

# Using Metasynthesis to Develop Sensitising Concepts to Understand Torres Strait Islander Migration

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## Abstract

Emerging research indicates that more and more Indigenous peoples will be forced to migrate due to climate change. Current responses focus on mitigation and adaptation strategies. One such group, Torres Strait Islander people are already moving for other reasons and existing vulnerabilities compound levels of disadvantage when moving. It will be important to understand Torres Strait Islander people's experiences of contemporary movements in order to inform policy development and facilitate the process of migration and resettlement as movement increases. A synthesis of existing studies would allow the development of sensitising concepts that could inform future research in the Torres Strait Islander context. This article presents a metasynthesis of six qualitative studies of the experiences of different Indigenous and minority groups at various stages of migration, displacement and resettlement. Articles were selected on contemporary movements (2001-2011) and importantly the inclusion of first person voice. Reciprocal translation was used to synthesise common themes and a core construct. The overarching construct that became apparent from the metasynthesis was 'continuity of being' through staying connected to self, family and culture. Three themes emerged: 'freedom to be', 'staying close' and 'forming anchor'. These were enacted through people valuing their personal, social, religious and political freedom and recognising the importance of maintaining or forming strong social and family networks. When researching the experiences of Torres Strait Islanders it will be necessary to focus on motivations for moving, and understand the processes for staying connected to kin and homeland in order to achieve the desired outcomes of successful resettlement under conditions of uncertainty.

## Vignette

*I am a Torres Strait Islander woman, born and raised on Thursday Island. My mother is from the Murray Islands. My tribal wind is Koki (North Westerlies), which sweeps through the islands during the monsoon period of November and March. Koki Kerker (seasonal period) replenishes our water supplies and cleans the land and waterways of litter and dust that accumulates during the dry and windy spells. The sea turtle, Nam, is my matriarchal totem. It is from Nam, an ancient symbol of longevity and endurance, that I form my character. Nam moves with perfect ease, travels far yet returns to her place of birth to nest and bury her eggs.*



*I moved to the mainland to further my career within the past 10 years. Experiencing a sense of displacement as a consequence of my move made me question whether other people in my situation felt the same. It is this sense of disconnection that motives my research. Although successfully establishing a physical home in Cairns, I feel my spirit is firmly anchored in the Torres Strait.*

*In this time, I have witnessed a large number of Torres Strait Islander people migrating from the region. I expect to see more people move as environmental pressure mounts and a growing population amplifies the current issues of land and housing shortage, coupled with limited employment opportunities and high cost of living.*

*I want to know more about this displacement to understand my own experience through the lives and stories of others. For this reason, I chose to conduct a metasynthesis to develop sensitising concepts that could inform future research on the Torres Strait experience. Reading outside and beyond the Australian context enhanced my own understanding of migration, displacement and the processes and outcomes of resettlement, validating as well as refuting pre-existing assumptions. Considerations emerging from the literature synthesis allowed for a deeper exploration of my own qualitative research agenda which intends to uncover previously hidden features of internal migration and resettlement of Torres Strait Islanders in Australia.*

## **Introduction**

Emerging research indicates that Indigenous peoples will be forced to migrate as climatic conditions add to environmental pressures that will impose on people's livelihoods. Climate change discourse has brought special interest to small islands nations in the South Pacific and flood prone areas of India, Vietnam and Africa (Warner, 2010). Despite media and political attention focusing on future predictions of rising sea levels, studies in the South Pacific have identified that vulnerable groups are already on the move for reasons other than environmental changes. Whilst the current focus is on climate change refugees, adaptation strategies and mitigation, there is a need to understand the realities of displaced Indigenous peoples particularly those already on the move for other reasons.

Existing migration studies tend to focus on the history and extent of mobility rather than seeking a deeper understanding from displaced people's perspectives. The internal migration of Indigenous Australian people came to light in the 1970s when they were first included in the National Census (Altman, Biddle & Hunter 2005). Previous to this there was little or no understanding of Indigenous Australians' contemporary movement, especially that of Torres Strait Islanders (Gray 1989). One of the first studies of Torres Strait Islander migration in North Queensland was conducted in 1974 by the Research School of Pacific Studies. The study was based on data which was collected from the 1971 census. The study supported the notion that a large population had already moved out of the Torres Strait and were residing on the mainland. Almost 60 per cent of Torres Strait Islanders at the time were residing outside

of the Torres Strait region, with Townsville having the second largest population of Torres Strait Islanders in Australia (Fisk, Duncan & Kehl 1974).

