

Re-remembering and re-imagining relational boundaries: Sibling narratives of migration

Jenny Altschuler

Abstract

The paper explores how white South African migrant and non-migrant¹ siblings portray the impact of migrations on their sense of self, family and positionings in relation to society. It demonstrates that, although conditions of migrancy expose siblings to particular politicized discourses, they do not determine the positions siblings adopt in relation to such discourses. Instead, to make sense of how aspects of self that are deemed more personal and the political intersect, it is important to take account of negotiations of similarities and differences that relate to prior family dynamics.

This paper explores how experiences of political events and migration informs sibling identities and relationships by examining how fourteen white² South Africans, nine migrant and four non-migrants, portray the impact of migrations to Britain on their sense of self, family and positioning in relation to society. It draws on a wider study in which twenty participants, nine migrants and eleven non-migrants, five parents and four siblings were asked how migration had affected themselves and their families. The analysis was informed by social constructionist and psychoanalytic interpretations of identity, and employed a biographical interpretative approach to narrative analysis, using the guidelines suggested by Hollway and Jefferson (1997, 2000) and Rosenthal (1993, 1998).

The decision to focus on siblings relates to academic and clinical concerns about gaps in research and theorizing. The stories I hear in psychotherapy have alerted me to the importance of attending to migrants and non-migrants' real and 'imagined' encounters with one another, including encounters between siblings (Altschuler, 2002). However, until recently, most of the literature focused almost exclusively on the positions of migrants and generalized notions of 'the family' rather than attending to the diversities that occur within families (Kofman, 2004; Papastergiades, 2000). Where particular family positions were addressed, attention was paid to intergenerational relationships with little reference to sibling relationships.

¹ This paper adopts the term non-migrant to denote people who chose or felt forced to remain in South Africa. I recognize that 'non' has been used to assign inferior status, as in the apartheid-based use of non-white. However, it is less unwieldy than terms like 'those who chose or felt forced to remain', and allows for more agency than the commonly used 'left behind'. Although the term transnational is often used in such situations, I have not used it as it fails to differentiate between conditions of migrancy.

² The terms black, white and coloured are not empty. They signify the replication of oppressive racializing practice. However, they are used here without additional punctuation to signify their role under apartheid as both problematic and taken for granted.

However, the paper reflects a more personal interest too. I migrated from South Africa in my early twenties. As such, I have an insider's experience of growing up as white under apartheid and deciding to leave the country, of how migration can affect sibling relationships, and how constructions of migration can alter as siblings move across the life course and in response to socio-political change.

The larger study addressed three questions: how apartheid-based migrations have informed white South Africans' sense of self and family; how this has been affected by memories of cross-racialized relationships within the home, of the triadic relationship between white mother, black nanny and white child; and the consequences of the dismantling of apartheid. However, this paper focuses more particularly on the implications of migration for sibling identities and relationships. In the interests of extending understandings of the racialization of white identities, particular attention is paid to the meanings ascribed to leaving and living in South Africa, rather than life in Britain. It is divided into three sections. The first locates the research in terms of the history of apartheid, social constructionist and psychoanalytic interpretations of identity, migratory literature and methodology. The second is devoted to analyzing the data and the third to implications for understandings how the boundaries of identity are affirmed and contested in other contexts.

1. Locating the research

The paper is predicated on the understanding that to make sense of any research analysis, it is important to take account of how what is presented as knowledge is 'situated' (Davies and Harre', 1990). As such, this first section locates the analysis in terms of apartheid, the theoretical framework, academic treatment of sibling migrations and approach to methodology.

1.1. Migration and apartheid-based South Africa

The white South African migration offers a particularly useful context for exploring the symbolic constructions of boundaries. South African society has long been characterized by cultural, racial and political diversity. Racist ideologies were a part of life well before the Nationalist government assumed power in 1948 (Beinhart, 2001). Between 1948 and 1994, when the Nationalist government came to power, a series of laws were adopted, enshrining apartheid-based racialization as central to the ways in which identities were constructed. The dismantling of official apartheid transferred political power to African National Congress (ANC), a party which represents the majority of the population. Amongst the consequences of the move to greater democracy was that it increased visibility of the idea that instead of representing absolutes, racialized categories had been culturally constructed to maintain racialized privilege. Although this shift is likely to have affected all white South Africans, it meant that those who continued to live in the country found themselves relatively subordinated in a country that is redefining itself as African (Steyn, 2001).

As Anderson (1990) suggests, the collapse of a belief system does not only bring down systems of social roles and the identities that go with it: it can create a sense of dispossession, a sense of not knowing who one is within the new system. Rather than the dismantling of apartheid meaning that white South Africans cannot draw on racialized categories in constructing identities, it has meant internal controls have to be set in place in order to censor previously taken for granted racist thoughts and speech in warranting identity claims (Billig, 1999). As such, the research required a theoretical framework and methodology equipped to take account of how events in the outside world might inform and be informed by more internalized experiences of self and other.

Migration occupies a pivotal yet contradictory position within the psyche of all who have lived in South Africa. Until 1994, white history was premised on the belief that the country had been a haven for people fleeing religious and political oppression. Examples include the flight of the French Huguenots, the “Great Trek” of Afrikaner settlers to escape Colonial rule, the migration of Jews from Eastern Europe and Germany, and the more recent migration from Central and North Africa (Beinhart, 2001). Migration was also a powerful vehicle of oppression: economically and psychologically, white privilege was consolidated through black migrant labour, through the employment of men in the mines and women in white homes. However, with important exceptions, as in the work of Bernstein (1994), Israel (1999), Pollock (1994), Tatz, Arnold and Heller (2007) and Unterhalter (2000), little academic attention has been paid to how such legacies of privilege have impacted on white South Africans who have been separated through migration.

