MIGRATIONS OF THEORY, METHOD AND PRACTICE: A REFLECTION ON THEMES IN MIGRATION STUDIES (Review article)

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Abstract.

In this review article, I offer some reflection on three themes in migration research, namely, the categorisation and quantification of migration, the role of trauma and distress in such categorisation, and the feminisation of migration. I was prompted to explore these three themes after reading a recent publication on migration in southern Africa (edited by Kok, Gelderblom, Oucho and Van Zyl, 2006). In this paper I raise these as three areas that appear to be determining the boundaries of the discipline of migration studies in ways that raise familiar concerns about representation, claims to objectivity and the perpetuation of inequalities. Although these are by no means new debates in the social sciences, they are ones that appear to have been excluded from migration studies in southern Africa with worrying implications for the role that the discipline can play in the repressive management of migration.

INTRODUCTION.

This article is a response to my reading of the recent HSRC publication **Migration in southern Africa: Dynamics and Determinants**. For me, the process of reading the book, given its general nature, was one that has generated reflection that is about migration as an area of study more generally. I should say at the outset that this makes my comments somewhat unfair on the authors of the book as I am engaging with issues far outside of its reach. However, the issues are ones that are pertinent to migration studies as a multidisciplinary and emerging area of research and I therefore hope I will be indulged somewhat. It is worth noting that, as a book describing migration (or more specifically its dynamics and determinants), it does so well, although the focus is far more squarely on South Africa than southern Africa in spite of the title. The authors use methods that are appropriately descriptive and together the chapters are able to map a migration profile in South Africa. However, as with all purely descriptive efforts there are underlying assumptions and themes which are typically taken for granted. The assumptions underlying the kind of quantitative and seemingly objective research on which this book is based have been well rehearsed and I do not want to go over them again here (see Parker,

1992 for further critique). To do so would require of the authors a critique that lies very much outside of the epistemological framework from which they are operating. Rather, I would like to use this book as a point of departure to discuss how these taken for granted assumptions operate more generally in migration studies[1] as it is developing in southern Africa – although this may not differ significantly from other parts of the world. Considered in this way, the book tells us a great deal about how migration is conceptualised, how it has been constructed as a domain of knowledge, and the ongoing tensions and debates within this domain. It is this that I hope to focus on with a view to considering the implications for those of us that subscribe to one of the varieties of critical psychology that exist (in all their contested forms) in South Africa.

In this paper, I will give a very brief overview of what is contained in the book. I will then talk to the themes that shape the questions asked and the answers arrived at in this book. I will then go on to discuss how these are themes inherent to migration studies as an emerging discipline and the implications of this for psychology. Although I cannot possibly claim to represent all of the themes in the book, I am drawing on those that seem particularly contested and messy for those interested in critical approaches to social research. Before turning to these it is worth offering a very brief overview of what is contained in the book.

WHAT THE BOOK IS ABOUT.
This book is largely a publication of survey findings of the HSRC's 2001-2002 study of migration. However, part one does give some historical context to migration in the southern African region. Perhaps predictably, this context leans heavily towards South Africa, which is itself a reflection of discourses of migration worldwide that privilege those states with economic power. Of course, this cannot be separated from the power of the South African academy and NGO sector relative to other southern African countries but it also reflects a bias in migration patterns of a particular kind (from poorer to wealthier countries). As such, a large portion of part one considers labour migration and its historical link to the South African mining sector. This book is, therefore, concentrated on very particular forms of migration and this shapes its focus. However, in responding to the book, I will draw on debates that have emerged from studies of a range of different forms of migration, as they offer useful contrasts and comparisons.

Considering the book as a whole, what is striking is the extent to which it explores themes and areas of concern common to the broader discipline of migration studies. In other words, the topics of study for migration studies in southern Africa do not appear vastly different from those in other contexts. Given this, the survey on which the book is based offers an opportunity for comparing migration in South Africa to the broader migration literature. However this comes with the inevitable concern about a "loss of contexualisation" which is one of the issues I will consider in this paper. There are three such "universalised" themes that seem relevant to this paper.

