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Gendered Dimensions of Migration and Conviviality: A Virtual Space for Autoethnographic Explorations of 'Finding Home'

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ABSTRACT

Gendered dimensions of migration although mainstream current research, there is less attention given to migrant women's social interaction and convivial experiences. As three transnational women living and working in Melbourne, we have our social lives outside work and family. During COVID-19 lockdowns, we found ourselves isolated with restrictions on social interaction and convivial gatherings. In this paper, we discuss how we experienced 'conviviality' while sharing our stories of 'finding home' in a virtual space. We engaged on Zoom to tour an exhibition about migrant stories – *The Unending Absence* (2017) at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne. We listened to migrants' audio stories of 'finding home', then paused to write our individual experiences of migratory moves. Collaborative autoethnography facilitated our writing and reflexive dialoguing providing a safe and convivial space to share our experiences infused with emotions. Discussing our gendered migration journeys we found similarities and differences in cultural heritage, ethnicity, and belonging along with personal and professional identities structuring our choices, decisions, norms, and opportunities of 'finding home'. Through reciprocal triadic lenses, we highlight how social interactions and being convivial are important to our ongoing well-being, whether we interact with others in person or using a virtual space.

Introduction

Research has progressively recognised that migration is fundamentally a gendered phenomenon (King and Kuschminder 2022), yet literature on gender and migration tends to overlook the emotional dimensions of migration and how women manage their lives in host countries (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015; Wise and Velayutham 2017; Yea 2020). 'Conviviality' refers to conditions created for social interaction and as a theoretical concept in migration studies, it captures social encounters and interchanges of diverse migrant groups within different contexts (Boesen et al. 2023). Different studies

reference structural issues of social networking, family, and individual factors framing gendered roles (Wilding 2006; Yeoh and Ramdas 2014; Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2018, 2019; Belford 2021; King and Lulle 2022) yet with less attention garnered to migrant women's emotional entanglements with migration moves, social interaction, conviviality and their wellbeing (Cory 2019; Yea 2020; Boesen et al. 2023). The opportunities for convivial engagement and gendered experiences for women relocating and rebuilding remain unexplored in the scholarship of migration as a gendered experience.

As three transnational women working and living in Melbourne, we all have our social interactions and circles with family and friends. In some of our previous works, we have discussed our gendered roles and migration experiences from our home cultures, education, family care, and workplace (Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2018; Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2019; Belford 2021; Lahiri-Roy et al. 2023; Lahiri-Roy and Belford 2021a; Lahiri-Roy and Belford 2021b; Sum et al. 2023). Although we have all lived away from our different home countries more than a decade ago, during informal conversations we often found similarities of our Indian heritage and culture associated with our migration experiences. As South Asian transnational scholars we were keen to explore these ideas and aspects through more structured discussions and writing from both individual and collective stances. We had plans to visit the Immigration Museum in Melbourne for a convivial meet up and use an exhibition about migrants' stories as a prompt for our writing. But our plans were foiled by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns (2020–2021). In addition, dealing with expansive limitations to everyday activities and social interactions for convivial connections with family, friends and colleagues was stressful and emotionally draining. We found our homes, workspaces, and community/ies transforming into spaces where we could not unite, gather, communicate, and be convivial (Abusaada and Elshater 2022). We experienced a profound shift to working from home with online platforms, even though virtual spaces such as Zoom and phone calls offered ways to communicate and interact with others, we missed the usual in-person gatherings. Online social interactions did not provide the same 'conviviality' of meeting in person for lunches, conferences, and other events.

Nevertheless, we decided to pursue our convivial plans by virtually engaging with the exhibition of migrant stories – 'The Unending Absence, 2017' from the Immigration Museum in Melbourne. Initially, we started ruminating about how this virtual tour might help our conviviality through sharing our individual migrant stories. We made time to connect to the museum's tour via Zoom which afforded us a 'convivial space' to interact with each other. The audio stories on 'finding home' from the exhibition resonated with us and revived memories of migration moves. We used collaborative autoethnography (CAE) (Chang 2013) and reflexive dialogues (Isaacs 2008) to write and discuss our own experiences. This approach led us to first write about our experiences on 'themes' – suitcases, what is home? Leaving and finding home, and journeys, and reflexively dialogue on our individual and collective experiences. It also offered us a convivial space to share our emotions about leaving and 'finding home'.

