involving not only geographical movement, but also ‘a movement in the very way in which the migrant subject inhabits the space of home’.

In my study, women’s references to ‘home’ revealed locality and affect as intertwined (Ahmed 1999). Women used the term ‘home’ in reference to actual living contexts and in a broader, social sense to articulate a sense of belonging or ‘at-homeness’ (Koskela 1997, 307). Some women described literal homes, alluding to the ways in which the material and social characteristics of their living environments precluded or promoted a sense of belonging or comfort in New Zealand. Some described policies or occasions that reinforced a distinction between ‘home’ (belonging) and ‘outside’ (not belonging), excluding those perceived to be outsiders in New Zealand and positioning them as strangers. In both a material and an affective sense, ‘home’ emerged as ‘paradoxical space’ (Rose 1993, 137): associated with a shifting sense of self; and with belonging, constraint, connection and alienation. Echoing Ahmed (1999), some women in my study alluded to estrangement in terms of discomfort and/or a sense of being ‘other’ in a new place. However, women also alluded to this movement as freeing, or as opening up new ways of being and behaving. Some women discussed how they would be a ‘different person’ upon their return ‘home’. Their reflections revealed the permeability of boundaries between both home and self, and ‘home and away’ (Ahmed 1999, 341).
Comfort and discomfort in material home environments

Xena, Anita, Rose and Sharon described how the material conditions of their home environments in New Zealand promoted a sense of uncomfortable estrangement. All four women used the term ‘home’ in relation to both literal living contexts and an affective sense of ‘fit’ (Noble 2005; Ahmed 1999). Noble (2005, 113–114) suggests that in order to feel ‘at home’ in a place we must experience a sufficient ‘sense of safety’ or ‘attachment to a place or context that makes acting in that setting possible’ (also see Koskela 1997). Noble (2005) argues that this is both a situated and a social experience. Our (private) ‘homely comfort’ is connected with a broader sense of (public) ‘belonging’ (Noble 2005, 114). To Noble, the degree of attachment (and therefore, comfort) we experience in a place is not only an outcome of the extent to which we can appropriate a setting or accommodate ourselves to it, but also the extent to which others recognise us as legitimate participants in that setting both at an interpersonal level, and in terms of broader institutional and policy frameworks.

Xena, Rose and Anita highlighted the limits of current policy frameworks for facilitating international students and their partners’ comfortable accommodation to/in New Zealand. These women had accompanied their international student partners to New Zealand from Ireland, the Gulf region and India respectively. For them, life in New Zealand involved spending larger chunks of time at home than previously due to a corresponding shift from full-time study (Anita) or professional employment (Xena and Rose) to initial unemployment (Anita and Xena) or distance study at home (Rose). Not surprisingly, Xena, Rose and Anita spoke extensively about their material home environments. Xena and Anita described houses that were (in Xena’s words) ‘damp and uninsulated and cold’ (characteristic of much student accommodation in the city), and Rose recalled arriving at university-arranged accommodation to find it filthy and her home-stay host mother chronically ill. Rose and Xena drew connections between uncomfortable home environments and a sense of affective discomfort. Rose described a resulting period of stress-related mental and physical illness and Xena recalled, ‘[I] cried the whole first day I was in there’.

Although New Zealand’s Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students does not include international students’ partners and families, its provisions around student accommodation should arguably be protective for those who live with international students. For example, the Code requires that educational institutions provide the international students they enrol with ‘information and advice on accommodation, including advice on whether the [educational institution] has assessed the suitability of any accommodation and the result of any such assessment’ (Ministry of Education 2010, 8). Transparent pre-arrival information was apparently unavailable for Xena and Rose and their international student partners; and the homes that they and Anita lived in were questionable in their adequacy. Xena and Rose’s reflections on their home environments in New Zealand suggest that policy recognition alone is not sufficient for ensuring a person’s sense of safety or ‘at-homeness’ in a place (Koskela 1997, 307; Noble 2005). Such policy must also translate into practice (Sawir et al. 2009).