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[1] I am using the term "migration studies" very loosely as a very diverse body of knowledge that has recently been asserted as an independent discipline.

Firstly, the focus on health (in chapter 6 written by Roux and Van Tonder) is one example of a theme that has been common in migration studies internationally (see also Gavagan and Brodyaga, 1998; Lurie, 2000), and the questions have, as is the case in this book, concentrated on whether migration improves or diminishes health and for whom. Furthermore there is a concern with whether health plays a role in decisions to migrate or not, which, given that in South Africa, the term "health migrant" has been popularised, is a pertinent – and politically infused - one. The authors analyse how several demographic variables (such as sex, age etc) might influence the health of migrants. The effect, therefore, is to consider which migrants are at risk of ill health.

Secondly, is a concern about why people migrate. The extent of the concern for understanding why people migrate is indicated in the fact that three chapters of the book are dedicated to understanding these motives (although others also grapple with them) and this is perhaps indicative of the status this research question has gained more broadly in migration studies. However, as the editors rightly point out, we should possibly be asking why people do *not* migrate rather than why they do (see Kok, Gelderblom and Van Zyl, chapter 1: 16). Although the book does not unpack this question further, it is a good one and one that goes to the core of why we ask the questions we do and with what consequences. Reviewing this book reminded me that what we know about migration may well be a function of the questions we ask and the possibilities of knowing created in the methods we use – a point I shall return to.

A third theme, which is also one central to the discipline as a whole is that of the role of migrant networks (Boyd, 1989; Kibreab, 2001; Willems, 2003). In particular, the concern is with the role of networks in facilitating migration as well as in facilitating adaptation to the new country. Studying the role of networks (and associated concepts such as social capital) has been popular in research on a range of impoverished groups and migrants have been no exception. It is a valid research concern in a context where migrants often lack formal channels of migration, integration and access to services. Nevertheless it also raises some concerns about how we conceptualise notions of kin, culture and identity.

In addition to these themes, and of particular interest to **PINS** readers, is chapter 12 (Gelderblom) which attempts a theory of migration. It is mostly concerned with "push and pull" factors and spatial differences in migration. It considers the level of analysis of migration decisions including whether decisions are made at an individual or household level. As Gerlderbom states: "From the perspective of middle class Western people, it seems obvious that the decision making unit in migration is the individual. However, this is often not an appropriate assumption for poor people in the developing world (Simmons, 1986:137-138). Their migration is typically not the result of a purely self-interested decision taken by an individual. It more often flows from a household decision directed at improving the welfare of the household as a whole" (274).

What is significant in this statement is that there are hints at notions of choice and agency, rationality and family homogeneity that psychology has equally grappled with. As a theory of migration the chapter is disappointing. In part this may be because theory has largely been absent from this variety of migration studies (based on positivist epistemological principles) and in part it may be because the book draws on the rather untheorised (and

anti-theoretical) empiricist tradition so inherent to social science praxis. The lack of engagement with the numerous investments in "knowing migrants" is not grappled with, nor are the broader socio-political forces that create the modern day migrant. Earlier in the book, Anderson rightly notes that, "governments are rarely concerned with migration for its own sake" (97). However, neither are researchers and the lack of reflection on this would, perhaps, be the most unsatisfactory aspect of the book for those concerned with what psychological theory might offer migration studies.

The emphasis on these topics raised three primary areas that I felt need interrogation for a more reflexive approach to studying migrants. Firstly, we have to ask why we are concerned with quantification and how this quantification rests on already established but nevertheless contested social categorisations. In other words, how does our research reinforce or challenge popular perceptions and with what consequences? More specifically, this book, in spite of being driven primarily by disciplines such as demography and sociology indicates the extent to which, and the ways in which, psychology has begun to enter migration studies and this is a second area I will interrogate further. Finally, the emphasis on understanding demographics leads me to an analysis of how the (often stated but little understood) feminisation of migration is treated. I will consider each of these topics in the remainder of the paper.