We wrote this paper while engaging in a virtual space during the pandemic and this experience was rewarding in different ways. We decided to focus our discussion along two strands – our triadic dialogues from the reciprocity of experiences of 'finding home' and what this collective reflexivity on migration journeys meant for us in experiencing conviviality. Our discussion of migration journeys traces our gendered

perspectives but also similarities of cultural heritage, ethnicity but also highlights our personal and professional identities informing our choices, options and opportunities. In discussing what the process meant for us in finding 'conviviality' – we elaborate on the relationality of trust, a safe place to share emotions and experiences while finding support foregrounding our collaborative work and ongoing wellbeing. We also find generative possibilities through this work in exploring theoretical and methodological approaches we used in this paper for collaborate research as well as our insights into research on gendered dimensions of migration and conviviality.

Theoretical Lens

Conviviality and Gendered Dimensions of Migration

Conviviality is understood by conditions/opportunities created for social interaction (Caire 2007) and 'togetherness' – wherein individual freedoms can be realised through personal interdependence from a social form of interaction or opportunities (Caire 2007). 'The concept of the convivial tools' – is rooted around notions of freedom and interdependence with others – where individuals can live according to their own tastes yet can also use these attributes to care 'for and about others' (Illich 1973, p. 11). Illich's (1973) definition of 'conviviality' takes us to a society with 'modern tools' – that can be used for the integrated and shared creation of convivial cultures (Deriu 2015, p. 79). Schechter (2004) reference to conviviality emphasises a more simplistic version of social interaction aimed at sharing a variety of mundane experiences such as food, games, and conversations.

In migration research, the term 'conviviality' stands for how we understand 'togetherness' and as a theoretical lens it looks through the dynamics of diversity, superdiversity, intercultural diversity, and 'urban multiculture'(Nowicka and Vertovec 2014; Berg and Nowicka 2019) within global cosmopolitan contexts (Brudvig 2014; Padilla et al. 2015; Tyler 2017; Mushonga 2022; Boesen et al. 2023; Samanani 2023). These studies also explore the impacts of social change, relational patterns, intercommunal living, and social recognition of migrants. Racial discrimination, interethnic conflicts and social cohesion are other aspects being studied (Padilla et al. 2015). Linking research on conviviality and migration brings another dimension to exploring the plural politics and ways of living together and living with differences (Valentine 2008; Samanani 2023) in settings where individuals of different religions, nationalities, ethnicities and racial identities meet (Berg and Nowicka 2019). Gilroy (2004) uses a spatial lens to find 'conviviality' within urban spaces and sites coming together from previously unconnected cultures, attempting to bridge social and cultural distances. Another understanding of 'conviviality' takes us through the 'unruly' and 'spontaneous social pattern' produced within closely knitted metropolitan communities around their social groups (Gilroy 2006; Back and Sinha 2016, p. 522). Gilroy (2006) however cautions us that the presence of convivial cultures does not equate to an absence of racism especially within cosmopolites.

From a gendered dimension, different studies focus on the causes of women's transnational movements – from structural and conceptual developments of their contribution to the labour force, homing, and care of transnational families (Zontini 2004; Kumari and Sharma 2014; Morokvasic 2014; Boyd 2021; Christou and Kofman 2022).

Walsh (2012) debates the subjective experience of place and the emotional dimensions of landscapes and space in migration, while feminist research stresses further emphasis on embodied gendered experiences in mapping women's emotions through migration journeys (Schechter 2004). Migrant women are often portrayed from structures of inequalities, and oppressed gender relations within families and communities, yet there is less emphasis on gendered emotional and affective entanglements of migration (Yea 2020) and experiential lived realities of migrant women's social life and experiences of conviviality (Morokvasic 2014; Rzepnikowska 2019; Sum 2023a). Feminist epistemologies call for a re-humanized knowledge and belonging of embodied gendered experiences and emotions (Schechter 2004), hence more attention is needed in researching migrant women's experiences with social interaction and 'conviviality' (De Nardi and Phillips 2021; Popyk 2021). Graham-Brown (2021) found language barriers of migrant women in the UK limiting their social interaction thus affecting their feelings of belonging at material, relational, cultural, and temporal dimensions. Lacking opportunities for socialisation these women struggled to develop trust in other people and explore other cultural knowledges and practices (Rzepnikowska 2019; Boyd 2021). Skilled migrant women experience empowerment mostly from education, employment offering them choices, autonomy, and freedom, however, there is limited research on their social life experiences (Ryan and Mulholland 2013; Dodson 2021; Chowdhory et al. 2022).

