



African Mothers' Experiences of Raising 'Afro-Kiwi Kids' in Aotearoa / New Zealand

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Abstract

This article presents findings from qualitative research data gathered from a group of ten refugee-background and immigrant African mothers living in Auckland, *Aotearoa*/New Zealand. The research study—*From Mama Africa to Papatūānuku: The experiences of a group of African Mothers living in Auckland*—focused on the mothers' narratives and their perceptions of their experiences of mothering within the cultural and social contexts of *Aotearoa*/New Zealand, and how they set about raising their 'Afro-Kiwi kids' (a term used by several of the women to describe their children's dual identity) in their adopted country. Findings are specific to the cohort's experiences and the Auckland community in which they have made new homes for themselves and their families. The role and place of African women migrants in resettlement and research into their mothering is limited, and this research was cognisant of addressing this gap in the literature. The study acknowledged the strong role women have within their families as guardians of culture and language, and an underlying rationale was to increase understanding of the ways mothers contribute to new migrant and refugee-background communities and to uncover some of the

challenges they face. Identifying central themes from the narratives was a significant aspect of this research. Identifying and reporting on the themes provided an inherently flexible approach and enabled the researchers to work collaboratively with the women to make sense of and interpret the data. Themes identified included: integration, language, connections with Māori culture, cultural reproduction and mothering practices.

He aroha whaerere, he potiki piri poho
A mother's love is the greatest treasure¹

Introduction

Migrant mothering extends borders, both ideologically and materially. Migrant mothers are often torn between mothering in ways that resemble how they were mothered or conceiving of other ways of mothering to 'adapt' and settle in to their new country (Kuroczycka Schultes, & Valliantos, 2016). The African migrant and refugee-background² mothers' narratives, from which this article draws, often expressed how they adapted their mothering practices to the bicultural context of Aotearoa/New Zealand: a context that acknowledges Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi³ as the foundation document of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Māori as tangata whenua (first peoples of the land). Connection to Māori was a major theme and is discussed in some detail.

Kačkutė (2016, p.61) argues that mothering in a foreign land is a site of "intense negotiations" pertaining to everyday occurrences, such as how to style your child's hair, what clothing they should wear and what schools they should attend. Feeding the family, prenatal care, birth, infant care, managing financial challenges, employment and unemployment, social isolation and lack of health care are common issues faced by mothers who settle in a new country. The mothers in this article mentioned many of these challenges and how the 'intense negotiation' required to address such challenges often placed them in precarious positions of marginalisation and stigmatisation.

Themes from this research are similar to those of several other recent research projects on African women in New Zealand. In the work of Adelowo (2012), for example, she discusses themes which fit within the stages of an African motif-rites of passage where themes such as 'loss of family support', 'ethnic food', 'maintaining cultural identity' and racism

¹ This proverb or *whakatauki* is a well-known saying in Māoridom and is often used to discuss the importance of mothering.

occur. These themes were also evident in the interviews with the mothers in this research (Connor, Elliott, & Ayallo, 2016).

Context of the Study

The findings presented in this article are from a study with a group of ten migrant and refugee-background African mothers living in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand. The study was interested in exploring how the mothers perceived the New Zealand cultural and social context of motherhood, and the challenges and issues they faced as they ‘settled’ into their new homes. To contextualise the study, a brief description of Aotearoa/New Zealand is provided, along with a brief background of African migration and the demographic background of the women in the study. A brief overview of the study methods is also provided.

Brief description of Aotearoa/New Zealand

Aotearoa, meaning ‘The Land of the Long White Cloud’, is the *Māori* name for New Zealand, which is situated in the South Pacific Ocean and made up of two main and one small island: the North Island, the South Island and Stewart Island. Its total land mass of around 268,680 square kilometres makes it slightly larger than the United Kingdom. The first people to arrive in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand may have originated from Eastern Polynesia, and arrived in a series of migrations sometime between 700 and 2000 years ago. Over time, these settlers developed into a distinct culture divided into *iwi* (tribes) and *hapu* (sub-tribes), now known as *Māori* (King, 2003).

Aotearoa/New Zealand has a population of just over 4.6 million people. Most of the country’s population is of European descent, with approximately 74 percent identifying as European. The indigenous *Māori*

² The term ‘refugee background’ is used because refugees coming to New Zealand under the government humanitarian programme are given permanent residence on arrival and are therefore no longer refugees and have the same rights and responsibilities as other New Zealanders.