Sharon, an exchange student from Taiwan, described interpersonal factors as contributing to a sense of estrangement and discomfort at home and in New Zealand (Noble 2005). Sharon had come to New Zealand hoping to make friends with ‘Kiwi students’, but during our interview, described roommates’ drunken behaviour and apparent unfriendliness as making her feel isolated, and sometimes, afraid. After shifting to new accommodation, Sharon continued to feel isolated due to her roommates’ preference for...
socialising with their non-roommate friends. Sharon expressed her sense of estrangement and discomfort in terms of both a negative view of self (I think it’s my personality, I have a really bad personality) and a broader sense of not being ‘at home’ (or safe) in New Zealand. Sharon contrasted her sense of estrangement in New Zealand with a (remembered) sense of safety in Taiwan, describing herself as ‘homesick’ and saying, ‘my home, Taiwan is the safe place to go back [to]’.

In contrast with Sharon, two women in my study highlighted the significance of interpersonal recognition in mitigating the discomfort of unpleasant or unsafe material home environments (Noble 2005). Both women encountered staff members who exhibited ‘everyday practices of caring and responsiveness beyond the classroom’ (Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo 2009, 43, emphasis original), blurring the boundary between classroom (or ‘outside’) and ‘home’ (Ahmed 1999). Anita recalled assistance from her husband’s lecturer who discovered that Anita was suffering from cold and offered the use of a heater and practical advice on how to maximise warmth and request landlord assistance. Similarly, Violet described a concerned lecturer who had arranged for her to see a counsellor after knowledge of a room-mate’s criminal activity began affecting her coursework. Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo (2009, 43) caution against privatising the ‘responsibility to care’ in internationalised higher education ‘to the level of the individual academic’, emphasising instead the need for ‘a broader “social” response: political structures, institutional cultures and policies’ that recognise international students as more than a source of human capital or foreign exchange. However, Anita and Violet’s accounts suggest that where broader social frameworks fail to exhibit adequate care, or to function effectively to protect the safety of both international students and their partners, the interpersonal care and recognition of individual academics can still have significant impact at an everyday level. Violet noted that she would not have thought to ask for professional help if the lecturer had not proactively suggested that she do so. Anita remarked, ‘these are the small small things, these are not the very big things, but they really make you feel that you’re not isolated. There are people who care about you’.

**Homes, constraint and agency**

Juxtaposed against Sharon’s longing for home (above), Douglas (1991, 287) argues that ‘nostalgia in writing about home is surprising’, given its ‘tyranny’ as a site of ‘scrutiny and control’. In this sense, being ‘at home’ in or ‘enveloped’ (Ahmed 1999, 341) by a place can be constraining. While Ahmed associates estrangement with discomfort and Noble (2005) connects an affective sense of ‘being at home’ with the capacity to act, four women in my project associated estrangement (at least in part) with the freedom to be or to act in new ways. Arui, a New Zealand student and recent migrant from China, associated ‘home’ (China) with a sense of obligation to her parents and young daughter, and New Zealand with the freedom to ‘enjoy life’. Frances and Miho, both international students, described leaving ‘home’ (China and Japan, respectively) as providing freedom from surveillance and others’ expectations. Miho said, ‘I feel really free from living away from my family’ and Frances explained:

In China you’re used to that environment … and you are familiar with all the people. So sometimes you … go in the same ways as them, even if you don’t know whether that’s the way you want to be. Whereas if you [are] in a totally different environment, no one knows you, … so you don’t need to care about [how] other people see you … you can do whatever you like, with total freedom.
While Frances, Miho and Arui could be read as reiterating the view that ‘home [is] a place necessarily to be left behind in the formation of the . . . emancipated woman’ (Johnson 1996, 450), two women’s interview accounts complicated a nostalgia-constraint binary in relation to ‘home’. In our first interview, Anita alluded to home-making activities as purposeful work and a kind of ‘personal project’ (De Verthelyi 1995, 395) that kept her occupied and satisfied with her use of time: ‘Right now [unemployment is] fine with me because I’m busy at home . . . I’m cooking and getting food from the market and all those things’. However, after living in New Zealand for a year, Anita admitted that keeping ‘busy at home’ was an unsatisfactory occupation. In the interim, she had obtained a work visa and acquired a job in the local supermarket. As a former software-programmer Anita’s job was a compromise, but she spoke positively about her new employment: ‘I think I’ve become more confident because I’m going out and meeting people . . . that is one of the best things which has happened to me’. For Anita, ‘home’ was both a place of purposeful occupation and depressing isolation: ‘if I would be at home it would be really depressing for me . . . but now I . . . can just distract myself and go to work’. Leaving home (for paid employment) offered enjoyable interactive opportunities and career compromise; new opportunities perhaps but not pure freedom or emancipation (Johnson 1996).