In this paper, as professionally qualified transnational women, we consider ourselves as independent and well surrounded by social networks and opportunities to be convivial – within both our personal and professional spheres. The onset of COVID-19 lockdowns, brought in isolation, depriving us of social interaction and 'conviviality'. The pandemic intensified calls for 'togetherness' as people struggled to socially engage with limitations imposed by social distancing rules and convivial gatherings. Globally the reliance on digital/virtual modes of communication was evident to stay connected and socialise virtually. New spatial dimensions emerged in how we experience 'conviviality' (Williamson et al. 2020) thus provoking dramatic shifts in our social living structures – moving us to online education systems (Tarabini 2022), working from home (Bloom 2020; Bolisani et al. 2020), and socialising more intensely through online platforms and social media. In this paper, we share our experiences with 'conviviality' in virtual space during the pandemic – confined in our homes we used Zoom to tour a virtual exhibition and collectively connect to write and dialogue on our experiences of finding home.

Methodology

CAE structures our narrative sequels which were analysed through dialoguing (Isaacs 2008) with a reflexive reciprocal stance (Burkitt 2012; Corlett 2013; Collier and Lawless 2016). CAE affords both collective writing and 'dialogue' in scrutinising our autobiographical narratives and analysis of sociocultural phenomena (Chang et al., 2013, 2016). Within a virtual space (Zoom) we safely experienced 'conviviality' in collectively engaging through a writing, dialogue, and reflection process. We started the virtual tour of '*The Unending Absence, 2017*' (Immigration Museum, Melbourne) by listening to the audio narrative of migrant stories, – leading us to pause and reflect individually on our own migratory moves. Muting ourselves on Zoom, we wrote our narrative sequels. Reuniting on Zoom, we shared our perspectives and challenges and found our

stories driven by emotional journeys. Our recorded discussions were transcribed and analysed through a trifocal lens (our three perspectives) leading to individual and shared understandings of our journeys in finding home and the safe conviviality we shared within the virtual space.

Chang et al. (2016: 17) refer to the strengths of self-reflexivity associated with autoethnographic narratives – from 'cultural interpretation within ethnography and multi-subjectivity with collaboration'. In our triadic discussion of our experiences of 'finding home', we collected and organised the artefacts of our migrant journeys. Moving on to curating our narratives (Certeau 1984) was a significant step towards engaging with reflexive dialogues (Burkitt 2012; Corlett 2013; Collier and Lawless 2016). We found this process important and meaningful in unpacking our shared emotions, and the related commonalities, and differences of cultural heritage, ethnicity and belonging. Our dialoguing was both transformative and ethical (Harrington 2001) as we experienced safety and trust in sharing emotionally laden stories. The practice of reflexivity (Burkitt 2012; Corlett 2013; Collier and Lawless 2016; Zerbe Enns et al. 2021) was psychologically and emotionally beneficial to us and it enabled us to find reciprocity and to act as checks and balances within each other's narrative.

Our Narrative Sequels of Migration Journeys and 'Finding Home'

Nish

Suitcases

Instead of suitcases, my family migration from Mauritius to Australia in 2008 included 20 boxes sent by air freight and 7 suitcases when flying to Melbourne. The logistics in arranging all this was massive at that time, and slowly I could see wardrobes and cupboards being emptied and packed away. Melbourne is a city of four seasons! – clothes were purchased and packed accordingly. I felt sad parting from salwar suits and sarees while taking only a few for temple visits, while not being sure if any such places would be accessible. Parting with home items was emotionally difficult as we packed only a few kitchen items, wooden decorative artefacts, photographs, and albums. We wondered if we would forget the family and home? But I guess over time our memories sustained us. Leaving home, we moved to uncertain terrains of what will be the real/ imaginary for us as different individuals. At the immigration counter – passports were stamped – heavy hearts left the home country while we acknowledged permanent residency status in Melbourne on the 4th of November 2008 – a Melbourne Cup Day, where our migrant family and friends welcomed us.

What and Where Is Home?

Resonating with 'unending absences' my experience of what is 'home' is tied to deep emotions – Yes 'home is a feeling' – and I have experienced different feelings about 'home' being in the 'home country' or 'host country'. Home for me is my mother's house, not even my own house which I left and retained in my home country – where I usually go during my return visits and experience the same emotions as when I left the place years ago. It remains a convivial space where I feel safe expressing my emotions with my family. I wish I could carry those feelings to my new home in Melbourne – but I

don't; it is only part of my memories, revived and revamped through trinkets I brought, but never acquired the same feelings as they used to be – I guess the temporal and spatial have distinct signifiers here.