THE POLITICS OF NUMBERS: METHODS IN MIGRATION STUDIES.
At the outset it is important to note that my intention is not to imply that migration studies is a discipline dominated by quantitative research. On the contrary, there is extensive qualitative research in the field and several qualitative studies adopt a similar epistemological paradigm as the one adopted by the authors of this book. Nevertheless, it is in the debates about the numbers of migrants that we most clearly see the assumed objectivity of empiricist approaches begin to unravel in, what I would argue, are productive ways. Migration studies is a discipline preoccupied with numbers and this is both a reflection of and a sustaining force behind popular discourses of "floods" of migrants (for example, Gifford, 2000). I have been asked by many an NGO, journalist and politician how many migrants there are in South Africa. Of course this also reflects a broader preoccupation with quantification in the social sciences. The question of "how many" seems to arise even more often when we are talking about undocumented migration which manages to elude even the most elaborate systems set up to contain and document it. In a recent piece of research conducted by the author on undocumented migration for an international aid organisation, their main anxiety was that without at least an estimation of how many people were crossing South Africa's borders from Zimbabwe no response could be put in place. This preoccupation translates into the HSRC publication and there is frequent reference to the "migration stock" and whether there have been net gains or net losses in population and what that might mean. Similarly, methods for measuring migration, particularly so called "illegal immigration", have become something of a specialisation of their own (see Crush and Williams, 2001; Massey and Capofiro, 2004).

These concerns with understanding, classifying and measuring will, of course be familiar to psychologists. Indeed, as I wrote this sentence I was reminded of my first psychology class where the lecturer informed the students that the purpose of psychology could be summed up as the need to: Understand, explain, predict and control human behaviour.

Although in post-apartheid South Africa the potentially sinister implications of this statement may (or rather should) make some first year lecturers shudder, it does remain the concern of a great deal of psychology even if political correctness prevents such an open explication of this. Increasing attention to why and under what conditions we want to classify, understand and predict should make us weary of the constant lament in this book about the lack of knowledge about migrants, particularly "illegal migrants". Indeed, this lack of knowledge may be precisely what protects some migrants from the emerging racisms and sexisms that, as I will discuss later on, we risk recreating with increasing research interest in migrants.

However, the meaning attributed to (high) numbers of migrants is not the same for all kinds of migrants. For example, the numbers of refugees are often presented in order to shock the world into how much need there is for a humanitarian response to refugee flows (UNHCR, 2007). In contrast, the numbers of undocumented migrants are often presented to highlight a supposed security threat (see for example, Leggett, 1996). How we classify not only shapes the investment in high or low numbers, but also what those mean. For example, this book is not a study of refugees and as such excludes human rights debates that we would expect to find if it were. A cursory review of the topics in a journal such as the **Journal of Refugee Studies** shows a focus on making the asylum system work and the humanitarian response (and failure to respond) to the needs and rights of refugees. Thus existing and often taken for granted systems of classifying migrants shape what questions we ask and how. The lack of reflection on the politics of asking and knowing is perhaps the greatest area of concern for those wishing to see a more theoretically and politically engaged psychology contributing to migration studies.

The classification of migrants has a particular relevance for psychology as a technology for managing the individual and in particular individual suffering. The conflation of (some) migrants with suffering and trauma is perhaps where psychologists have had the most influence on migration studies and it is, therefore, worth considering in more detail.

THE VALIDITY OF TEARS[2] AND THE MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN MISERY.
In this section I want to consider the way that notions of trauma and their associations with lack of agency form an implicit core in how we study and respond to migrants. This is a conceptualisation of migration that demands of us a singular and coherent knowledge of why people migrate and a very specific performance of those reasons through, for example, the asylum system.