1.2. Combining social constructionist and psychoanalytic approaches to identity

There are considerable differences between the views of all who write from a social constructionist stance. Drawing on the discursive ideas of Foucault (1980), instead of viewing identity as static and essentialized, social constructionist approaches view identity multiple, fragmentary and contingent on particular circumstances, as exemplified in the notion that identities represent ‘social positions’ (Davies and Harre, 1990). Meanings, social realities, knowledge and emotions are seen to arise from social processes and interactions within particular socially structured contexts (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1994). As such, it is well suited to interrogating how individuals make sense of the experiences that took place when they were younger and when the ideology that dominated the country in which they had lived was very different.

However, despite the shift away from static notions of identity, most commonly held views of the self and other, and of the individual and society are grounded in the logic that despite altered circumstances, core aspects of identity remain the same (Hall, 1998). Derrida argues: “‘Broken’ versus ‘unbroken’ stories expose the modernist compulsion to generate order from disorder, and the anxiety produced when a fixed point of origin cannot be supplied” (1978, p279). Just as pressure to fix identities exposes the fragility of a sense of identity beyond the reach of play, narratives that relate to migration (Falicov, 1998) and the changes introduced by dismantling apartheid (Nuttall and Coetze, 1998) attest to limitations of the postmodernist impulse to frame identities as only ‘play’.

One of the criticisms of discursive approaches is that they marginalize agency and economic, structural and material factors (Hall, 1998). However, rather than viewing the material as irrelevant and underplaying agency, discursive ideas have served to highlight the real effects of discourse on the lives of individual agents. Although discourses might expose people to certain ways of understanding and imagining experiences, it is not assumed that they determine the positions individuals adopt in relation to discourses. Instead, to make sense of identity claims, we need to consider how they intersect with other modalities of identity too (Crenshaw, 1989; Brah, 1998).

A concern of added significance for analyzing migrations from apartheid South Africa is that prioritizing language can lead to ignoring modes of cultural transmission that operate through the unsaid, through innuendo, censorship and experiences that lie beyond conscious memory (Fuchs, 2000). My own ambivalence about addressing the consequences of these migrations was heightened as friends, family and colleagues veered between being appalled at my decision to undertake this research to sharing painful stories of struggling to balance their commitment to family with a commitment to political views.

As such, it was important to draw on theories that offer a framework for interpreting issues that seem uncomfortable or risky. Because psychoanalytic theories place particular emphasis on interpreting the unsaid, and since, as Phoenix (2004) suggests, they are ‘sedimented’ into what is currently regarded as common sense, I decided to combine social constructionist and psychoanalytic interpretations to analyze the identity claims that underpin narrating.

My personal experience and understanding of the literature led to the view that an understanding of ‘othering’ is integral to analyzing how siblings respond to the ‘broken stories’ posed by migrations. One reason is that, as Mitchell (2003) indicates, “The sibling is *par excellence* someone who threatens the subject’s uniqueness. The ecstasy of loving one who is like oneself is experienced at the same time as the trauma of being annihilated by one who stands in one’s place” (p10). The power of these earlier negotiations means that they may inform subsequent negotiations of similarities and differences. Another is that, because the research was restricted to migrations where some close family remained in South Africa, one of the issues migrants and non-migrants needed to deal with related to the consequences of migratory decisions.

Othering is also important because the widespread practice of employing black women to care for white children meant that for most white children the processes of attachment and separation were inseparable from racialization, from learning to ‘become’ white by dis-identifying with a highly significant carer who came to be seen as black (Cock, 1989; Ginsburg, 2006; Pollock, 1994). Moreover, the dismantling of apartheid has meant that racist attitudes that might previously have been taken for granted are now seen as shameful, requiring individuals to take on potentially fractured notions of self. One way of responding to this change is to acknowledge aspects of personal racism that have not been considered before. However, acknowledging aspects of the self that are shameful is rarely easy, so that another way of responding is to project what is hated and feared onto another, such as other white South Africans. Consequently, in researching these issues and writing this paper, it has been important to guard against assigning what I find uncomfortable onto others as well.

In discussing othering, I am drawing on the discursive view that othering entails a process of identifying oneself with a chain of signifiers deemed desirable while identifying those one subjugates with the oppositional (Hall, 1998; Minh-ha, 1989). Earlier discursive constructions of othering tended to under theorize subjectivity and obscure how the variety of subjectivities were reproduced through the interplay between institutional regimes of power. This has shifted considerably as evident in greater engagement with how people are constructed as ‘Other’, along dimensions of gender, race, class and sexuality and/or through cultural processes that involve language as an instrument of power (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994).

These developments have given race, ethnicity and racism a formative rather than expressive place in political, social and psychic life (Phoenix, 2004). They have also contributed to calls to re-position whiteness as central to debates on racialization and racialized, and calls for a nuanced understanding of whiteness that differentiates between whiteness as racial ideology and the subject positions open to and adopted by white people (Giroux, 1997). Within the field of migration, these developments have contributed to a greater commitment to unpack “how gender and ethnicity circulate, articulate, are embedded and produced in representations of collective identity and local particularity” (Fortier, 2000, p4).

Psycho-analytic interpretations theorize identification, difference and lack in terms of desire for the ‘Other’, disavowal and defense. The earlier formulations framed identification and othering, including processes that pertain to racialization, as products of internalized individual dynamics and a human instinct to seek confirmation from an in-group by denigrating, opposing and threatening the out-group (Davids, 2003). Rather than restricting identification and othering to internalized dynamics and human instinct, current formulations relate these processes to the social discourses that circulate within the context in which people live (Benjamin, 1998; Frosh, 2005). Despite their differences, both social constructionist and psychoanalytic approaches position individuals as playing an active role in constructing cultural identities.