³ *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, the Treaty of Waitangi, was signed between the British Crown, Queen Victoria’s representative, Lieutenant Governor Hobson, and 48 Northland *Māori* chiefs on 6 February 1840. It is regarded as the foundation document of *Aotearoa*/New Zealand and the formalised bicultural partnership between the indigenous *Māori* and colonial English. The articles of the treaty address powers of sovereignty, governance and protection of *Aotearoa*/New Zealand and its peoples. Two versions were signed, one in English and one in *Māori*. The differences between the two versions have been a long-standing site of misunderstanding and contention (King, 2003).

are the largest non-European ethnic group, accounting for 15.5 percent of the population. Asian ethnic groups make up 11.8 percent of the population and 7.4 percent of people are of Pacific Island decent⁴ (Statistics NZ, 2015). Africans make up less than 1 percent of the population (Statistics NZ, 2015). Before the late 1990s, immigrants from Africa tended to be white South Africans. In the 2013 census, approximately 18,000 people identified as African, although the majority of African migrants continue to be white South Africans (Lucas, 2008).

African Settlement in Aotearoa/New Zealand—Skilled Migrants and Refugees

In its guide to understanding how migrants and refugees enter New Zealand, Immigration New Zealand (2017) notes several distinctions between the two groups which are in line with international understandings. In summary, the key difference is that migrants choose to leave their homeland and settle in a country of their choice, whereas refugees do not choose to leave their homeland. They flee in response to a crisis.

Refugees come to New Zealand in three ways. New Zealand currently accepts 750 refugees as part of an annual quota system referred to Immigration New Zealand by UNHCR. Included in this number are up to 75 places for women at risk. All refugee arrivals complete a six-week orientation programme at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre before being resettled. The orientation programme includes information about New Zealand life, laws and expectations, and access to English language classes. All new arrivals are also screened for any special needs they might have in relation to education, social support, physical and mental healthcare and the like (Marlow & Elliott, 2014).

In addition to its quota of refugees, New Zealand also considers applications from asylum seekers who claim refugee status on arrival or after a length of time in the country. Up to 300 people from a refugee background or refugee-like situations are accepted each year under the Refugee Family Support Category, the main vehicle for refugee family reunification (Immigration NZ, 2017). These groups do not receive the same entitlements as those arriving as part of the annual quota.

⁴ These percentages amount to more than 100 percent because people can identify with more than one ethnic group (Statistics NZ, 2015).

The majority of African refugees in New Zealand are from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Congo Brazzaville (Yusuf, 2015).

Study Aims

The aim of the study *From Mama Africa to Papatūānuku: the experiences of a group of African mothers living in Auckland* was to explore African migrant and refugee-background women's experiences of motherhood in New Zealand. The study acknowledged the strong role women have within their families as guardians of culture and language, and an underlying rationale for the study was to increase understanding of the ways mothers contribute to new migrant and refugee-background communities and to uncover some of the challenges they face.

Method

The study was given ethics approval⁵ to utilise the in-depth interview as its central qualitative mode of investigation. The interview contexts were informal and sociable, with each of the interviews being conducted at a place convenient to the women, often at the participant's home. It can be beneficial for interviews to take place in the natural context of the activities that are going to be discussed (in this case mothering), as the interview discussion is likely to be more realistic and enriched by information about the context (Drever, 1995). All interviews were audiotaped with the participants' permission and the transcripts returned to each interviewee to check for accuracy.

The research was underpinned by a feminist theoretical perspective where gender and gender relations were conceptualised as key concerns.

Participants

Informed consent was gained prior to conducting the interviews. The consent forms included information about the interviews being audiotaped and transcribed. The participants were assured of confidentiality and that they would be identified anonymously as 'Participant A', 'Participant B' etc. Therefore, no names are used in this article as the African community is relatively small and even pseudonyms could be used to identify the women. Recruitment was made via the researchers' extensive networks and through snow-balling.