Notions of agency are one of the most obvious ways in which legal (and indeed moral) systems of classification have been uncritically adopted in the study of migrants in ways that reproduce a range of migration hierarchies. It is worth reflecting for a moment on these hierarchies in order to unpack some of their possible functions and consequences. For example, the often privileged category refugee carries with it a legitimacy that is rooted in a lack of agency and an associated assumption of victimisation. Refugees are *forced* migrants; economic migrants, on the other hand, are conflated with illegal immigrants who

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[2] Lather (2001:211) cites Britzman (1997) when she uses this term to critique the demand for situatedness and voice as a part of "recovering from objectivity".

are criminalised. In this way, the refugee is legitimised by their lack of agency and victim status and their comparison with the economic migrant. Leaving one's country of citizenship for economic reasons (regardless of how much one may not want to) is not accorded the same status. Bracken and Petty (1998), in their critique of the use of trauma models in war contexts note that they are based on the assumption that trauma is a discrete event that is out of keeping with the everyday experiences of the refugee. In this way, the definition of trauma excludes ongoing racism and poverty that many people may in fact experience as more traumatic than a single life threatening event. Similarly, the classification of migrants according to the nature of their hardship – where war and political persecution are considered legitimate motivations for migration but poverty is not – has been adopted in the study of migrants in ways that reproduce hierarchies determined by victimisation and lack of agency. In this way, refugeeness is associated with a sense of being wronged while undocumented migration positions the migrant as the wrongdoer. As Bell (1995) notes, the legitimacy of migration requires the creation of a perfect space of refugee suffering that resists the association with the suffering of other migrants. This slide from a legal to a moral category reminds us of the dangers of assuming that there is such a thing as innocent knowing and, equally, the dangers of a retreat into objectivity. A project of describing migration that claims to simply observe necessarily recreates this distinction. For example, in chapter 9, Cross states that "a progression of push motivations can be seen, with poverty-related factors powering the rural-origin streams, but with housing taking over in migration involving the towns and secondary cities. For intra-metro moves in contrast…individual factors involving social connections appear instead" (216). The seemingly neutral observation of these motivations cannot be extracted from the social context in which they circulate and, by classifying data in this way, a popular notion of a poor economic migrant and a wealthier migrant with agency and individualised decision making is recreated.

A similar case in point is the current popular debate on Zimbabwe that is taking place in South Africa. There has been a great deal of argument in South Africa about whether Zimbabweans are refugees. Reference has often been made by the Department of Home Affairs to Zimbabweans as economic migrants and, therefore, not refugees (Department of Home Affairs, 2006) citing their economic hardships as evidence for this. Interpreting a lower number of asylum applications in December 2006 their annual report stated that this was evidence that "the majority of people seeking asylum have returned to their countries to visit families. This assertion applied to nationals from SADC countries – mainly Zimbabwe, Malawi and DRC – which substantiate(s) the allegation that people seeking asylum are mostly economic migrants and do not know why they are seeking asylum" (DHA, 2006:7) As the lobby in support of Zimbabweans has grown from human rights advocates there has been reference to them as economic refugees. The use of the terms together shows sympathy in the term refugee but refusal to unequivocally assign the privileged term refugee as indicated in the qualifier "economic". At a recent meeting of the National Consortium for Refugee Affairs in South Africa (now the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa) there was resistance by many refugees who are NCRA members to widening the mandate of the NCRA to include all migrants. This is indicative of the moral weight attributed to being a refugee that carries with it, if not actual entitlements (given the poor implementation of asylum policy in South Africa), at least the possibility of them. These examples indicate the extensive contestations around how we

classify migrants' intentions and the moral, economic and political issues at stake in a system of classification defined by trauma, in the case of refugees. It also points to the ways that such a system of classification, with its conflation of economic migrant marginalises the poor migrant whilst reifying the traumatised migrant.