1.3. Academic treatment of sibling migrations

The concepts of diaspora and transnationalism dominate the current migratory literature. Diaspora tends to denote the consequences of movement and political struggles to define the local, and the relatively abstract idea of a distant homeland and diasporic identity (Brah, 1998). Transnationalism is used to denote how individuals “forge and sustain the multi-stranded social, economic and political relations that link together societies of origin and settlement, creating transnational social fields that cross national borders” (Basch, Glick Schiller and Blanc-Szanton, 1994 p6). They offer different but complementary insight into migratory experiences, because, as Olwig (2002) suggests, the concrete social and economic transnational practices inform more symbolic notions of home. Similarly, a home is unlikely to become a nodal point in concrete relations unless it receives validation through narrative and other forms of symbolic interchange, and comes to represent an abstract place of identification.

In this context, the diasporic literature is useful because, in common with most white South Africans, all participants were able to claim an ancestry from elsewhere. The country's colonial past means that Britain represents a form of cultural 'home' regardless of whether or not there is any family connection (Steyn, 2001; Israel, 1999). As the research pertains to a past that was informed by a much discredited political structure, the diasporic literature offers a way of interpreting claims that reflect a desire for a less contested site of belonging. On the other hand, because the sample was restricted to families where migrants remain engaged with non-migrants in South Africa, the transnational literature offers insight into encounters between migrant and non-migrant kin.

These literatures have drawn attention to such issues as the tensions of readjusting to a new context and of becoming a family that spans more than one geographic and national locality, and how in some contexts, migration seems to reflect a flight from difficult family positionings (Chamberlain and Leydesdorff, 2002; Gardner and Grillo, 2002). As with the South African literature, fewer publications address the intersection between family and politicized differences. An exception is Al-Ali's (2002) analysis of interactions between family members who were separated by the war in Bosnia. She argues that in highly politicized contexts, the tensions that are located between those who left and those who remained may reflect individuals' own ambivalence about migration and the country of their birth.

One of the themes to dominate these literatures centres on the dualities of loss and gain. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Aktar (1995) proposes that loss of access to the relationships and concrete objects that have been intrinsic to subjectivity challenges the newcomer's psychic organization, creating a sense of flux reminiscent of earlier separation-individuation phases. As such, migration may trigger feelings pertaining to far earlier loss. Echoing Bhabha's (1994) notion of a 'third space', he also argues that disruption can lead to psychic growth, to a 'third individuation': it brings aspects of identity together in a different way, allowing for the development of an altered relationship with self, family and/or the nation.

On one side of this continuum, some like Burck (2005) argue that an over emphasis on loss has had the effect of obscuring the gains posed by migrating and what contributes to alleviating experiences of loss. On the other, Falicov (1998) and Swirsky (1999) argue that loss and disarray accompany all forms of migration. Their work draws attention to how in contexts in which individuals are defined in ways that are not congruent with how they see themselves, aspects of the host culture or aspects of self that relate to one's culture of origin may be rejected to minimize the sense of living within a 'broken story' (Derrida, 1978). Both processes involve denying or censoring the pain presented by disruption to an anticipated sense of self and family.

Despite the value of such publications, important gaps in theorizing and research remain. For example, most of the literature frames the family as central to transgenerational transmissions of cultural patterns and values. However, this view does not take account of a need to relinquish aspects of the past and memories of family to fit in with the present or of the possibility that family experiences may have led to decisions to migrate (Chamberlain and Leydesdorff, 2004). Until recently, relatively little attention was paid to

the ‘double space’ (Zlotnick, 1995) of migration, to the dis-location migration can present to non-migrants. This omission may reflect uncertainties about family boundaries, such as whether families can be considered ‘units’ when some members live elsewhere and start their ‘own’ family of procreation. However, as migration frequently entails leaving vulnerable family members behind, it may also reflect an unwillingness to expose uncomfortable consequences of migration, including disparities in the opportunities and responsibilities of migrants and non-migrants. There are signs of increased interest in this area as evident in the focus on transitional experiences of migration and the small but growing literature devoted to what are termed ‘the left behind’ (Militiades, 2002; Parnas, 2003).

Similarly, until recently, the literature tended to focus on generalized notions of family, obscuring what might be particular to sibling relationships. Again there are important exceptions (Chamberlain, 1999; Fog Olwig, 1999; Song, 1997). This pattern is not confined to migration as, with some exceptions (Dunn and Kendrick, 1982), sibling relationships tended to be largely absent from psychological and sociological theorizing. However, recent publications attest to growing recognition that relationships between brothers and sisters are integral to learning to negotiate the space between the self and other (Cole, 2003; Edwards, Hatfield, Lucey and Mauthner, 2006; Mitchell, 2003).

1.4. Approach to methodology

These theoretical priorities led to the decision to select a methodology that allowed for a ‘symptomatic reading’ (Althusser, 1971) of the data, for reading text as much for its absence as what is said, and listening to the gaps in which the forgotten or unsaid makes itself heard, a biographical interpretative approach to narrative analysis (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997, 2000; Rosenthal, 1993, 1996). The approach treats participants as the actors and originators of meaning within the stories they present, as well as recognizing that such stories are ‘dialogically’ (Bakhtin, 1981) produced in encounters with a researcher.

Interviews involved asking participants an open ended question, allowing them to present their experience as a unified whole and prioritize issues they regard as important to themselves and the question they have been asked to address. In this case, I asked participants about a particular issue: migration. However, as the question relates to events that took place twenty or thirty years before it is similar to life history analysis as it required participants to reflect on the course of their lives. A series of probes were used subsequently to explore issues that had not been raised and/or inconsistencies.