Leaving and Finding Home

'Homeland' or 'motherland' (*Swadesh*[1]) – I have often wondered where my anchoring is being twice diasporic of Indian and Mauritian heritage. When I hear the Indian and Mauritian National anthems – it gives me goosebumps. Home is about a 'convivial space' or '*un espace conviviale*' as Mauritians call it borrowing on the French heritage – this is where we feel safe, friendly, and hospitable – in the company of our '*apnes*' (my own, those loved and liked) (Lahiri-Roy and Belford 2021b). Parting from home for migration was exciting in looking forward to new horizons – our children's education, our job prospects, and our future. At that time the 'push and pull' factor was barely felt – even though we were privileged through our education and status in the home country (Lahiri-Roy and Belford 2021a) – we felt content and twice-privileged to leave and be part of the few who acquire permanent residency visas through skilled migration. We experienced uncertainties about whether new careers would maintain our class, status, culture, religious faith, and identity, along with trepidations regarding culture shock, acculturation, and settlement (Lahiri-Roy and Belford 2021b). There are apprehensions about long-term negotiations of racial and cultural identities and the acceptance of erasures of home cultures happening intergenerationally.

Journeys

I queried the initial journey of finding home – what it is like to come from 'there' homeland to 'here' the host land. How do we navigate at 'intersections of histories and memories' (Chambers 1994, p. 6) and cope with nostalgia and cultural norms. The journey of 'finding home' is unlike an 'iceberg' – with hidden parts of apprehensions and uncertainties about 'belonging', 'otherness', 'recognition', and negotiation of identities. Journeys
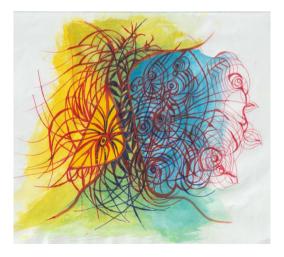

Figure 1. Belford, N.(2011) 'Liminal Space', Acrylic on canvas, 20 in. x 16 in., Courtesy of the author.

for migrants are not as distinct as I often found myself within a 'liminal space' as represented in one of my artworks (see Figure 1, Belford, 2011).

There is a perceived 'liminality' with challenges of archetypes of culture and heritage (food, languages, religious faith, and more) (Mitchell 1997; Rosunee 2011) and an acculturation process to societal norms including class, status, nationality, education, and race. These social norms define my identity and gendered roles as a mother, partner, caregiver, and academic. Akin to many other migrants, I am forging a journey in 'finding home' as pictured in Figure 1 which is one of my artworks showing the 'contact zone' depicting the 'in-betweenness' I experience through a *liminal space*. The boundaries are jagged and dented in representing two cultures or more (home, host, and hybrid - as I cohabit with migrants from diverse race and cultures in Australian context). It also represents my ongoing challenges in negotiating the borderlands of different sociocultural norms and expectations in my migration journey (Rosunee 2013; Yeoh and Ramdas 2014; Zerbe Enns et al. 2021). After more than a decade of transnational living, I am still negotiating different roles and responsibilities of homing, caring for my family here and back home, working, and socialising within the 'liminal' space (Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2018; Joseph et al. 2022). Hence, caught in this liminality, and the angst of an ageing and retirement process is often not comforting and emotionally difficult to decide where is 'home' (Lahiri-Roy and Belford 2021b).

Nicola

Suitcases

My suitcases have evolved with my journey and my feelings of home. I left Melbourne with a single backpack. After a life in London, I arrived in Vietnam with 2 suitcases to take up a new job. I had packed a small carton of photos and papers and shipped these backs to Australia and donated everything else to a local rubbish collection service. Charity shops did not want clothes, furniture, or electricals at that time. I had been told that there was no need to bring anything to Vietnam because everything was available in the city to set up a new home. This wasn't quite the case, but it became my first experience of the relationship between leadership and context (Sum 2021). I adjusted to rebuilding a life and a home with the limited contents of what had made the journey with me (Lofgren 2016). From Vietnam, I relocated to Bangladesh for new work. Looking back, I see myself as detached from these two places. My suitcases would carry items of clothing and toiletries, but the homes were incomplete. The people I met and spent time with became the places where I felt at home. The suitcases represented a final packing, and a final arrival at a new home to do it all again. I could have lost the suitcases in the travel, and it would have meant a few less clothes, and possibly some mementos. Over the years, the most important things – diary, photos, electronic hard drives of my work, and memories of travel had become permanent fixtures in my small carry on backpack. Suitcases marked the end of one job and the arrival in a new community (Sum 2023a). Everything else was built from scratch.

What Is Home?

Home is safety. Safety from physical harm and safety to share and express everyday life as it happens. The privilege of an education and a job has made finding a safe place to live

achievable (Sum 2023b). The mobility of moving from city to city for work has made the opportunities to share and build community more challenging. Like the mobility of work, the constituent members of the community are equally mobile, so home is a shifting landscape of people and relationships that create a safe space, or what I've heard other people refer to as a 'soft landing'.