⁵ This study was approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (3.6.2015) to (3.6.2016). UREC Registration Number: (2015-1021)

Demographic Background of the Mothers

There is a relatively small population (approximately 100,000) of people from Africa living in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand and the majority live in Auckland, the largest urban area in the country (Statistics NZ, 2015). The women in the study emigrated to *Aotearoa*/New Zealand as either refugees, asylum seekers, skilled migrants or partners of skilled migrants. Their countries of origin include: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The women were all aged between 20 and 45 years and had at least one biological child. Some also had adopted or fostered children or step-children and a few of the women were carers for their nieces and/or nephews. The children ranged in age from two to eighteen. Most of the women were in either full-time or part-time employment and worked in a range of occupations including: social work, community development, nursing, caregiving and early childhood work. Several of the women were also studying towards a tertiary qualification. There was a mix of married women, women living with partners, and separated, divorced or widowed women raising children on their own.

Integration: Connections and Challenges

Integration from Africa into *Aotearoa*/New Zealand involved several opportunities, as well as challenges, for the mothers interviewed. Increasingly, there is an expectation that new migrants will integrate with the culture(s) of the country they settle in. In New Zealand, this context is complex. *Aotearoa*/New Zealand is a multicultural country which takes a moral position of having a bicultural foundation, acknowledging the Treaty of Waitangi and the partnership that was established during the colonial period between Māori and the British Crown (King, 2003). For new migrants, the bicultural context can be perplexing. However, as the process of acculturation unfolds and there is more direct contact between Māori and *tauiwi* (non-Māori), many migrants learn about the Treaty of Waitangi in the work place and via education and training, and begin to understand the importance of honouring a treaty that purports to acknowledge the rights of the indigenous people.

For the African mothers in this study, the emphasis placed on the importance of Māori culture within the sociocultural context of New Zealand was viewed as a positive and valuable part of the host society they were adapting to. Generally, migrants prefer an integration style of migration, where there is some maintenance of their culture of origin but also some adaption to the culture(s) of the host country. Within New

Zealand, where the notion of ‘host culture’ is erroneous as the population is so multicultural, newly formed relationships are multidimensional. Building new relationships and adopting a multifaceted identity that corresponds with the mother’s own values can be theorised as ‘selective acculturation’ (Sampson, Marlowe, de Haan, & Bartley, 2016). This approach to integration enabled the mothers to maintain ties with their own ethnic communities while learning to integrate into Auckland’s multicultural society.

Cultural similarities and social interactions between Māori and migrant mothers, knowledge about the Māori culture and language, and knowledge about the Treaty of Waitangi were all important factors in successful settlement. The women were also keen to learn about New Zealand European culture and the English and Celtic origins of the country’s settler population.

This research identified three central themes relating to integration as expressed by the women: language, connections with Māori culture, and mothering Afro-Kiwi kids. Each of these themes are explored here with reference to both the literature and the mothers’ own words.

Integration and Language—Nurturing the Mother Tongue and Fostering English

Civic and social integration is paramount for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as they settle into their new homes. For many there is an immediate need to learn or improve their English language skills. Indeed, language skills are a primary factor in immigrants’ and refugees’ career development and job success (Hebbani & Preece, 2015).

New knowledge and skills are needed to negotiate new communities and to network with other migrants and organisations that can assist with settlement (Nash, Wong, & Trlin, 2006). All of the mothers talked about language difficulties and the emotional adjustments and struggles they experienced adapting to a new identity for both themselves and their children. Several of the mothers perceived English language acquisition and proficiency as being vital to finding jobs, but were also conflicted about needing to retain their ‘mother tongue’ and for their children to maintain fluency or, if born in New Zealand, to learn the language of their home country. Similarly, Barkhuizen (2006), in a study of language-related experiences of Afrikaans-speaking South African immigrants living in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand, found that there was a competing need to maintain both linguistic and cultural roots versus the need to integrate. Kačkutė (2016) argues that mothering in the mother’s native tongue, as opposed to

the language of the host country, can be read as a source of maternal power and agency. She argues that speaking in one's native language and engaging in culturally familiar practices will safeguard a sense of identity and will also nurture a migrant identity.

All the mothers in this study spoke English, yet several mothers commented that their 'African English' accents sometimes limited their interactions with non-Africans and also that their accents could be barriers to employment. Adelowo (2012) found similarly in her research, and noted that the most common response to 'African English' was that, when Africans spoke, they were ignored and/or corrected rather than being listened to and listeners responding to the context of their words.