This style of interviewing meant that it was possible to track how constructions changed over the course of an interview, exposing the multi-dimensional nature of migratory experiences to research scrutiny and, therefore, well suited to research that is primarily explorative. It allowed for an analysis of the chosen as well as silenced content of narrating, of how narratives of migration are spoken through cultural discourse as well as the less known and unconscious.

The sample was selected by a process of snowballing. Because the research was concerned with how constructions of self, family and migration were informed by the legacies of

racialized privilege, the sample was restricted to white South Africans and migrations that took place before apartheid was dismantled, prior to 1991. One migrant said that she was “born” Indian and later “declared white South African[s]”. She was included in the sample as her account reflects an extreme version of the ‘performative’ (Goffman, 1959) nature of white identities.

Although the analysis of experiences of family was based on individual accounts, the sample included two pairings of a migrant and non-migrant sibling from the same family. Rather than treating their accounts as a way of authenticating the data or analysis, they are used to contrast individual constructions of the experience of a sibling, with the actual accounts of siblings.

The analysis involved attending to how language was used and referenced in asserting and refuting identity and agency claims (Hall, 1998; Foucault, 1980; Wetherell, 1998). This was the case in analyzing abstract accounts of migration, apartheid and the family, as well as stories depicting responses to the dilemmas posed by negotiating personal experiences and memories in the context of ‘canonical narratives’ (Bruner, 1990) of what is acceptable to say in the present.

Informed by an interest in how experiences of the world inform and are informed by their inner worlds, the analysis also drew on psycho-analytic concepts to account for the investment in taking up a certain position rather than another in relation to particular discourses (Hollway, 1997). This meant paying attention non-discursive markers like gaps and changes in pitch in narrating.

2. Data Analysis

Although the analysis focuses on narratives selected from interviews with 3 migrant and 2 non-migrant siblings, it was also informed by analysis of the accounts of the rest of the sample. Participants tended to structure their narratives in three ways. Although some prioritize one strategy, more usually this varied depending on the issue under discussion and whether the narratives were presented toward the beginning or end of the interview. One strategy involved positioning migration as a site of loss, another as an opportunity to claim a more comfortable positioning in relation to family and/or the socio-political context, while a third involved framing migration as having led to disruptions that were relatively easy to transcend. I illustrate these differences by focusing on narratives selected from interviews with migrants who were the only siblings in their family to have left, migrants who joined or were joined by another sibling, and non-migrant siblings.

2.1. On migrating alone

Charlie (55) migrated about thirty years ago, leaving his parents and only sibling, Tom, in South Africa. He relates his decision to leave to apartheid. Rather than focusing primarily on government policies, he focuses on the tension between his desire to treat members of his extended family with respect and his anger about their racist attitude. Charlie positions his relationship with his brother Tom, who agreed to participate too, as unaffected by apartheid. Instead, he talks about the guilt of having left at a particularly traumatic time of

his life and that this guilt has increased because Tom carries primary responsibility for caring for their increasingly frail non-migrant parents. At this point, Charlie re-introduced the political, showing how, in highly politicized contexts, personal and politicized aspects of self may become conflated:

Charlie: “I think there are *so* many things - *notwithstanding* South African politics - that you *never* work out with your family basically - and you *never will* in the future - um - and so you know that’s something I’ve had to live with but I think that - in a South African context - it’s *doubly* important - cause you’re reconciling *all* those sorts of things - every time you you go *back* – but there is never *enough* time to - sort of *put* the jigsaw together – you just have to do a *little* bit and *acknowledge* that there are *limits* in what you - you can do.”

The narrative begins by separating the personal and political. Repeated pauses, use of the extreme case formulation (Potter, 1996), “*so* many things - *notwithstanding* South African politics”, and reference to it being “*doubly*” important to reconcile family difference suggest that, despite his attempts to separate the personal and the political, Charlie’s feelings towards his brother intersects with identifications to the country. The narrative is fairly abstract and appears well-worn. However, the marked emphasis and extreme case formulations, “you *never* work out [...] you *never will*”, he remains troubled by the impossibility of reconciliation. Although Charlie focuses on the family, he hints at the shame of white privilege. For example, the link between country and family before noting “every time you you go *back*” and the lack of time “to – sort of *put* the jigsaw back” suggests a desire to return and rework the past, both personally and politically, and an acknowledgement that what he imagines to be ‘back there’ no longer exists.

This narrative illustrates the ambiguity of the losses incurred and struggle to negotiate how much to retain those who are physically absent as an ongoing psychological presence on one another’s lives. It also shows how, because reunions take place in the knowledge of another separation, aspects of self may be censored to make up for gaps in time and space. Paradoxically, as Miller and Stiver (1991) suggest, it can introduce an artificiality that militates against the very intimacy siblings wish to achieve. Charlie also alludes to the opposite, to the hope that the “double” importance of reaching some form of reconciliation in terms of the personal and political means limited time together might force or enable them to say things that would otherwise not be said.

As shown later, in reflecting on the disruptive nature of migration, his brother mentions the problematic timing of Charlie’s migration, his resentment at having to assume most of the care for their parents, and past relational difficulties. This means that although the brothers have not been able to “*put* the jigsaw back” they have a shared understanding of the issues that underpin their relationship.

Jeannette (60) frames her decision to leave as a desire to escape “that reprehensible regime”. Like Charlie, much of her interview focuses on the loss, as evident in repeated reference to her difficulties in dealing with the challenges posed by migration, and how aspects of her own sense of “displacement” have been transmitted to her children. Curious

about her omission of her only sibling, Michael, from most of her account, I ask her about him after a long and abstract discussion about their careers:

JA: I must say this is a huge question but erm - what impact do you think your being here and your having left has had on your relationship with him?