Leaving and Finding Home

I am torn as I have been for several years when trying to speak of home. I know I left home when I left Melbourne to go travel, work, and see the world. I know I came home when I returned to Melbourne for further study and to relocate back to be with my family. But knowing and feeling are different parts of the experience, and coming back to Melbourne to being othered 'stretch[es] the elastic concept of conviviality' (Nayak 2017, p. 291). I am very lucky to be able to say that the different places I have lived and worked have changed me, and made me a better person, a better teacher, and at times a destination for other people's adventures. For these reasons I sometimes drop into a language of home being the world – I declare that I am a citizen of the world, and home is everywhere. In actuality, this is avoiding the feeling of trying to limit belonging to the physical place I find myself located in now (Lofgren 2016). Something bounded and trapped is mixed with something reconnected to old pieces of my life. The feelings, of sadness and grief, and of excitement and gratitude, of need and of guilt are not so easily negotiated.

Journeys

Journeys have become routine. The audacity to state this makes transparent the privilege of the opportunity to choose. Because we were educated and pushed to follow up with careers and qualifications, life has been punctuated by the choice to move to other locations which I have written about before (Lahiri-Roy 2021). As I say that now, each time I have relocated and found myself in a new community, to build a home and a life, has brought with it some underlying emotion. Leaving Australia to go to the UK was a journey of big dreams, unknown excitement and imagined opportunities. I had given myself over to the magic of the journey. This emotion is very different from relocating back to Melbourne. After many years away, coming home to my old home was a journey filled with sentiment. It was emotional to be landing at Melbourne Airport and have the cabin crew say 'If you're coming back to Melbourne – welcome home'. Relief and joy at seeing close family marked the end of that journey. But even as that journey ended, I started a new journey here in Melbourne – again rebuilding new learning, new life, some old pieces but a very different me.

Reshmi

Suitcases

1998, Christchurch Airport: The family had only 3 suitcases as they came in – a man, a woman, and a two-year-old boy. The huge container of household goods was to arrive later, a collage of all that would go into making a home away from home. The airport like the country was cool, civilized, and alien. No bustling chaos of humanity here like the home left behind. The suitcases contained the things most precious to each of the

travellers. The woman in her mid-20s had, a much-thumbed copy of *Daddy Long Legs*, harking back to a convivial time and place left behind. She'd loved that book, gifted her by a cousin she was close to. Her suitcase also contained her wedding saree and albums, a photograph of the dog she had left behind with her parents, and a collection of letters – all correspondence detailing myriad family relationships and friendships – these epistles signified her place in her world. The man carried his financial documents, bulwarks against an uncertain migrant life and his late father's Omega watch. The little boy carried his favourite stuffed toy and his grandmother's saree; he said he could smell her then.

2008, Tullamarine Airport Melbourne – Another airport, more bustle this time, more chaos and more colour in people and surroundings . . . yet another migrant journey began . ..

So, What Is Home?

Home has always been an uncertain state of being, one that could be shifted and altered physically, psychologically, and geographically at any given point. It was dependent on adult decisions at one point – my father's job and his career advancement drove these moves from India to Kuwait, back again, and onto different cities in India (Lahiri-Roy 2021). The cities, the homes, the people connected with them play like reels of film in memory – convivial spaces combine vividly with losses of the same. As an adult, the decisions to move are mine (Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2019; Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2021a), making homes in New Zealand and then Australia. One constant remains, good homes are intertwined with conviviality, and leaving such homes require vivisections.

Leaving Home and Finding Home

The homeland of origin is a place I have returned to several times in the last 24 years, but the home of childhood, the real home, was the one I never returned to. It is hard to explain why Kuwait was home, as I discussed in an earlier paper (Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2019) perhaps it was because I was emotionally the safest there. My place of origin is always associated with entrapment due to emotionally scarring experiences (Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2018; Lahiri-Roy 2021) and I am always anxious on return visits for the day of departure to arrive. I await with trepidation for some imaginary disaster to befall. Perhaps I will not get on the plane, I will lose my Australian and New Zealand passports, anything and everything can go wrong – I will then not be able to go back home – to the safety of the space where I now belong, to the conviviality of the physical space of my suburban Australian home, my garden, my animals, my friendly neighbours, and my nuclear family. This fear is braided with a paradoxically wrenching sense of loss when the plane is airborne and the smells, sounds, and colours that make up my country of birth start fading from sight – when I transform from a Bengali woman into a transnational woman of Indian origin.