Like Anita, Xena alluded to the connections between locality and self, ‘home’ and ‘outside’ (Ahmed 1999). As noted, Xena’s move to New Zealand had involved a dual transition: from full-time paid employment to initial unemployment and from relative autonomy to motherhood. Like Anita, she drew a clear distinction between public (‘work’) and private (‘home’) worlds, contrasting ‘work’ productivity with the accomplishment of mundane, household tasks and noting her former dread of being primarily preoccupied with the latter. However, Xena also reflected on how her new locality and associated change in roles had altered both her sense of self and her daily behaviour:

I suppose I could talk all day really about how I’ve changed . . . It’s not just me with a child, it’s a different part of me that wasn’t there before I had her . . . I have not been work productive . . . I’ve been at home a lot of the time which I always dreaded [laughs] . . . I’ve learnt to be a much quieter person, . . . it’s just . . . a lot of space . . . the whole thing of taking the time out to be here and having a break . . . I’ve felt I’ve had the freedom to be like that, because if I was at home I would have had a lot of pressure to be back in my job. (emphases Xena’s)

Ironically, Xena noted how by leaving ‘home’ (Ireland) she felt free to stay ‘home’ (in New Zealand). Echoing Arui, Frances and Miho, Xena described being ‘out of place’ as allowing her to do motherhood differently than she may have done otherwise (Ahmed 1999, 343). However, like Anita, Xena problematised clear-cut ‘distinctions and oppositions’ around the idea of home (Johnson 1996, 461), differentiating between ‘home’ and ‘work’ while also acknowledging the emotional and physical labour involved in caring for a young child. Xena associated home with both agency (see above) and constraint, describing subsequent part-time paid employment as a welcome opportunity to leave her baby and escape the constancy of parenting: ‘Having started work . . . that’s been good because . . . it’s a separate thing where it’s just me’.

Shifting homes, shifting selves

Thien (2005, 453) argues that ‘selves and spaces’ are mutually constituted and always incomplete or in process. Casey (2001, 688) articulates a similar notion in relation to place, suggesting that although places (or localities) may exist despite our absence, they are nevertheless transformed or altered by our presence, just as we are altered by being in
them: ‘Places come to be embedded in us; they become part of our very self, our enduring character, what we enact and carry forward’. For this reason, and as Ahmed (1999, 343) suggests, ‘it is impossible to return to a place that was lived as home, precisely because the home is not exterior to a self, but implicated in it’. Ahmed (1999, 343, emphasis original) uses ‘memory’ to articulate the mutually constitutive connection between spaces, places and selves, relating the ‘discomfort of inhabiting a migrant body’ to ‘the failure of memory to fully make sense of the place one comes to inhabit’. Ahmed (1999, 343) suggests that for those who move between places, ‘the process of returning home is likewise about the failures of memory, of not being inhabited in the same way by that which appears as familiar’.