If we accept that there is no disinvested categorisation then clearly there are implications for how we conduct research. Lacroix (2004) describes how for asylum seeking men their narratives centred on the point of being forced out of their countries and the feelings of loss and sadness accompanying this. Indeed in my own research with displaced women from the Great Lakes region (see Palmary, 2006) I have been struck by how women emphasised their lack of choice to leave or return. I would argue it is important to understand this, not simply as evidence of the commonalities that define forced migrants against those that choose to migrate, but rather as a reflection of the central tenets on which the notion of refugee is constructed and its polarised position relative to other, particularly undocumented, migrants. That is, this can be read as an example of how we as researchers create the phenomena that we then pretend to discover (see Parker 1992; 2002) by our starting assumptions. The demand for a narrative of trauma that separates the refugee from the economic migrant is one that structures the sense we (as researchers or migrants) make of experience and the ways we have been positioned to experience the real (Foucault, 1980). The asylum system figures in this construction as a technology for the management of human misery and through its decisions on who constitutes a refugee plays a central role in defining legitimate misery (Rose, 1993). Specifically, classifications of PTSD figure frequently in asylum applications and applications for resettlement. Psychology is perhaps the most central technology for the management of human misery and has extended to reach to the study of migrants. At a recent feminist psychology conference, there was extensive discussion about whether psychologist should continue to give PTSD diagnoses for asylum seekers given the way it has almost become a requirement for a successful claim. In this way we need to look carefully at how psychology has and continues to benefit from the effects of war (Burman, 1996) through the ways that human suffering has been redefined as a problem to be subjected to expert psychological intervention (Pupavac, 2001). Perhaps the clearest way is through a demand for a clear and uncontested statement of migrants' reasons for migrating and by a demand for reinforcing the legitimacy of the traumatised migrant which simultaneously functions to delegitimise the economic migrant.

THE FEMINISATION OF MIGRATION (STUDIES): TRADITION, NETWORKS AND KIN.
There is an understated but always present concern with the migration of women in this book and this is the third theme pervading migration studies as a whole that I want to consider here[3]. There has been increasing attention to female migrants but it is the kind of attention that is cause for concern. This is the sort of approach to studying gender that considers difference rather than politics and is one that has drawn much feminist critique. In particular, in so much of migration studies, women are treated as an already constituted group outside of social context. Far from looking at how our (and their) constructions of gender shape the questions asked and answers obtained, the authors of the HSRC

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[3] I could equally have concentrated on the concern with migrating children which is sometimes seen to be synonymous with migrating women.

publication take categories of men and women for granted and then look at how they might be different on a number of topics such as health, networks and reasons for migration (see Indra, 1999 for further critiques of this nature). Most notably, gender (which in this book is equated with women) is, for the most part, treated as a neutral demographic variable rather than anything that imbues power relations of any sort. Once again, a study of gender as a depoliticised demographic variable cannot be read as a neutral interest in women even though the focus on women in this way has often been explained as a response to the gender blindness of previous research. Rather, in keeping with the arguments made so far, this reflects a normative assumption, lying just beneath the guise of neutrality, about gendered patterns of migration that are reproduced in the questions we ask and to whom we ask them[4]. This book, in its methodology and analysis, considers the household to be a space devoid of politics and with homogenous needs and decision making. As such, the attention to women is limited to whether they migrate and why, rather than the impact of migration on household relationships. Where attention is paid to household decision-making, it is seen as something homogenous and unrelated to gender contestations.

More than this, however, I would argue that we should be concerned about the reasons why many authors (including those in this book, see chapter 2 and 3) argue for increased attention to the study of female migrants. Female headed households (which are taken to be a consequence of migration) have been, aside from a few notable exceptions, studied almost entirely as a problem and have attracted the gaze of the researcher almost exclusively from this perspective (see Burman, 1990 for broader critiques of this nature). Their problematic nature is mentioned variously as being a result of their vulnerability, the impact on children and changes in who heads a household. Of course, female headed households are non-normative only to the extent that they do not defer power to men given that families made up only of women constitute 41.2% of households in South Africa (StatsSA, 2001). Similarly some researchers have begun to point out that rather than female migration being a new phenomenon, it is something that researchers have newly begun to pay attention to. Chapter 3 of this book does make this point but beyond this it is assumed to be something new. In this way, the calls for increasing information on women migrants' risks reinforcing the normalised absence / pathologised presence so eloquently described by Phoenix (1987) whereby women only figure in migration studies as a pathologised group. Indra (1999:20) rightly points out that we should "not assume that the increased use of the word gender [or women for that matter] in forced migration circles means that there now exists a broad-based commitment to further gender programming". Indeed, years of psychological research (perhaps most notably in developmental psychology) should not allow us to believe that this has been of benefit to women. Reflection on the role of attachment theories (of the sort developed by Bowlby, 1969) in undermining childcare support for mothers (see Singer, 1998) reminds us that studying women is not the same as working to improve conditions for them and studies of feminised migration are by no means feminist by necessity.