The interest in Indigenous migration patterns has since expanded, mostly for political and economic reasons (Taylor & Arthur 1993; Altman et al. 2005) to identify shifts in the labour market (Gray 1989). Studies were undertaken for economic and planning purposes by governments which looked at levels of unemployment that would place demands on social services required to support an increasingly mobile Indigenous population. The study by Fisk et al. (1974) of Torres Strait Islander migration provided a number of motives for movement. These included: better living conditions, education, health and employment opportunities, and freedom from the Torres Strait Islander Act of 1939 which gave local Councils more power over domestic life and island policing, adding to the existing restriction of free movement and controlled wages (Beckett, 2010). Under this Act the practice of abusive power became more localized, even permitting the enforcement of bylaws which were not recognised by Australian law. These laws were punitive, sometimes resulting with the accused being expelled from the islands indefinitely (Beckett, 1987).

People's choice of destination was determined by where friends or relative had already settled, providing a stepping stone for new families to become established and providing a conduit for others who followed (Fisk et al. 1974; Beckett 1987; Watkin Lui 2009).

Migration is not always permanent or intended as such. As large numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in remote areas, the need to travel great distances to access services from regional centres is often necessary (Long and Memmott 2007). People also move to be close to kin who are receiving medical treatment in urban-based hospitals, or to be near those incarcerated (Coulehan 1996). Indigenous migratory patterns are continually being explored by demographers, economists and service providers to gauge the viability of remote and rural communities for government provided infrastructure and essential services (Taylor 2009).

Much has been recorded on the refugee experience of displacement and the experiences of transnational migration (Gough 2006; Locke 2009; Correa-Velez, Gifford and Barnett 2010). Less is known about the experiences of Indigenous people who move internally, especially within the confines of first world nations such as Australia. Existing international qualitative studies do to some extent explore first person accounts of the motivations, experiences and

outcomes for displaced groups but more is written from the perspective of minorities (Becker 2003; Holtzman and Nezam 2004). A synthesis of such existing international studies would allow the development of sensitising concepts that could inform future research in the Torres Strait Islander context. The aim of this meta-synthesis is to explore first person accounts of experiences of movement captured through qualitative methodologies.

## **Methods**

As the disciplines of the social sciences have become more involved in evidence-based research, the application of metasynthesis has been adopted as one way of presenting seemingly diverse qualitative research credible to the scientific community. Metasynthesis is a technique for combining the results of multiple qualitative studies on the same topic (Beck 2009). It has gained prominence in the field of nursing since the early 1990s and is becoming popular within social sciences (Sandelowski, Docherty and Emden 1997). Metasynthesis involves looking beyond descriptive information, as presented in conventional literature reviews, to locating qualitative studies within a broader interpretive context (Sandelowski et al. 1997). Integrating qualitative data for the process of metasynthesis requires locating references of particular bodies of literature with a common focus which is cross-examined to identify key constructs and themes. The advantages of this process allow for individual, isolated pieces or studies to be identified and drawn together to form a larger picture of a phenomenon. Glaser and Straus (1971 as cited by Beck 2009) describe individual studies as separate islands of knowledge that remain detached from each other. The goal of metasynthesis is not only to look for similarities of results of a specific phenomenon, but rather to probe deeper to reveal new information that may increase our understanding. The aim is to account for all important similarities, differences and nuances in language, concepts and around key ideas (Sandelowski et al. 1997).

Noblit and Hare's (1988) development of meta-ethnography for synthesizing qualitative research in anthropology is perhaps the most established systematic method of literature synthesis of primary data and it has been adapted by a growing number of disciplines (Britten, Campbell, Pope, Donovan, Morgan & Pill 2002; Beck 2009; McCalman, Tsey, Wenitong, Wilson, McEwan, Cadet-James & Whiteside 2010). The approach of Noblit and Hare (1988) includes a seven step process for aggregating and analysing individual qualitative studies

(Table 1). The step-by-step procedure proved invaluable in providing a conceptual framework to understanding the depth and complexity of this mode of analysis (Beck 2009).

**Table 1. Seven step process for aggregating and analysing individual qualitative studies**

1. Identify topic
2. Decided which studies are relevant
3. Read the studies multiple times
4. Determine how the studies are related to each other by making a list of key metaphors (concepts or themes)
5. Translate the studies into one another (reciprocal translation)
6. Synthesize the translations
7. Interpret the synthesis results through written form

Source: Noblit and Hare (1988), adapted by Beck (2009)

The literature selected for review in this study was organically and deliberately derived for the purpose of informing a future research study which seeks to address the question ‘What factors determine successful contemporary migration of Torres Strait Islanders who are moving to the Australian mainland?’