Laura, Stella, Xena and Yukiko alluded to estrangement not only in terms of feeling strange in a new place, but also in relation to being different people and feeling out of place upon their return to former homes (in the Appalachian US, South Korea, Ireland and Japan, respectively). Through inhabiting and having been inhabited by a new place (Ahmed 1999) each had developed new understandings, new ways of being and new ways of communicating with others; and anticipated experiencing former homes differently than previously. Laura, a New Zealand student who had left the Appalachian US as a child, anticipated being read by others as an outsider due to her New Zealand accent, despite her own sense of affective connection with Appalachia: ‘While I feel a part of [Appalachia], as soon as I speak my accent is going to put up a wall between me and them’ (emphasis Laura’s). Stella, a New Zealand student and recent migrant from South Korea, expressed fear of feeling estranged from/strange to family, saying, ‘I [am] worried ... that probably my family feel that I’m a different person’. Xena articulated a sense of estrangement from her former life in Ireland, due to having lived in New Zealand, being absent during momentous family events, and becoming a mother for the first time:

I’m trying to prepare myself to go back to the life that I can’t even remember ... relationships that I have kept going but ... everything’s different. I’m different and not just because of the baby, but because of being here, and because of not having to work ... Everything has changed.

Like Laura and Stella, Xena reflected on ‘the impossibility of return’ (Ahmed 1999, 343), noting that she would now experience Ireland differently than previously as a different person in her former ‘home’.

Yukiko revealed how although ‘places come into us lastingly’ (Casey 2001, 688), selves are not passively constituted through place. She recalled how on an earlier trip ‘home’ to Japan, she had experienced a sense of ‘struggle’ between wanting to be seen as ‘other’ (not Japanese) and wanting to reconnect with friends: ‘I didn’t want people to think I’m a Japanese because ... I was a different person ... then I adjusted myself ... to listen and ... think how Japanese people think’ (emphasis Yukiko’s). Yukiko’s statement ‘I adjusted myself’ cautions against solely negative constructions of the estrangement inherent in migration. As Lugones (1987, 3) argues, those who move between (social, linguistic and cultural) ‘worlds’ engage in a ‘skilful, creative, rich [and] enriching’ process that develops one’s agentic capacity to ‘be’ differently in different contexts.

‘Nationhood’, national belonging and the regulation of ‘home’

As discussed in the previous section, Ahmed (1999, 343) uses the term ‘estrangement’ in reference to migration: the movement of bodies ‘out of place’, the disruption of personal lives and failure to inhabit what was once familiar in the same way as previously. Lugones (1987) suggests the importance of recognising the agency and skilfulness developed
through estrangement, or the necessary negotiation of shifts between spaces, places and ways of being. However, external factors can also actively produce estrangement from/in a place and limit one’s capacity to act, as Goldman (1997, 153) indicates below.

There is an inextricable link between the imaginings of “home” and the mechanism of hatred used to define its borders ... a unified sense of self and nation depends on the exclusion or “othering” of any foreign element that disrupts that image of unity. (also see Noble 2005)

The nation as a broader, public kind of ‘home’ can (like a literal home) function as a site of ‘scrutiny and control’ (Douglas 1991, 287) in which one’s right to belong is regulated and communicated. Women in my project alluded to such regulation as experienced in two ways: through interpersonal encounters and exclusive (maternity care) policy.

Five women in my project described interactions where others had overtly positioned them as outsiders in New Zealand (see Anderson 2008b). All of these women were recent migrants, international students or partners of international students from countries in the Asia region11 who were unable to pass as (dominant) Pākehā New Zealanders. Although in a sense, all five women encountered the regulation of ‘home’ (the nation) in others’ assumption of their ‘difference’, two women spoke of interactions where their otherness was explicitly linked with ‘home’. Frances, who on several occasions encountered drunken students when walking to her flat after studying late at the university library, remarked that these students often swore at her and told her to, ‘go home to China’. Similarly, Stella, a New Zealand citizen, recalled an incident on the city’s main street when young people in a passing car had called to her, ‘airport is that way’. For those not subjected to them, it is easy to dismiss such events as isolated, but Goldman (1997, 154) argues that ‘in the blurring of “hatred” and “home”, the complex effects that everyday small, hostile incidents provoke cannot be underestimated’ (also see Noble 2005). As Palumbo-Liu (2002, 767) explains, such small incidents carry the force of powerful ‘historical narratives’; and reveal dominant imaginaries of nationhood, otherness and belonging (also see Anderson 2008b; Collins 2006; Noble 2005). Stella recalled the pain she felt after the interaction described above, saying, ‘the moment I just understood what happened ... it was like “oh my god, what am I doing in this country ... why did I come here?” it was so sad’ (Stella’s emphases).