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[4] Indra (1999) provides a useful critique of the way household studies have excluded women and reproduced the erroneous assumption that women do not migrate.

A second intriguing theme in the study of female migration has been the extent to which terms such as tradition, culture and networks appear in such studies. For Mallki (1995) there is an implicit functionalism in the way that culture and tradition have been a central concern in the study of forced migration. She points to an "…assumption that to become uprooted and removed from a national community is automatically to loose one's identity, traditions and culture" (Mallki, 1995:508). Where we conflate culture with citizenship, the study of migrants necessarily raises anxieties about cultural difference and cross-cultural understandings. I have written elsewhere about the way that culture is evoked most commonly when referring to gender relations in humanitarian interventions (see Palmary, 2008). This tendency is equally present in this book where culture frequently equates to gendered practices and these are homogenised across a range of complex and diverse social settings and strata. The politics of how we represent the other has been well developed in feminist and postcolonial theory and is a striking absence in studies of female migrants. This too is no benign act. The tendency to conflate place and culture has, in recent years, been central to the creation of the nation state as a place of identity and belonging that legitimates a host of violent practices (including the often repeated demand by South Africans to turn on the electric fence that makes up parts of our borders). Culture continues to be used to frame entitlements and needs and where this is done without attention to the politics of representation it risks recreating existing social divisions.

In this book, these problems emerge in many places. For example in chapter 2 Adepoju begins a section on the migration of women by stating that "in many parts of Africa, independent female migration is generally frowned upon on account of culture and religion that regard migration of single or unaccompanied married women as inappropriate" (37). The reference to "parts of Africa" indicates the extent to which references to culture inevitably evoke a place based comparison that functions to produce otherness. As Young (1995:53) states: "Culture never stands alone but always participates in a conflictual economy acting out the tension between sameness and difference, comparison and differentiation, unity and diversity, cohesion and dispersion, containment and subversion".

In the process of naming and categorising African cultural practices, we both constitute them and distance the authors and readers of the text from them. Chapter 3 mentions "complications" in the systems of marriage and kinship but nevertheless focuses on the general rather than the (fascinating and more politically productive) complications. This homogenisation has been typical in the treatment of women as if entirely framed by "culture" and unaware of their oppression and the absence of reflection on the longstanding feminist debates on this matter (see Mohanty, 1993; Spivak, 1993) is a notable absence in the book and in understanding female migration.

SOME IMPLICATIONS.
In this paper I have attempted to reflect on three areas of growing concern that I have felt about how migration studies is emerging as a discipline. Most of my critiques emerge from a growing concern that the epistemological debates from the various disciplines that contribute to the study of migrants seem to have been lost. This is perhaps a risk of all multi-disciplinary studies but, I would argue that there are two worrying components of this. Firstly, knowledge is taken to be neutral and the political context that drives an interest in migrants is seldom adequately acknowledged. As such it allows for a number of

inequalities and myths to be perpetuated through the familiarity of the question asked. The recreation of categories of migrants (undocumented, traumatised, female) in pathologised ways is an area for concern.

Secondly, psychology has begun to play a role in the study of migration as a discipline concerned with human suffering. However, this has positioned psychologists and psychological expertise as the guardians of legitimate suffering in a context where migrants' legitimacy is rooted in this suffering. There has been a wealth of critique of this approach to psychology and these debates can be useful in migration studies.

 One example that I have given of the risk of taken for granted categorisation is the potential for this kind of research to reproduce sexist practices through its depoliticised approach to studying women. These are intractable from race where the African woman is reproduced in familiar, problematic ways through a claim to generalisability and objectivity (Mohanty, 1993). Given the long history of such research in South Africa this too is an area where there is existing critique and debate that could usefully inform migration studies. Indeed, the recent discovery by researchers that female migration is not new after all (Indra, 1999) is an example of how pre-existing classifications foreclose knowledge.

There are potentially any number of themes I could have commented on in this paper. I have chosen these because they reflect areas about which I think psychologists should be concerned and because they overlap with my own preoccupations.

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