Journeys

As I listen to the podcast on journeys from the museum resources, I am struck by the physical ease of my migratory journey – the journey I undertook from a place of origin to find a home. A permanent residency for New Zealand was obtained in 4

days, based on an application made on a momentary whim on our part, tickets purchased from a travel agent who deliver them to the house, and a comfortable flight to a place we had already visited and now planned to live in. Nonetheless, the migrant angst is present; we remember from our earlier visit that Christchurch lacks certain kinds of groceries, this is 1998 after all, there is no proper Hindu temple, we Brahmins do not frequent ISKCON temples, and will there be other privileged, yet marginalised (Lahiri-Roy and Belford, 2021b) groups like us? The internet is there but not social media … What are the push–pull factors to this migratory journey? Each one is intensely personal (Hagen-Zanker 2008) and mine as outlined elsewhere (Lahiri-Roy 2021) is a desire to escape a gendered subjectivity and a pursuit of educational desire (Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2018). I think of the sky as a constant in my migratory journeys, India to New Zealand and New Zealand to Australia – the sky just grew bigger each time. The blue sky over the golden sand dunes in Kuwait was vast, a convivial space where I could breathe and breathe freely. I embarked on these journeys in search of that breath.

Discussion

As three academic women of South Asian heritage in academia, we lost the physical convivial spaces of collegiality and socialising during the pandemic lockdowns. In crafting this paper, we engaged within a virtual convivial space that connected us to socially engage and continue working on this collective writing project of 'finding home' – which was in our plans before the pandemic. Engaging in this process, we noticed both spatial and temporal shifts in our lives in discussing the resonances of migration and 'finding home'. From our triadic dialogues and reciprocity of our experiences, we uncover various layers of 'finding home' and the varied challenges we experienced from our emotionally laden stories (Christou 2013). We support our discussion with literature on gendered dimensions of migration but stress our insights contributing to scholarship in showing nuances of personal and professional identities, similarities and differences of cultural heritage, ethnicity and belonging influencing informing our migration experiences. Connecting to this idea, we add to notions that transnational women share similar experiences, or have different priorities towards migration moves and find different ways of conceptualising agency. We acknowledge the scope of this paper in further discussion of theoretical and methodological underpinnings of 'finding home' – from practicing reflexivity or using intersectional lenses (Zerbe Enns et al. 2021). Yet we lean towards arguing on the implications of finding conviviality through this project as it was a meaningful and rewarding experience for us. Therefore, we argue what it means for us in finding conviviality, and social interaction and how it was driven by other intricacies such as emotional safety and a relationality of trust, collaboration and support.

Triadic Dialogues from the Reciprocity of Our Experiences of 'Finding Home'

Home is significant in migration studies (Ahmed 2003; Ahmed et al. 2003; Boccagni 2014; Boccagni 2017), and 'finding home' is also conceptualised as a search and site for belonging and familiarity (Ahmed 1999; Boccagni 2017). In our narrative sequels of 'finding home', we captured the dynamic and individualised nature of imagining,

desiring, and constructing home as lived and felt practices yet interwoven with different emotions and tensions (Ahmed et al. 2003; Tolia-Kelly 2004). Our migration as transnational women with South Asian cultural heritage entails emotional responses associated with our travels, with suitcases, trunks, and cabin bags. Through our dialogues, our '*suitcases*' at times became a boundary marker for possibilities in the new places where we could re-imagine constructing 'home'. We were positioned to make choices about what was left behind – things that were bulky but had a scope to be regenerated and found in the host country. What is here may not be with us when we reach the host country – an issue that we experienced with our transnational realities and was embodied in our choices. While dialoguing, Nicola posed the question, 'What are we imagining are the boundaries, because who gets to decide what each suitcase contains for us from one home to the next home?'. The emotional response was almost immediate from Reshmi, as she recalled the red Delsey suitcase which accompanied her on her migrant journeys beginning with her departure from Kuwait. For Reshmi, this symbolised a link between the homes of the past and future – with the possibility of creating yet another convivial space in yet another context.

Nish recounted a story of migration with her family unit which involved moving large number of personal belongings by air freight – consisting of cultural objects and trinkets in recreating yet another convivial home in Melbourne. Similarly, recollections of objects arose when Reshmi shared the memory of her move to New Zealand as a young family with dreams. In that journey, the red Delsey suitcase purchased years ago in Kuwait held family heirlooms to be carried forward to another hopefully convivial 'home' in the making. The common emotional response amongst us indicated that while we had agency, we nevertheless felt constrained by the capacity of the suitcases and other shipping freight costs and restrictions. In this way, the suitcase is symbolic of the socio-material, filled with the choices we made in finding a new home. We carried pieces that we could bring, migrating with shards of our old lives; hoping they could be glued back together to support a renewed convivial space in a new destination that we could then call home. Our dialogues also teased out our quest for constructing and cultivating homes stemming from our daily practices (Boccagni and Brighenti 2015) and our material, spatial, and emotional attachments. Finding home seems to be an ongoing project for some of us (Fathi and Ní Laoire 2023) and transnational migrants 'have multiple attachments and detachments to people and places' (Brujić 2023: 305). These attachments often rest in objects which have a sociocultural biography of their very own.