Fluency in one's own language is essential for cultural identity, and loss of language has been identified as a stressor that can affect immigrants' mental health (Adelowo, 2012). Certainly, many of the mothers were concerned about maintaining their mother tongue, not only for themselves but also for their children:

Language is one thing that I think, as a mother, I'm failing my children a bit because I'm not talking to them in my mother tongue or making an effort for them to learn and that would have been different if I was back home because it's the language that would be around, they will immersed in it. When I talk to my friends, other mothers, who are able to teach their children their mother tongue, I feel a bit guilty that I'm not doing that as much. (Participant H, personal communication, August 12, 2015)

In addition to their diverse indigenous languages, all of the women in this study were able to converse in the English language and read written English. Women from the Democratic Republic of the Congo also spoke French. However, for the Congolese mothers, their children were often more confident within the medium of English and would often interpret for their families. Mitchell and Ouko (2012), in their research into Congolese refugee families living in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand, also found that children were sometimes asked to act as interpreters, a role shift that parents said changed the power dynamics in their relationships with their children. Similarly, Deng and Marlowe (2013), in their research with South Sudanese refugees, reported that the children would often interpret for their parents who, on occasion, had to pull their children out of school to interpret for them at medical appointments and the like.

Several of the women in this study commented on how much they valued the New Zealand system where responsibility for education is shared between the family and the school:

It's great here because children are taught to think for themselves, critical thinking happened right at the beginning and parents have a greater relationship with school, so you feel like you are part of that community, you can go and talk to teacher. Where back home the teaching happens just at school. (Participant H, personal communication, August 15, 2015)

However, when mothers have limited English, the communication between school and home is hindered, marginalising the women.

Communication with the school and teachers is hard if you cannot speak English. There is no interpreter. The teachers just talk, and all you do is say yes, yes to everything because you do not understand. In most cases my husband would go because he could speak English. (Participant A personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Gebremariam (2015) argues that schools can play a significant role in supporting refugee families by facilitating connections between them and the wider community. In her study on Ethiopian former refugee families, Gebremariam found that the parents sought out support within the community to help select schools and to find ways to participate in their children's education. Despite best intentions though, the parents often faced several barriers, including, English proficiency, limited educational background, financial hardship and availability of time, especially for single mothers.

The role of language as a tool for acquiring cultural competencies and interpreting 'cultural codes' enabled the 'Afro-Kiwi kids' to build a sense of belonging in their new home. Nevertheless, as many of the mothers perceived, being bilingual or multilingual was advantageous not only for personal development and self-esteem but also in terms of developing 'intercultural awareness'. Strzelecka-Misonne (2016) argues that children with an awareness of the language and culture of both their country of origin and their host country are in a unique position to become interculturally aware, enabling them to enjoy the benefits of living in a culturally diverse environment such as Auckland.

Integration and Connections with Māori Culture

The indigenous Māori population of approximately 723,500 makes up 15.5 percent of the total population of New Zealand (Statistics NZ, 2016). Since the Māori Renaissance, a social movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s, there have been significant efforts to revive *te reo Māori* (Māori language) and *tikanga Māori* (Māori culture). The Māori language became an official language in 1987, and there are now Māori radio stations and television channels, and Māori cultural events that showcase traditional Māori performing arts (Keegan, 2017). In the 1980s an important early childhood education innovation known as *kōhanga reo* (language nests) was set up to teach children the Māori language. Māori-medium and Māori and English bilingual classrooms were also introduced at primary and secondary schools, though less than 15 percent of all Māori students are enrolled in Māori-medium education (Keegan, 2017). In the 1990s the use of the Māori language increased in mainstream education and most schools teach some Māori language and culture.

Several mothers mentioned that their ‘Afro-Kiwi kids’ would help them with not only their English but would also teach them Māori *waiata* (songs) and other aspects of Māori culture they learnt at school. One woman spoke of her daughter teaching her the Māori words for colours and with a palpable sense of pride sang a short song which is often taught in New Zealand pre-schools:

Ma is white, *whero* is red, *kakariki* green. *Pango* is black, *mangu* is too, AEIOU. *Kowhai* is yellow, *pakara* brown, *kikorangi* blue... AEIOU. (Participant A, personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Another woman spoke about her son learning his *pepeha*, a Māori device for introducing the self in *te reo Māori* (Māori language).