Jeanette: Oh – yes (*pause*)

JA: What do you think it's like for him?

Jeanette: Erm - yes - (*more slowly*) yeah - I think – I - I sort of lie low with him when I'm with him – because - although he gets to hear of something or other I do - you know – erm - he's - he's proud - in the way my mother was too. Ah - I think the real feeling is that - erm - I don't know how to put this. He hasn't had these opportunities - and his life hasn't worked out so well - I mean in the - in the public sense.

The interchange begins with a question I describe as “huge”: how living apart and “having left” has influenced her relationship with Michael. Jeanette acknowledges the question but says no more. On being prompted to elaborate, she introduces the first of several narratives positioning migration as a way of protecting herself from being dominated by her brother's negative views of her. In contrast to the free flowing style of her earlier account, this interchange is slower and replete with hesitations, fillers and qualifiers, suggesting an attempt to collect her thoughts, and/or ambivalence about including memories about their relationship in her account. Her style of responding may also reflect uncertainty about how to speak about implications I regard as “huge”.

Jeanette emphasizes differentials in power. There is no indication of what she means by “opportunities” or how Michael's life hasn't “worked well [...] in the public sense”. However, the discussion about their careers framed migration as offering her far better professional opportunities than would have been available in South Africa. However, the qualifier “I mean in the – in the public sense”, and reference to having to “lie low” with Michael as well as her mother suggest there are other areas in which he is more powerful than her. “[L]ie low” also implies a need for protection, suggesting her altered self-image is still too fragile to bear the consequences of such confrontations.

She consolidates this view by positioning him as someone who can “come in and savage” her children with hurtful comments, as well as humiliate her. This is exemplified in a subsequent narrative in which she says “in – in South Africa” she was regarded as “very very plain”, and that when with her brother feels drawn back into the position of “a sort of plain freak”. No link is drawn between the embodied nature of a “plain freak” and racialized humiliation. However, by locating the positioning as a “plain freak” in South Africa as well as her brother's eyes, the narrative draws a parallel between the embodied nature of racialized humiliation and being humiliated by her brother.

Jeanette indicates that, to avoid being drawn back into past positions, she takes work with her when returning to South Africa, as it allows her to mark her positioning in relation to a different social and professional system. Although she speaks of having found more “adult” ways of relating to one another, she returns repeatedly to the risks of being in her brother's presence. Whilst I would not want to question the validity of her experience,

underplaying such shifts in positions may reflect a defense against the possibility that living in closer proximity could allow for a less fragile resolution of their difficulties.

2.2. On shared decisions to migrate

Although all participants referred to legacies of prior migration, participants who shared the decision to migrate with another sibling were more likely to draw on this legacy, framing migration as a way of maintaining rather than disrupting family relationships, and/or supporting claims to a marginal position in relation to white society.

Melanie (44) constructs her decision to move to Britain where her brother Jonny was living as a way of replicating what Byng-Hall (1985) calls a family script. She draws on legacies of Jewish exile and oppression in relating her migration to her grandparents' migration from Lithuania. On being asked why she decided to settle in Britain, she replies: "the only thing was - my brother". There are indications that becoming parents and professional and social encounters in Britain have altered aspects of her relationship with her brother. However, she frames living in the same town as integral to helping her authenticate the decision to leave. Although she has considered re-emigrating, she is unwilling to relinquish the possibility of living in close proximity to her brother, suggesting that their relationship is integral to maintaining a sense of continuity in the context of what might otherwise represent highly significant personal, sociological and environmental change.

Rachel (47) presents a more extreme account of a shared sense of subjectivity. Within the first few minutes of meeting, she mentions having been born "Indian" but reclassified "white" at the age of five. As below, repeated reference to her experience as "we" and "our" illustrates the taken for granted nature of her assumption that core aspects of experience were shared with her older and only sister Mira:

Rachel: "There wasn't - there wasn't anyone who - who - you know had our lives - I mean it was - a **fact** - it wasn't sort of - making oneself **different** - it was just a fact".

The secrecy surrounding reclassification meant that the only person who could authenticate the reality of her past was her sister, with "our lives" presenting her experience as a victim and beneficiary of racialized privilege as shared. The only time Rachael refers to difference in relation to racialization is when reflecting on the dismantling of official apartheid:

Rachel: "She said - '*it's all over now. (long pause)* that's finished now - I *never* want to go back there.' (*long pause*) It didn't - I remember standing in the queue - to vote - to vote thinking - that there was *no-one* that I could say to 'was it like that for you too?' Because there wasn't anyone in that queue - who'd had this bizarre - double life really - it was a - life of lies."

In contrast to Mira's declaration, "it's all over now", Rachael's use of "never" indicates that for her, the dismantling of apartheid can not eradicate the fear of exposure and

discomfort about reclassification. Although the statement “no one else” shared that “bizarre - double life really” positions their experience as shared, “I didn’t” refutes her sister’s suggestion “that’s finished now”.

In commenting on this narrative, it is important to acknowledge that on meeting her, I found myself wondering whether her claim to whiteness was ‘valid’. My guess is that, based on the emphasis she placed on having been “trained to be white”, she was alert to the possibility I may wonder about her claim to whiteness. On re-reading the transcripts and listening to the tapes, I was reminded of a particular desire to be liked by her and anxiety about intruding. Neither of us referred our initial encounter. However, my analysis of her account cannot be understood without considering how unacknowledged and un-languaged interchanges like this influenced the process of interviewing and analysis because it confronted me, and I assume her, with the legacy of our racialized trainings. It also forced me to recognize how despite aspiring to high levels of self reflexivity, what I present as knowledge will reflect my own blind spots, in relation to white privilege as well as to my own positioning as a sister.