The study will use constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) within a theoretical framework of decolonizing methodology (Smith 1999) which provides Indigenous researchers with a guide for working from the inside out as well as from the outside in. My future research agenda thus defined the topic.

In order to focus on current issues of migration, inclusion was limited to studies published between 2001 and 2011. The time limit here also reflects the increasing knowledge around climate change and the effect this will have on certain marginalised populations. Climate change has prompted a new focus on the displacement of marginalised and vulnerable groups and studies have become interested in how these people are living and their future lives. I sought articles that had rich descriptions containing firsthand accounts of people’s experiences of migration.

For inclusion, a study had to contain a rich description of the data collected using various qualitative methodologies; particularly important were those whose findings were based on actual accounts of their participants. The inclusion of direct quotations throughout the articles was an important feature, giving people voice that would otherwise be lost to the scholarship of expert observers. The chosen studies are not historical or colonial and the voices of marginalised people have been valued, particularly those of Indigenous people who are now recognised for their environmental knowledge and stewardship. More thought is given as to how people research Indigenous issues and how they write about them as increasing numbers of Indigenous scholars are emerging in the ranks of academia. Smith suggests that Indigenous people are now in a position to tell their own stories, write their own versions, in their own ways, and for their purposes (Smith 1999).

The search began with articles relating to the experiences of Indigenous Australians, assuming that more recent literature would be centred on climate change induced migration. However, current studies into Indigenous people were mainly based on community adaptability capacities in view of climate change, for example Green, Alexander, McLnnes, Church, Nicholls and White (2010) and Petheram, Zander, Campbell, High and Stacey (2010). Therefore it was necessary to widen the search parameters. Many existing Torres Strait studies tend to be historical third person accounts of movement from archival research and through ethnographic methods, or quantitative from census data. These do not meet the criteria established and it was important to select articles that analysed success of migration beyond historical descriptions.

Because of the very small number of studies into the success factors in movement of Indigenous people in Australia with particular reference to Torres Strait Islanders, my search for literature extended outside of Australia as I had found a dearth of rich descriptive research on the migratory experiences of these groups. I found extensive literature on refugee experiences and diaspora. For example, Correa-Velez et al. (2010) considered the psychosocial factors associated with subjective health and wellbeing outcomes of young people with refugee backgrounds. This was typical of this group of literature which focused predominately on impacts of resettlement, the process of acculturation and social integration. These types of papers considered outcomes and did not necessarily examine the process of migration. Literature surrounding physical adaptation of communities to climate change was

excluded, as well as those providing only policy analyses and descriptive outsider commentaries.

Ultimately, six articles were selected for metasynthesis as they met the selection criteria of: first person accounts collected through rich descriptive qualitative methods between 2001 and 2011 (Table 2). Reciprocal translation was used to first analyse and then synthesize the articles (Britten et al. 2002). As noted above, metasynthesis is a multi-step process, which relies for its rigour in part on an adherence to process. The selected studies were read multiple times and key concepts identified within each study were listed in a table, following the process used by Ypinazar, Margolis, Haswell-Elkins and Tsey (2007). These concepts are presented in Table 2. Key concepts identified from this process became the data for synthesis using tables. The themes from one study were then translated into themes from the next in an iterative process to identify commonalities across the other studies selected for analysis producing the higher order synthesis presented in Table 3 and the section on Results.

#### *Selected literature*

The studies selected focused on people with existing vulnerabilities who had experienced displacement or were faced with the prospect of forced migration. The studies were carried out in various locations internationally. The participants in the six studies came from various ethnic groups who had experienced displacement or were faced with the prospect of forced migration. Even though there are considerable variations in participants' ethnicity or country of origin and different conditions for migration, there were similarities in the methodologies and methods used in the studies. Case study was predominately chosen as the methodology for all but two of the studies and data was captured using in-depth interviews.