When my boy had to learn his *pepeha* I was happy as he had to find out where he came from. He didn’t want to know before. (Participant D, personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Learning about Māori culture and the cultural similarities between the indigenous Māori and African migrants was highlighted as one way of enhancing integration into New Zealand society by acting as a ‘social bridge’. Yusuf (2015), in his research into the Somali migrant community in New Zealand, found that those with a relatively in-depth knowledge of

the cultural and social structure of the Māori people felt it helped them with their integration and resettlement. The participants in Yusuf's (2015) study talked about several similarities between Māori and Somali culture that they could readily relate to. These similarities included: respect for elders, the importance of *whānau* (family), having knowledge of *whakapapa* (genealogy) and offering *manaakitanga* (hospitality).

I know common greetings and also you see Māori names in the hospitals, words like 'whānau room' where relatives of the sick patient sit, or when filling forms you see 'iwi' which means what is your tribe which is the same for Somalis being very tribal, this is something we share with the Māori. We also have similarity in the family structure, especially with respect to the elders and family hierarchy so these are the similarities we have seen. (Participant cited in Yusuf, 2015, p. 74)

The value of respecting elders was expressed by several of the mothers. Elders were revered as storytellers and imparters of wisdom. Discussing the importance of elders within an African context, Adelowo (2012) noted that family issues were dealt with by community elders and spiritual leaders in the community. Elders also told stories of the ancestors. Respect for one's elders is also a fundamental aspect of Māori culture because the *kaumātua* (male elders) and *kuia* (female elders) provide leadership and preserve traditions and knowledge.

The area of health care was another potential area of connection between the migrant mothers and Māori communities. Many of the women in this study reflected traditional African perspectives on health, which include mental, physical, spiritual and emotional stability for one's self, family and community (Tuwe, 2012). This perspective is very similar to Māori perspectives on health, which include: *taha tinana* - the physical dimension; *taha hinengaro* - the mind; *taha wairua* - the spiritual dimension; and *taha whānau* - family (Ministry of Health NZ, 2015).

Similarly, there are areas of connection between attitudes towards mothering within traditional Māori society and African culture. The responses of the women in this study echoed an *Igbo* and *Yoruba* (Nigeria) proverb which states that "it takes a whole village to raise a child". The basic meaning of this proverb, which exists in different forms in many African languages, is that child upbringing is a communal effort. Everyone in the family participates, especially the older children, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and even cousins (Healey, 1996). This perspective is similar

to child-rearing in Māori society, which is carried out within the context of the wider *whānau* (family), with children being raised by multiple ‘parents’, including biological parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and siblings (Connor, 2015).

Integration is a process by which migrant and refugee-background people are accepted into and become part of the host society, both as individuals and groups. This process is effective when newcomers can see connections between their worldviews and those of some (if not all) communities in the host society. This is opposed to them always being regarded as the ‘others’ who do not belong. For the mothers in this study, similarities between their perceptions of parenting of those of Māori society contributed significantly to their effective integration into New Zealand society.

Integration and Mothering ‘Afro-Kiwi Kids’

Gedalof (2009) argues that a feminist concept of reproduction which includes not only childbirth and motherhood, but also the work of reproducing heritage, culture and structures of belonging, enables feminist migration scholars to tell more complicated narratives about the place of reproduction in migration. The work of reproducing culture and structures of belonging, such as the passing on of culturally specific histories and traditions regarding food, dress and family, were paramount to the mothers in this study.

Many of the migrant mothers discussed cultural differences and attitudes towards postnatal care and support. One seemingly benign example where cultural differences and misunderstandings occurred was around the practice of New Zealand mothers gifting pre-used baby clothes to their new African neighbours or fellow parishioners:

I found it strange they were giving me second-hand clothes for the baby. In Africa, it's completely different; it's taboo. What are they thinking? I can't put my child in second-hand clothes. So, I said, “No I don't want second-hand clothes.” I think some felt offended but to me it was a big thing. It has to be very close family who can give clothes; not someone you don't know. But now I say, “Oh that's okay”. (Participant G, personal communication, August 15, 2015)

For Gedalof (2009) an embodied practice such as the choice of clothing for babies and children reflects on the migrant mother and her children's

place within both the collective migrant community identity and the ‘host’ country identity. Several mothers mentioned that their ‘Afro-Kiwi kids’ were adapting to cultural differences via their clothing as another way of integrating and finding acceptance amongst their peers.