2.3. On decisions to remain

Falicov (1998) asserts that migration offers those who leave a way of exercising agency, requiring those who remain to re-work their views of themselves to frame decisions to remain as empowering. As reflected below, this is likely to have added resonance when non-migrants continue to live in a highly politicized country.

Both Greg (56) and Heather (50) framed their lives as unaffected by migration. They each have two siblings in Britain and two in South Africa and construct remaining as a way of meeting family responsibilities and participating in rebuilding in the aftermath of apartheid. However, like many, but not all, of the men I interviewed, Greg prioritizes the political in presenting his account. For example, he frames his engagement in opposing apartheid as authentic and his migrant siblings’ involvement in similar activities in Britain as a response to assumptions of what being “white South Africans” meant in a different context.

Although Heather refers to the political it refutes the idea that migration might have represented a form of protest against apartheid, as with many but again not all the women, she tends to prioritize the personal. For much of her account, she problematizes migrations, as evident in framing migration as an extreme way of separating from their parents. She offers a graphic description of how each time her migrant brother returns to South Africa, he has a blow-up with their parents. In describing this event, she places herself as an observer, without any reference to her own role or what such reunions might represent for her.

However, on being asked how her understanding of migration might be particular to South Africa, Heather introduces more uncomfortable contrasts between the positions of migrants and non-migrants. Remaining is described as having forced her to continue to engage with the legacies of apartheid, with living in close proximity to “immediate poverty” and “immediate suffering”. Rather than powerless, she positions herself as agentic in saying this led her to choose a career where she could address some of

damaging consequences of apartheid. Focusing on Kate, a sister with whom she describes herself as particularly close, she goes on to say:

Heather: She doesn't have to deal with this anymore - she doesn't have to deal with this complexity - so whatever complexity you're dealing with there - it's OK. It's different - but it's not this un-resolvable kind of complex - difficult thing.

The statement Kate does not "have to deal with this" suggests far greater ambivalence about the decision to stay. Although the generalizing "you" acknowledges the "complexities" migrants face, she frames such complexities as less significant than those posed by remaining, positioning the decision to remain as more heroic than migrating. On being asked to say more, she mentions the "uneasy" nature of her position as "white in Africa": although she celebrates the change in government, she quotes its policy on issues like HIV/AIDS in saying it does not engage with the concerns she views as important.

Less than thirty minutes before the second interview, Heather calls to cancel, saying she has little to add but agreed to meet regardless. Shortly after starting, she questioned my motivation for undertaking this research. I paused before stopping the tape and sharing some personal information about my decision to migrate. I was relatively guarded in what I said, and viewed my response as indicative of a need to balance a desire to be respectful and establish a more dialogic interchange with a theoretically informed commitment to avoid prescribing the data. However, my response may reflect ambivalence about exposing troubled aspects of my own experience to another South African, particularly someone who, unlike me, decided to stay.

With Heather's permission, I resumed taping. This more dialogic interchange seems to have allowed her to introduce an issue she had not discussed before, the consequences of remaining for her role as a parent. She talks of needing to protect her children from being "contaminated" by the racist views of someone in her extended family. However, rather than focusing purely on others, she refers to her own position in discussing the need to protect children from "how awful what we know is". She deals with this troubled subject position by returning to the advantages of remaining, such as being able to engage in "healing this country".

She continued by speaking of a desire to ensure that the stories her children hear have been worked through, includes shame and pain, and are "articulated through Mandela's voice - not through a hateful old lady". Although this suggests a projection of racist views onto "a hateful old lady", acknowledgement of the awfulness of what she knows indicates a concern about relying on her own voice to avoid her children being contaminated by the past. This indicates that, amongst the "unresolvable" disparities introduced by migration is that her migrant siblings have been able to parent in a way that is less informed by the legacy of apartheid.

In contrast, Tom, Charlie's brother, frames migration as having damaging consequences for sibling identities. He portrays his decision to remain as a reflection of unfavourable comparisons he and others have always drawn between himself and his brother: his brother's choice was "too daunting for me". His pre-occupation with attempts to construct

similarity suggests that compounding the difficulties in transcending gaps in geographic space is the loss of opportunity to resolve sibling differences that pre-date migration.

Tom: So then when he went I think that was a huge loss for me.

JA: So how much older than you was he?"

Tom: He's about - I think he's 3 years (*long pause*) I think there's always been - I suppose - sorrow and quite a bit of resentment that he left and wasn't here as a bigger brother to help me through many things.

The simplicity of "a huge loss" reflects the enormity of his brother's absence. My reference to age seems to introduce the relationship between birth order and family roles as he then expressed longing for the strength this "bigger" brother might have provided. However, the hesitation and qualification evident implies ambivalence about acknowledging his loss. Underlying this statement of loss is a statement of difference: Charlie is framed as a much missed resource but there is no suggestion that his "bigger brother" might miss out on what he could have offered as well. The same term is used in discussing his brother's stance against apartheid

Tom: "I've got this huge big brother memory of him that would just come down so hard on anyone who – in any way was – racist or stereotyped people or anything like that."

Repeated use of the language of childhood, "big brother", suggests that the image Tom retains of their relationship remains informed by the experience of a far younger person. Although he does not label himself the object of his brother's scrutiny, the reference both here and elsewhere to his brother having "come down hard" on anyone who appeared to be racist suggests that despite his brother's absence, he remains concerned about the possibility of being found wanting in his eyes.

Here too there are indications of change in positionings. However, although remaining in South Africa is described as enabling Tom to establish less racialized relationships both at work and socially and to alter his positioning in relation to their parents, prior construction of their relationship appears to frame these newer positions as less authentic than the old.