Our experience of migration is defined by our gendered and emotional experiences of relocation, while the nature of our destinations and pathways to and through them were points of contrast. Reshmi reflected upon her cycle of migration as we discussed our responses to leaving and 'finding home'. She identified her migration to New Zealand, with her young family at the time, as a critical opportunity to establish their nuclear sense of home and household, delinking from the intrusiveness of historical ties to extended family. She shared that

> the boundaries, the rules, the traditions – though they were family traditions, there were no traditions of mine. The new home (in New Zealand), it was also a place where I took back a space of empowerment, where I took that power.

In Reshmi's story, we see the relief of 'finding home' through migration, sometimes from the overtly convivial yet dissonant spaces of old traditions and imposed identities, and how this sense of empowerment rebalances the notion of pieces lost to the limited capacity of suitcases. Her sense of empowerment is echoed within Nish's reflections on greater independence.

Nish expressed how home referred to her 'childhood memories – my mother's house and then my own home where my two sons grew up'. Her home in Melbourne was grounded in adapting to changes and 'trepidations about how to carry on with our beliefs, social values and norms and religiosity'. Life in Melbourne in her new home and socialites was in sharp contrast to home life and the convivial familial space in Mauritius, despite the closeness and support of home country family and friends as part of the family acculturation process in Melbourne. In both instances, Nish noted that her journey away from one home to a new home travelled in parallel – from the context of developing economies and opportunities to spaces of high economic expectations and performance.

Nicola's migratory route in contrast appears inverted. Sharing her migration journey, Nicola commenced with packing up her life in London and taking her suitcase to her new job in Vietnam. By the time she moved from Vietnam to Bangladesh, she noted that the 'suitcase was a prop', and shared how her most meaningful pieces of life had been reduced to the backpack she used as her cabin bag. The dialogue/s enabled us to identify, that, while Nicola's direction seemed at odds with the direction of migration, assumed, her gendered experience of seeking empowerment and the independence to create and live her own traditions were indeed consistent with those of Nish and Reshmi. Her migration to London from Australia had afforded her luxury of distance while finding her identity in new convivial spaces and building a life and home in that independence. While Nish held fond memories of her childhood home in Mauritius (Rosunee 2013), Nicola had struggled with her transition back to Melbourne to find herself immersed in anti-Asian sentiments in what she had expected to be her childhood spaces.

Our Collective Reflexivity on Migration Journeys: What It Meant for Us in Experiencing Conviviality?

Scoping gendered dimensions of migration – this paper factored in our shared cultural heritage/s (Nish and Reshmi are ethnically similar, and Nicola and Reshmi are born in Calcutta), friendship and collegial connections as academics and transnational women of colour. While considering the inherent wear and tear of migration, relocation, and rebuilding of home/s, we identified the privilege embedded within our empowerments through access to choice/s. Our sense of agency was reflected in our earlier consideration of who decides what goes in the suitcase/s, and it also uncovers our subjective experiences and emotional dimensions in making these choices (Walsh 2012). Additionally, our gender, personal and professional identities including our home cultures, and experiences from different parts of the world influenced our choices, decisions and opportunities to find home as discussed in other studies (Morokvasic 2014; Yea 2020; Zerbe Enns et al. 2021; Chowdhory et al. 2022). Our narratives provide our insights, yet with further scope to delve into discussions and theories of cultural, social, and professional dimensions informing our migration moves as emphasised by others (Dwyer 2018;

Graham-Brown 2021; Christou and Kofman 2022). However, we found it as important to argue what backed up our collective writing and reflection besides the social interaction and conviviality. More importantly, what brought us together in sharing our stories while finding a sense of emotional safety, trust, and support. During the pandemic lockdowns, we strove for social interactions and convivial discussions as Nish shared her experience:

> For me, having a convivial space is crucial, as you can feel isolated here, compared to what it was in the home country, where there were more things to do, attend and go to every weekend (social and familial events). Here [in Australia] we organise ourselves in a way that's more around duties at home. And during the pandemic, it was much more confined to the home, the garden, and my dogs. That was how we created the space where we could work with our emotions and feel safe and stay well, keep our sanity during that lockdown. Being on your own and not being able to go for a meal or meet a friend. I really missed that. (Nish in dialogue)