Of the selected studies, two researched internal displaced of minority groups within United States of America: the King Islanders experiences of being displaced twice from their traditional homeland in Alaska (Kingston and Marino 2010) and the Hurricane Katrina evacuees of New Orleans (Murakami-Ramalho and Durodoye 2008). In both cases, people were unable to return after losing their homes and possessions. Two articles researched the experiences of people escaping persecution or seeking freedom from restrictive and oppressive political systems (Nielsen and Reenberg 2010; Greene, Tehranifar, Hernandez-cordero and Fullilove 2011). The remaining two articles consider other refugee experiences both permanent (Rosbrook and Schweitzer 2010) and temporary (Mortreux and Barnett 2009)

Details on each of the published articles selected for metasynthesis are included in this section (Table 2).

**Table 2. Key concepts in selected studies**

Authors/year/location	Participants	Study year	Methodology/design	Key concepts
<b>Greene, Tehranifar, Hernandez-Cordero, &amp; Fullilove (2011)</b> USA	20 families (representing 18 different countries)	Sept-Dec 1996	Case study Three in-depth interviews with each family	Families moved to escape restrictive conditions that deprived them of opportunities, economic, religious and political freedom. Wanting their children to live in a free world.
<b>Kingston &amp; Marino (2010)</b> Alaska	14 King Island community members	2005	Case study Interviews conducted with participants age 35 to 75yrs	Physical and emotional closeness of community ensured maintenance of language, culture, norms and values. Moving to the civic centre of Nome fractured this sense of 'closeness'.
<b>Mortreux &amp; Barnett (2009)</b> Tuvalu	40 Tuvaluan's	Jul-07	Case study 40 semi-structured interviews (28 personal capacity - 11 professionals)	Migrations mostly economical motivated, and influenced by attributes of age, education and family type. Remittance vital source of income for sustaining families living on Tuvalu.
<b>Murakami-Ramalho &amp; Durodoye (2008)</b> USA	9 African American women (Katrina evacuee's)	2006	Case study 2 focus group discussion, participants recruited through network sampling	Vulnerable people, living in poor area are often worst affected by natural disasters. Most are unable to return to their homes and recover what remain of their lives.
<b>Nielsen &amp; Reenberg (2010)</b> Africa	Not provided	Aug 2007 - Feb 2008	Ethnography 65 semi-structured interviews, 50 questionnaire survey, 12 focus group interviews and participant observation	The <i>Fulbe</i> , faced a moral and cultural dilemma as preferring to live in the bush maintain personal freedom and integrity. Their isolation restricts access to aid organisations that assist livelihood diversification.
<b>Rosbrook &amp; Schweitzer (2010)</b> Australia	9 Karen and Chin refugees	No date	Phenomenology In-depth semi-structured interviews, Recruitment by snowball sampling	Home is experienced not only as physical, but a psychological space of safety and retreat, of personal freedom and feeling valued. Confronting the unfamiliar, can create disturbances in one's personal identity.

Greene et al. (2011) based their study on the experience of displacement as a family group. Twenty families were interviewed representing 18 different countries. The criterion for recruitment was that displacement was the only option available to maintain or achieve family well-being. Families left for reasons of religious, ethnic and political persecution and economic deprivation. Despite the situational differences among the families participating in

the study, a common process of displacement emerged consisting of four phases: the antecedent; uprooting; transition; and resettlement. These involved a process of disconnection and reconnection, accompanied by massive shifts in social, cultural, and economic capitals. Losses identified by families from migration stemmed from the fact that group connections were not always transferrable from one socio-geographic setting to another.

The forced movement of the *Ugiuvangmiut* (King Islanders) from the remote makeshift settlement of East End to the urban setting of Nome in Alaska is an earlier account of forced migration and the integration of Indigenous people into larger non-Indigenous populations (Kingston & Marino 2010). Initially there was a gradual movement away from their traditional home on King Island to the mainland town of East End from the 1940s onwards. The second move to the city of Nome came after the 1974 storm that destroyed the makeshift community of East End. Participants recounted their earlier years at East End as resembling the close knit community of King Island. Close kinship ties became severed as people no longer lived in close proximity to each other, resulting in the decline in the number *Ugiuvangmiut* language speakers and the inability to interact on a daily basis. Having to rely largely on the cash economy, the *Ugiuvangmiut* had neither the time nor means to maintain traditions such as canoe making, or take part in ceremony and hunting which regulated and maintained community life (Kingston & Marino 2010).

The study of Mortreux and Barnett (2009) in Funafuti found that current migration was being influenced by factors other than climate change. Current migration was essentially spurred by economic needs and access to opportunities not locally available. They noted that factors that encourage people to remain on their islands were not well-explored, however there were several speculations which included an individual's knowledge of and access to facilities and financial resources; place-specific work knowledge and skills; and the value of close ties with one's cultural identity through a given community. Despite the international media and some academic reporting, individuals did not necessarily identify climate change as a risk or as a motive for migration. Personal observation of environmental change, belief in God and the significance of maintaining physical connection to their Islands were important factors shaping individuals perceptions of climate risks, responses and reason for staying.