3. Conclusion

The narratives discussed here indicate that decisions about whether to migrate or stay in one's country of origin can have profound consequences for sibling identities and relationships. They illustrate the value of attending to the 'hidden dialogicality' (Bakhtin, 1984) of accounts, to the 'real' and imagined voices of siblings informing experiences and understandings of migration. In this context, because the research involved looking back in time, narratives about the disruptions posed by migration represented narratives about changes in the life course as well. Similarly, because apartheid was dismantled just over ten years before these interviews took place, portrayals of movements across geographic space and the life course reflect responses to the dismantling of the system that had granted white siblings privileged status.

Constructions of migration were far from uniform, with portrayals varying between presenting migration as having problematic consequences for identities, as allowing for a more comfortable positioning in relation to family and/or country, and as having posed relatively little disruption to anticipated identities. Although there were some suggestions that men tended to prioritize the political and women the personal in presenting their accounts, this was not the case for all.

Similarities between the issues prioritized by migrants and non-migrants suggest that it is not only those who leave who are forced to find themselves living in a different 'imaginary geography' (Said, 1990), but those who choose or feel forced to remain. Some narratives tended to prioritize similarities between migrants and non-migrants suggesting that although conditions of migrancy might expose siblings to particular discourses, they do not determine the positions siblings adopt in relation to such discourses.

However, participants also portrayed the position of migrants and non-migrants as markedly different. For example migration was framed as assigning primary responsibility for dealing with the legacy of apartheid and caring for increasingly vulnerable parents to the position of non-migrants. The tendency to emphasize difference was more apparent when relational dynamics were portrayed as problematic, suggesting that to make sense of migratory narratives, it is important to consider how certain aspects of identity intersect with other modalities of identity (Crenshaw, 1989; Brah 1998). There were also suggestions that, as with Al-Ali's (2002) research, some of the issues ascribed to sibling relationships reflect a more internalized personal ambivalence about decisions to leave or remain in South Africa.

Although these findings will be relevant to other contexts too, what is particular to highly politicized contexts is that aspects of self that are deemed to be more personal can become conflated with the political. For example, regardless of whether apartheid was mentioned or not, it informed constructions of self and other. Although this was not necessarily conscious, the highly politicized nature of South Africa also meant that it was possible to draw on language that pertains to family when constructing claims that pertain to the political.

In the larger study, sibling narratives were marked by a greater tendency to focus on the political than was evident in intergenerational narratives. As discussed earlier, current understandings of sibling relationships indicate that these are far more integral to adult identities than had been recognized before. This view is exemplified in Mitchell's (2003) proposal that sibling relationships represent a threat to the individual, as the sibling is someone who is in some ways the same but "stands in one's place" (p10). This work suggests that where a siblings' adult decision is regarded as highly significant, the meanings associated with reaching similar or different decisions are likely to be imbued with feelings that pertain to far earlier negotiations of similarity and difference.

In addition, although membership of a particular age cohort does not determine the significance associated with certain issues or responses to particular events, the 'social and cultural context in which relationships are conducted provide particular discourses and subject positions through which practices and meanings are constructed' (Edwards, Hadfield, Lucey and Mauthner, 2006, p122). As apartheid was a dominating discourse

during apartheid, these discourses are likely to be particularly significant to warranting identity claims. Consequently, reaching different migratory decisions can challenge how white South African siblings like me view our selves.

In emphasizing the intersection between the personal and political, it has not been my intention to invalidate what was said or to suggest that other aspects of participants' accounts were less significant. Instead I have tried to explore how particular aspects of identity get taken up or refused in highly politicized contexts. There are considerable differences between the othering that underpins migratory and sibling identities and racialization. However, this research suggests that greater attention to how siblings 'do' and imagine similarities and differences in contexts of migration can extend understandings of other forms of othering as well. This paper cannot provide insight into what might account for reworking the boundaries between what is considered to be other and self. However, references to the consequences of the dismantling of apartheid and changes in the life course echo Frosh (2006) and Butler's (2003) proposals that reworking of the boundaries between self and other requires recognizing that the other is as real and vulnerable as oneself, and being prepared to engage with incapacitation versions of the self.

References

- Akhtar, S. (1995). 'A Third Individuation: Immigration, Identity and the Psychoanalytic Process' *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 43(4): 1051-1084.
- Al-Ali, N. (2002) 'Gender relations, transnational ties and rituals among Bosnian refugees' *Global Networks* 2(3): 249-262.
- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books.
- Anderson, W.T. (1990). *Reality isn't what is used to be*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Anthias, F. and Yuval-Davis, N. (1992). *Racialized Boundaries*. London: Routledge
- Altschuler, J. (2002). Narratives of migration in therapy *The Psychologist* 17: 12-16.
- Bakhtin, M.M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four Essays* (ed). Holquist, M, Austin: Texas Press.
- Basch, L.G., Glick Schiller, N. and Blanc-Szanton (1994). *Nations unbound: transnational projects, post-colonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nation-states*. Langhorne, PS: Gordon and Breach.
- Bhavnani, K.K. and Phoenix, A. (1994). *Shifting Identities, Shifting Racisms*. London: Sage.
- Beinart, W. (2001). *Twentieth Century South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Benjamin, L.J. (1998). *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- Berger, P. and Luckman, T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Bernstein, H. (1994) *The Rift*. London: Johnathan Cape.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *Location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Billig, M. (1999). *Freudian Repression* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brah, A. (1998). *Cartographies of diaspora* London, Routledge .
- Bruner, J. (2004). Life as narrative. *Social Research* 71(3): 691-701.