Similar to Nish, Nicola and Reshmi also experienced challenges of strict isolation and usual 'convivial spaces' to socialise during the lockdown. Reflecting upon tensions within individual extended family units, our conversations also veered towards the transnational characteristics of our life and work, and the dynamics of socialisation and conviviality. We concur with (Merleau-Ponty and Smith 1978) that such readjustments made us dependent on the relational and corporeal (Diprose 2002, p. 135). As women, we experienced shared emotional connections and commitments in situating our gendered subjectivities and we experienced liberation in the ability to express our emotions (Belford and Lahiri-Roy, 2021b). As shared in Nish's narrative vignette earlier, migrant women in particular thrive and negotiate their subjectivities better when they experience 'corporeal generosity' – a condition 'of being given in' to others (Diprose 2002, p. 165). This was important to establish the 'relationality' we experienced in the virtual convivial space while discussing our migration journeys (Hinchliffe and Whatmore 2006, p. 136). Conviviality demands civility, acceptance, and a hinterworld of affectivity and migrant women in general are considered to be apt in bridging the familial, affective, and cultural connections between home and host communities more efficiently (Baldassar 2008; Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2019).

What also stood out for us was the comfort and ease we experienced in sharing personal insights which are often heightened with emotions and sensitivity. Although we had previously engaged in sharing personal insights in person, the shift to 'virtual spaces' was not different in affording similar comfort and safety in facilitating conviviality and to continue and share our emotions and challenges of migration and lockdown experiences. We agree with Georgiou (2017) that 'conviviality' through this virtual space brought us closer – through 'togetherness' and awareness of our own and others' presence and proximity. As Arundhati Roy (2020) stated 'the pandemic is a portal between one world and the next'. In the throes of the pandemic, we lived in isolation and were compelled into digitalisation strategy for communication and social interaction. The aftermath of this process has guided us in reviewing ways we can be 'convivial' despite our busy lives and schedules, but it also informs us about the significance of ongoing social interaction and being convivial – both in person gatherings or virtual spaces are important to our emotional support and wellbeing. We also found that working collaboratively on research through dialogues and reciprocal reflexivity also works through and within convivial spaces.

Conclusion

From our insights on gendered aspects of migration and conviviality, this paper only offers a glimpse into how the pandemic has impacted the ways we define 'togetherness', socialise, experience conviviality in sharing our emotions and find possibilities to collaborate and pursue our academic work – a research so far area receiving little attention (Morokvasic 2014; Boesen et al. 2023). We found social interactions either in person or in a virtual space were significant for us to unpack emotional entanglements and to find support during the pandemic (Wilding 2006). The virtual space soon became an important resource for social interaction, conviviality, collaboration, and wellbeing. As empowered and independent transnational women, we also face vulnerabilities and are often wary of sharing our emotions and experiences unless we experience comfort and safety in doing so (Chowdhory et al. 2022). Possibly, our gendered academic scholarship and cultural and ethnic similarities and differences facilitated a relationality of trust, understanding and acceptance to engage in convivial encounters and prompted our collaboration to work together (Amin 2008). It also allowed us to share personal insights about migration, home, and workplace issues – which are often driven by emotions and incorporate sensitive information. Our collective autoethnographic and reflexive lenses facilitated this approach to writing and dialogue within a convivial space.

Regardless of the direction/s of our different migration journeys, this experience made us pause and think about the challenges and connections we experienced in reinforcing solidarity, our vulnerabilities, and ongoing support and wellbeing. Although 'finding home' prompted our conversations, writing and reflection in this paper, it allowed us to review and re-imagine 'conviviality' and the gendered emotional dimensions of migration journeys. It de-constructed the earlier definition of convivial practices for most of us – and forced us to find different routes to connectivity. Given that there is much needed work on transnational feminist perspectives, our efforts also foster transnational solidarity and collaboration made possible; in practicing reflexivity to understand the complexities and value of different forms of agency within gendered migration journeys (Zerbe Enns et al. 2021). We hope this paper contributes to other research undertaken in the limitations under the COVID 19 restrictions – via virtual collaborations and otherwise; although we stress the opportunities for gendered and shared conviviality made possible through virtual spaces.

While our collaborative undertaking is limited and contextualised to the experiences and shared narratives of three individuals in metropolitan Melbourne, further removed by the remoteness of Australia from both the global north and south physicalities, the scope of our findings may not be generalizable. However, in a global context permanently transposed by the pandemic, trauma, technology and alternative models to research in more sustainable ways, this experience of building conviviality through virtual spaces contributes to a growing body of work in consideration of approaches to emerging methods and associated opportunities and constraints.

Note

1. Swadesh – homeland, motherland – one's own country where one belongs and has their roots – stemming from the word 'desh' (country in the Hindi language).

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