Xena highlighted how exclusive policy can also be implicated in ‘the production and regulation of strangeness’ (Noble 2005, 118). If women or their partners are New Zealand citizens or permanent residents they are entitled to publicly funded maternity care, but this is unavailable to most other women and maternity care is not funded through international student health insurance providers. Many women who are international students or whose partners are international students when they become pregnant, are forced to either ‘go home’ or ‘stay home’ (away from New Zealand) to have their babies, or to have termination procedures undertaken at their own expense. Exceptions are women who are studying (or whose partners are studying) under specific aid-based scholarship arrangements, who come from countries that fund their maternity care abroad (for example, Norway), or whose ‘home’ countries have reciprocal healthcare agreements with New Zealand (for example, the UK).

Xena was 28-weeks pregnant when she arrived in New Zealand and despite having sought clarification from government websites, did not know whether or under what circumstances she could access publicly funded maternity care.12 Not surprisingly, Xena stated that the uncertainty and possibility of having to pay large sums of money for care (particularly if complications occurred) caused her considerable stress. Eventually, through the advocacy and advice of a local doctor, Xena was able to receive publicly funded maternity care, but another woman she knew was less fortunate, having to fly for
20 hours late in her pregnancy to have her baby at ‘home’ (outside New Zealand). This was problematic not only for the woman concerned, but also for her student partner, who had to take weeks off his doctoral studies to be with her during and after the birth. Notably, full policy recognition for international students is rare in countries that export higher education since it rests on the development of political structures that ‘include the international student [and his/her accompanying partners and children] as quasi-citizen’ (Sawir et al. 2009, 49). The uneven provision of maternity care for international students and their partners in New Zealand serves to police women’s (pregnant) bodies; including some as belonging and excluding others from being fully at home.

Implications for higher education policy, research and practice

The interview accounts considered in this article trouble both blanket identifiers (‘women’, ‘New Zealand students’, ‘international students’, ‘women whose partners are international students’) and straightforward conceptions of ‘home’ (sanctuary, basis for nostalgia, site of oppression). Women’s references to ‘home’ in both a symbolic and a material sense revealed the complex politics and practices of their everyday lives (Dyck 2005; Johnson 1996; Rhee 2006). At the same time, women’s accounts also highlighted the ‘real and substantive differences’ that mark the conditions governing ‘particular movements across spatial borders’ (Ahmed 1999, 332). For example, accommodation difficulties and concerns were highlighted exclusively by women who were international students or whose partners were international students. This is despite New Zealand’s Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students, a regulatory mechanism intended to protect international student well-being both inside and outside classroom contexts. Furthermore, the most extended discussions about homes and material discomfort were with ‘at home’ women whose partners were international students and who (as a group) are all but invisible in New Zealand policy and research. At an interpersonal level, only Asian women in my study were read as ‘other’ in New Zealand and told to ‘go home’. At a policy level, Xena’s account highlighted the disproportionately difficult effects of uneven maternity care provision for international women students or students’ partners, and more specifically, for women whose passport countries lie outside long-standing colonial connections with New Zealand.

Critical scholarship has problematised a view of internationalised higher education as a neutral undertaking, and called for responsibility and ‘pedagogical engagement . . . beyond the classroom’ that recognises international students as more than passive, different ‘others’ who are a source of foreign exchange and human capital to their ‘education provider’ countries (Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo 2009, 43; Bullen and Kenway 2003; Doherty and Singh 2005; Haigh 2002). My study suggests that such engagement must include dual attention to the ways in which policies and practices actively produce or reduce (some) students’ sense of safety or estrangement in higher education contexts; and to the legitimate presence of all actors associated with internationalised higher education, international students’ partners included. Considering the human implications of existing policy gaps and oversights might be a productive starting point. For example, ensuring women’s equal access to social services such as maternity care is an obvious and practical way of proactively recognising their legitimate presence in internationalised higher education (Noble 2005) and contributing to their sense of ‘absolute safety’ in a place (Goldman 1997, 155). Conversely, uneven policy provision in this area contributes to the active estrangement of those who are excluded, reinforcing a nation-as-home boundary. At the very least, it is incumbent on ‘education provider’ countries to acknowledge uneven
policy provision openly and transparently to all whose everyday lives it affects (Haigh 2002). Furthermore, Xena and Rose’s descriptions of their accommodation issues provide a useful caution. Protective policy (such as the New Zealand Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students) is of limited usefulness unless it also translates into practice (Nyland, Forbes-Mewett and Marginson 2010; Sawir et al. 2009).