Our African kids are copying too much Kiwi kids - I mean Kiwi culture. Even our African churches the boys they don’t dress formal and even the girls; you know back home you can’t dress in jeans and sandals to go into church. If it’s the pants, you put on loose pants; that formal, like going to the Court, if it’s church [it’s the same]. (Participant G, personal communication, August 12, 2015)

Adelowo (2012) also found that ‘Afro-Kiwi kids’ and teenagers were choosing to be ‘casual’ in their dress to fit in with New Zealand standards and to avoid the embarrassment of wearing African patterned fabrics, which often provoked comment and, in some cases, ridicule.

While adaptation to ‘Kiwi’ apparel such as jeans and hoodies could help youth fit in to New Zealand culture, it could also be problematic as there have been reports of African youth being stopped by the police because their clothing was that typically worn by gang members (Nakhid, et al., 2016).

Several mothers mentioned that they and their ‘Afro-Kiwi kids’ experienced racism and discrimination when they wore their traditional garments. In addition, Yusuf (2015), for example, found that many of the Somali women in his research experienced racism because of their Islamic traditional clothing, which includes items such as hijabs and head scarves. Indeed, Muslim women who wear any sort of head-covering have been at the forefront of discrimination and the manifestation of Islamophobia. Consequently, Muslim women in the West may fear the loss of their freedom to wear hijab in order to avoid discrimination and, in extreme cases, physical abuse (Carland, 2011). The hijab and head scarves, though bounded within the framework of religious expression, have in recent years been re-contextualised within discourses on migration and integration. The religious framework highlights individual and collective rights while any reference to ‘culture’ is value-laden, stressing the politics of identity and producing demarcation lines between ‘them’ and ‘us’ (Gresch & Sauer, 2012).

Clothing and hair styles are important performative sites in which culturally specific identities are re-constituted (Gedalof, 2009). For the

mothers and ‘Afro-Kiwi kids’ who chose to wear Western fashions, a new way of embodying cultural identities was enabled where they actively negotiated the complexity of difference. Conversely, where they chose to wear authentic traditional clothing, this was viewed as one way of affirming cultural identity and maintaining ties with the past.

Creating a home was an important aspect of cultural reproduction in the personal narratives of the mothers. A home anchors and embodies identity and creates continuity between the past and the present. Within the home and domestic space, the creation of meals was essential to mothering ‘Afro-Kiwi kids’. Several mothers in this study spoke about the cultural meaning of food. The majority talked about having the ‘pot’ ready for guests and welcoming visitors with food and drink. This aspect of African culture is very similar to Māori culture, where providing food and hospitality for guests is known as *manaakitanga* and is a cultural practice through which respect and generosity is shown for others.

Cooking food for their ‘Afro-Kiwi kids’ was not only a means of providing nutritious meals, but also a way of connecting to African values and identity:

I have to give my children cooked food. I can’t finish the whole day without cooking. I have to stand at the pot. I mean at the stove and cook for the kids. That’s part of being a mother. Sometimes it’s hard like maybe you are so tired and have a headache. Because they are yours they are still going to wait for a cooked dinner. (Participant G, personal communication, August 12, 2015)

Some also spoke of ‘ethnic’ food as one way of holding on to cultural traditions. As Valliantos (2016) argues:

Food is a highly salient tool used to signify identity. It is a social object, laden with social values that are consumed; in turn, through digestion, people incorporate a food’s meanings and morals. (p. 123)

While food symbolised cultural values for the mothers in this study, it was also seen as a way of integrating into New Zealand society. The mothers would sometimes experiment with ‘Kiwi’ style food and would try to follow the advice of midwives and Plunket (childcare and parenting) nurses. However, many found the advice they received conflicted with their

own cultural values around which food was best for their children and families.

When they were little, none of my kids got bottle fed, I breast fed and that's what I would have done. In terms of food, I've got this (how do you call it?) sorghum flour, use that as porridge. That is what children are fed when they are little. Import that or sometimes you have that in the South African shops. I fed that to the children. I was able to get that here. I've seen what my Aunties and my Mum did, so, yeah, it is something familiar. I looked for it here and fed it to my kids. (Participant I, personal communication, August 15, 2015)

The food practices of the migrant mothers in this study revealed not only the gendered social norms of their home countries but also cultural guidelines around food for pregnant women and their infants. In their own ways, the mothers, while desirous of integration into New Zealand culture, contested hegemonic paediatric discourses to feed their babies and children at set times with prescriptive food choices. Resisting the pressure to conform to expectations around food consumption for their children was often stressful for the women and a potential source of tension between them and their midwives.