- Burck, C (2005) *Multilingual Living: Explorations in language and subjectivity* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Butler, J. (2004) *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- Byng-Hall, J. (1985). The family script: a useful bridge between theory and practice. *Journal of Family Therapy* 7: 301-5.
- Chamberlain, M. (1999). Brothers and sister, uncles and aunts: a lateral perspective on Caribbean families. In Silva, E.B. & Smart, C. (eds.) *The New Family?* London: Sage.
- Chamberlain, M. and Leydesdorff, S. (2004). Transnational families: memories and narratives. *Global Networks* 4(3): 227-241.
- Cock, J. (1989). *Maids and madams*. London: The Women's Press.
- Coles, P. (2003). *The Importance of Sibling Relationships in Psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac Books.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 138-167.
- Dalal, F. (2002). *Race, Colour and the Process of racialization* Hove: Brunner-Routledge.
- Davids, F. (2003). The Internal Racist Paper. *Bulletin of British Psychoanalytic Society* 39(4): 1-15.
- Davies, B. and Harre, R. (1990). Positioning: the discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*. 20(1): 43-63.
- Derrida, J. (1981). *Positions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dunn, J. and Kendrick, C. (1982). *Siblings: love, envy and understanding*. London: Fontana.
- Edwards, R., Hatfield, L., Lucy, H, and Mauthner, M, (2006), *Sibling Identity and Relationships: sisters and brothers*, London: Routledge,
- Falicov, C, (1998), *Latino Families in Therapy*, New York: Guilford Press,
- Fortier, A,M, (2000). *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity*, Oxford: Berg.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (ed. Gordon, C). Brighton: Sussex.
- Frosh, S. (2005). *Hate and the 'Jewish Science' Anti-Semitism, Nazism and Psychoanalysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Frosh, F. (2006). Recognizing the Other. Conference Presentation at the 'Imagine' Conference, Tel Aviv.
- Fuchs, A. (2002). Towards an Ethics of Remembering: The Walser-Bubis Debate and the Other of Discourse *The German Quarterly* 75(3): 235-246.
- Gardner, K. and Grillo, R. (2002). Transnational households and ritual: an overview. *Global Networks* 2(3): 179-190.
- Gergen, K.J. (1994). *Realities and Relationships*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ginsburg, R (2006) The View from the Back Step: Black and White Children Learn about Race in Johannesburg's Suburban Homes. In Gutman, M. and de Coninck-Smith, N. (eds.) *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children. An International Reader*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press
- Giroux, H.A. (1997) Rewriting the discourse of racial identity: Towards a pedagogy and politics of whiteness. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(2): 285-320.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.

- Hall, S. (1998). Introduction: Who needs 'Identity?'. In Hall, S. & du Gay, P. (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.
- Hoffman, E. (1991). *Lost in translation* London, Minerva Press.
- Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (1997). Eliciting Narrative Through the In-depth Interview *Qualitative enquiry*, 3(1): 53-70.
- Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2000). *Doing qualitative research differently*. London: Sage.
- Israel, M. (1999). *South African Political Exile in The United Kingdom*. New York: McMillan.
- Klein, M. (1975). *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works*. New York: Delta.
- Kofman, E. (2004). Family-Related Migration: A Critical Review of European Studies. *Journal of Ethnic Migration Studies* 30(2): 243-262.
- Miller, J.B. and Stiver, I.P. (1991). *A relational reframing of therapy Work in Progress*. Wellesley, MA: Stone Paper Working Paper Series.
- Miliatides, H.B. (2002). The social and psychological effect of an adult child's emigration on non-immigrant Asian Indian elderly parents. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 17, 33-55.
- Minha-ha, T.T. (1989). *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Post Coloniality and Feminism*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Mitchell, J. (2003). *Siblings, Sex and Violence*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Nuttall, S. and Coetze, C. (1998) *Negotiating the past: the making of memory in South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Olwig, K. (2002). A wedding in the family: home making in a global kin network. *Global Networks* 2(3): 205-281.
- Papastergiadis, N. (2000). *The turbulence of Migration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Parrenas, R.S. (2003). The Care Crisis in the Philippines: Children and Transnational Families in the New Global Economy. In Ehrenreich, B. and Hochschild, A.R. (eds.) *Global woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Phoenix, A. (2004). Extolling eclecticism: language, psychoanalysis and demographic analysis in the study of 'race' and racism. In Bulmer, M. and Solomos, J. (eds.) *Researching race and racism*. New York: Routledge.
- Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction*. Sage: London.
- Rosenthal, G. (1993). Reconstruction of life stories Principles of selection in generating stories for narrative biographical interviews. *The Narrative study of lives* 1(1): 59-91.
- Rosenthal, G. (1998). *The Holocaust in Three Generation*. London: Cassell.
- Said, E. (1990). Narrative and geography. *New Left Review* 180: 81-100.
- Song, M. (1997). 'You're becoming more and more English': investigating Chinese siblings' cultural identities. *New Community*, 23(3): 343-362.
- Steyn, M. (2001). *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be: White identity in a Changing South Africa*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Swirsky, R. (1999). Migration and Dislocation: Echoes of Loss within Jewish Women's Narratives. In Brah, A., Hickman, M. and Mac an Ghail, M. (eds.) *Thinking Identities: Ethnicity, Racism & Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Tatz, C., Arnold, P. and Heller, G. (2007). *World's Apart: The Remigration of South African Jews*. Dural Delivery Centre: Rosenberg Publishing.

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1999). *South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Vols 1-5. London: Rider.
- Unterhalter, E. (2000). Gendered diaspora identities: South African women, exile and migration (1960 – 95). In Ali, S., Coate, K. and Wa Gogo, W. (eds.) *Global feminist politics: identities in a changing world* London, Routledge.
- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretive repertoires: conversational analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse and Society* 9(3): 387-412.
- Zlotnick, H. (1995). Migration and the Family: The Female Perspective. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 4 (2-3): 253-271.

Correspondence

Jenny Altschuler
altschuler@compuserve.com