Finally, this study highlights the inadequacy of simplistic representations of all groups of women associated with internationalised higher education. For example, women spoke about ‘estrangement’ or being out of place in different ways: as uncomfortable, creating agentic possibilities and self-changing. For some women, instances of interpersonal recognition and care facilitated a sense of being ‘at home’ despite otherwise uncomfortable home contexts and/or feeling strange in a new place. This study suggests that representing women whose partners are studying as simply ‘disadvantaged’ (Howes 2001; Scheyvens, Wild and Overton 2003) is inadequate and disingenuous since it precludes attention both to women’s agency and creativity; and the ways in which policy and institutional factors may actively or inadvertently produce disadvantage or estrangement (Ahmed 1999). Likewise, portraying New Zealand (or ‘local’) students as a homogeneous group who are necessarily ‘at home’ is clearly simplistic, since being constructed as ‘other’ or ‘not belonging’ is not only experienced by international students. Simplistic representations homogenise women whose lives are shaped similarly and differently by a multitude of factors and ignore the strategic ways in which women cope when their presence is overlooked or recognised unevenly in policy or in educational institutions. Ongoing research is needed that acknowledges the presence of all women associated with higher education (including those who support students’ studies), and that examines further how social and political factors affect women’s lives in higher education contexts differently. For example, larger-scale, comparative research could examine how national and institutional policies and practices in different contexts recognise or fail to recognise students’ lives ‘beyond the classroom’ (Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo 2009) and affirm or deny the legitimate presence of those whose partners or family members are international students (Noble 2005). Further research could also examine the effects of policies and practices on women’s lives as they study in specific contexts or move between them; how women actively ‘make sense’ of living in and across localities; and how interpersonal, institutional and policy-level factors might actively promote a sense of belonging and agency in a place.

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Notes
1. I use these terms in reference to women’s (or their partners’) enrolment status in New Zealand higher education institutions, but acknowledge the limits of such terms as a way of identifying women. As Madge, Raghuram and Noxolo (2009) note, whether a person is classified as ‘international’ or ‘local’ (in this case, a ‘New Zealander’) depends on the geo-political centre from which the classification occurs.
2. Biculturalism in the New Zealand context refers to partnership between Pākehā and indigenous Māori. ‘Pākehā’, a contested term, was the name given to Anglo-Celt colonisers by Māori
(Spoonley 1993). It is now used more generally in reference to ‘white’ New Zealanders (Mohanram 1998).

3. This term is explained in the endnote above.

4. Full-fee paying international students are ‘a crucial source of funding’ for New Zealand’s public higher education institutions, effectively subsidising domestic education in an era of reduced state expenditure (Butcher 2004b, 259). While a small number of international students study on the basis of scholarships or exchange agreements, the majority pay fees set by their respective educational institutions to cover the full cost of their courses and generate a profit. In contrast, New Zealanders with permanent resident visas or citizenship status receive a government-subsidised higher education. (For a full account of the emergence of ‘export education’ in New Zealand, see Tarling 2004.)

5. Bullen and Kenway (2003, 41) describe ‘culturalism’ as characterising much international education literature: that is, ‘the privileging of culture – and cultural difference’ as a ‘primary analytical tool’ (citing McConaghy 1998).

6. This is a likely outcome of policies aimed at attracting (older) postgraduate and doctoral students.

7. Women are identified by codename.

8. Rose’s previous country is not identified to protect her anonymity.

9. Most international students coming to New Zealand shift hemispheres, seasons and climates. New Zealand’s climate is temperate but varied; this study took place in a city characterised by its frosty winters and cool summers. Despite considerable efforts to encourage retrofitting of older New Zealand homes (for example, see http://www.energywise.govt.nz/), landlords are not required to provide heating for their tenants or to insulate older houses (Department of Building and Housing, personal communication, 14 October 2010). Although university halls of residence are warm and well insulated, most do not accommodate students’ partners or families.