When it came to feeding my children, I followed my customs; values and cultures. Thank God I didn't listen to the midwives, because ten years ago they advised you the bottle is more important. Bonding, whatever, all that stuff wasn't existed but I followed my custom and breast fed my babies. (Participant B, personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Vallianatos (2016) argues that migrant mothers negotiate personal, familial and ethnocultural beliefs in their everyday food practices and that it is important that they impart what it means to be a member of their respective communities through food practices. This was evident in the narratives of the mothers in this study. Their food practices were embedded within their own ethnocultural beliefs and practices, and they all spoke of the need to have access to traditional foods and to reproduce traditional methods of food preparation.

A significant challenge for many of the migrant mothers resettling in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand is the lack of support of an extended family.

Discussing this with regard to Somalian refugees, Yusuf (2015) found that many are widowed women who face the burden of caring for a large family without the support of the traditional extended family. In other cases, families may face adjustment issues associated with changing gender and intergenerational roles. Limited extended family support also impacted many of the women in this study:

Having my daughter was really hard. I had to stay in the hospital for a month. I was so scared I'm going to lose my daughter and then when I had her, I couldn't trust anyone even to take care of her. Back then the hospital system wasn't as good as today. They were unfriendly, the midwife and everyone. Back home you go back to your mum's home even if you're married then your mother will look after you for 40 days. At home, everyone's responsible. The fathers have a role to be responsible and the mum is there, the neighbours there, aunt and uncles, grandparent; you're not on your own. (Participant F, personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Similarly, another refugee mother also commented on the challenges of not having extended family support:

In Africa, the kids belong to everybody – anyone can look after the child. But in New Zealand the child is only yours. It is challenging when you are new to New Zealand and do not know much about this culture. (Participant B, personal communication, August 15, 2015)

In her discussion of the lack of the support of an extended family for African mothers in New Zealand, Adelowo (2012) notes the importance of a child being raised in a village, meaning that care and nurturing is administered by every family member. She argues that, as there are no isolated parents or families in Africa, it is very stressful for most African women in New Zealand, especially if they are first-generation migrants, to learn how to juggle domestic and paid work, career and family commitments without the support they are used to.

For us when we grow up, everyone is a parent, you know your neighbour is a parent, your aunt and your uncles is a parent; you're not the only one who's responsible, the whole

community's environment support there existed, like if they see anyone on the street, they are disciplining you, so you know you worry [as a] parent. Also you're worried of your neighbours, you know! You don't want to do things that is not accepted by the environment, by the community but here, all on your own. (Participant F, personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Conclusion

The role and place of women migrants and scholarly accounts of their roles in the migration process are relatively under-theorised. As Gedalof (2009) argues, feminist migration scholars can draw on a theoretical concept of reproduction to tell more complicated stories about the place of reproduction in migration. Migrant women's subjective positions as 'mothers' can be helpful in creating a new sense of belonging in their host country. Migrant mothers have distinctive experiences within the specific sociocultural contexts they inhabit, and their experiences can provide understanding and insight into the gendered roles of migrants. For the women in this study, 'motherhood' was a dominant element of their identity and social reproduction was identified as being entrenched in their mothering, through which they transmitted ethno-cultural practices and language.

While the mothers spoke about some of the challenges of being migrant mothers, including the loss of support from the extended family, they all also spoke about how much they valued being a mother and raising their 'Afro-Kiwi kids' in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand.

I enjoy the fact that I gave birth to another human being, whom I love unconditionally. I enjoy passing on the experience of life to my children. I love being a mother and also having a meaningful career. (Participant E, personal communication, August 12, 2015)

For many women, migration means a loss of autonomy and freedom, even though they may have been escaping situations of political upheaval in which their lives were endangered. For others, migration initiates possibilities of self-improvement despite the difficulties faced in the new country (Bailey, 2012). Migration from Africa to *Aotearoa*/New Zealand involved a number of opportunities as well as challenges for the mothers interviewed for this research project. Overall, African mothers' experiences of raising their 'Afro-Kiwi kids' reflected successful settlement into their

New Zealand society, particularly when intercultural communication and connections were strong, when opportunities were available for relationships with indigenous groups and social and educational groups that were open to inclusiveness, and when there was no attempt to enforce the cultural norms and values of New Zealand *Pākehā* (European) culture. However, research on relationships between African refugees and migrants and indigenous people/communities is underdeveloped in both *Aotearoa* /New Zealand and Australia.

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