10. Sharon used this term in reference to non-Asian New Zealand students.

11. I draw here on the definition of ‘Asia’ provided by the Asia New Zealand Foundation (http://www.asianz.org.nz/the-asian-region): the broad region of the world bordered by Pakistan in the west and Japan in the east; the People’s Republic of China in the north and Indonesia in the south (accessed 18 May 2011).

12. Xena’s situation was complicated: although she was a citizen of Ireland, her partner was a citizen of the UK with which New Zealand has a reciprocal healthcare agreement. Also, Xena had lived and worked as a healthcare professional in the UK for many years.

13. Sawir et al. (2009, 46) note that although no education export countries provide all international students with quasi-citizenship rights, European Union (EU) members ‘come close, in their treatment of students who are citizens of other European nations’. Sawir et al. make no comment on the implications of EU members’ provision or otherwise for the welfare of international students’ partners and families.

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References


**ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS**

Los “hogares” y el estar “en el hogar” en Nueva Zelanda: la creación de lugar de las mujeres en la educación superior internacionalizada

La investigación sobre las experiencias de estudiantes en la educación superior internacionalizada en su mayoría asume la autonomía de los y las estudiantes y privilegia sus individualidades públicas. La investigación en Nueva Zelanda no es la excepción. Se ha prestado poca atención a la vida de los y las estudiantes más allá del contexto del aula; cómo las políticas nacionales y las prácticas institucionales dan forma a sus experiencias cotidianas y a las vidas en el “hogar” en forma similar y diferente. Además, se le ha prestado escasa atención al género, o éste ha sido considerado solo como un tema secundario, y las personas cuyas parejas o miembros de la familia son estudiantes internacionales son invisibles. Este artículo se propone abordarla inatención relativa al género en la investigación de la educación internacional y la invisibilidad de las mujeres cuyas parejas son estudiantes internacionales. Se basa en datos de entrevistas con 17 mujeres que participaron en un proyecto de investigación doctoral más amplio durante 2005 y 2006. Las mujeres eran o bien inmigrantes o estudiantes internacionales o tenían parejas que eran estudiantes internacionales. El artículo utiliza al “hogar” como un cristal a través del cual se examina la creación de lugar situada e internacional de las mujeres y los factores que promovieron o impidieron un sentido de pertenencia en Nueva Zelanda. Establece conexiones entre los relatos de las mujeres sobre “hogar” y el sentirse “en el hogar”, y las políticas, la política y las prácticas institucionales más amplias en la educación superior en Nueva Zelanda.

**Palabras claves:** educación superior; internacionalización; mujeres; creación de lugar; hogar; Nueva Zelanda
「家」与「以新西兰为家」：国际化高等教育中女性的地方营造

对于接受国际化高等教育学生的研究，多半假定学生的自主性，并青睐他们的公共面向，而新西兰的研究亦是如此。学生在课堂之外的生活鲜少受到关注，例如国家政策以及制度实践如何形塑学生相异或相仿的每日经验与「家庭生活」。此外，性别议题极少受到关注，抑或仅被视为次要的考虑，而某些家人或配偶为国际学生的人们则受到忽略。本文便致力于探讨国际化教育研究相对而言较少关注的性别面向，以及对于伴侣为国际学生的女性视而不见的问题。本研究运用针对十七名曾在2005及2006年间参与各类博士研究计划的女性之访谈资料，这些女性不是本身为移民或国际学生，便是身为国际学生的配偶。本文使用「家」的视角检视这些女性的情境化跨国地方营造，以及增进或抑止其对于新西兰的归属感之各项因素。本文将连结女性对于「家」和感觉「在家」的解释，以及更为广泛的新西兰高等教育政治、政策和制度实践。

关键词：高等教育、国际化、女性、地方营造、家、新西兰