Murakami-Ramalho and Durodoye (2008) conducted a qualitative study one year after the devastation of the Gulf Coast of America by Hurricane Katrina. This disaster saw a large

number of evacuees displaced and unable to return home to rebuild their lives. Those profoundly affected were African-Americans whose lower socio-economic positions meant that they lived in low-lying flood prone areas of New Orleans (Murakami-Ramalho & Durodoye 2008). Evacuees were forced to start a new life away from their usual place of residence, leaving behind family, history, traditions and well-established social networks. Participants were recruited through network sampling among members of the evacuee community who had chosen to settle in San Antonio, Texas. The study explored the experiences of life in New Orleans prior to Katrina and the consequential events that followed the storm. As participants recalled the accounts prior to and after the event, they themselves found ways of moving forward in their lives. Some of the participants felt that being accepted and welcomed in their new location made the task of resettling less traumatic.

The study by Nielsen and Reenberg (2010) of the *Fulbe* of Northern Burkina Faso looked at their resistance to diversification despite being just as involved with rain-fed agriculture as their counterpart the *Rimaiibe*. Part of their resistance is to maintain the traditional practice of transhumance, the practice of moving livestock between seasonal pastures. The other reason is to keep at a distance from the *Rimaiibe* whom the *Fulbe* once kept as slaves. Their absence during transhumance often leaves the *Fulbe* unaware of the presence of project work and the hiring of labour to realise these projects. The *Fulbe*'s reluctance to give up transhumance is mainly due to existential and moral reasons, despite the fact that transhumance is associated with difficulties, not strictly necessary, and stands in the way of often more economically viable strategies such as labour migration. The *Fulbe* are well aware of the benefits of labour migration, development work, and market gardening, but are unwilling to fully embrace these strategies, preferring to live in the bush, outside the control of 'foreign rule' and subjugation.

Rosbrook and Schweitzer's study (2010) used a phenomenological approach to explicate the meaning of home across pre-migrations and post-migration phases of refugee experience. The aim of this study was to identify the patterns of meaning relating to the experiences of home and its implications for Burmese refugees in terms of their emotional well-being. Participants in this study were members of the Karen and Chin refugee communities who had recently resettled in Brisbane. The results were the identification of three super-ordinate themes: home as the experience of a psychological space of safety and retreat; home as a socio-emotional relatedness to family; and home as a geographical-emotional landscape. Home as a geographical-emotional landscape conveys the idea that the landscapes of home are more

than physical landscapes – they are landscapes to which the individual has an emotional connection, which in this regard is best understood as relating to the power of landscapes that stir up strong feelings or agitations of the mind.

## Results

The six qualitative studies selected looked at migration experiences through chronicles of loss. What emerged through metasynthesis were stories of strength and resilience that are often concealed within separate, isolated studies. These were stories that tackled the difficult task of maintaining a *continuity of being* from one cultural and social context to another. This overarching construct of *continuity of being* needed to operate at self, family and cultural levels. Three themes related to *continuity of being* emerged from the process of reciprocal translation and synthesis of the selected studies (Table 3). These were; *freedom to be*, *staying close* and *forming anchor*.

**Table 3. Key themes derived from reciprocal translation of selected studies**

Study	Freedom to be	Staying close	Forming anchor
<b>Greene, Tehranifar, Hernandez-Cordero, and Fullilove</b>	Seeking freedom	Breaking long-standing ties	Restoring familiarity
<b>Kingston and Marino</b>	Loss of freedom to practice way of life	Keeping unity and group identity	Being able to practice tradition
<b>Mortreux and Barnett</b>	Maintaining freedom	Staying back with family	Moving away being the last resort
<b>Murakami-Ramalho and Durodoye</b>	Restricted freedom	Reminiscing the old	To feel welcomed
<b>Nielsen and Reenberg</b>	Remaining free from 'foreign rule'	Taking care of your own	Maintaining a separate way of life
<b>Rosbrook and Schweitzer</b>	Free from worry	Maintaining contact	To feel safe, valued and cared for

### *Freedom to be*

*Freedom to be* is a motivating factor that influences individuals' decision to migrate or not to migrate. The choice of migration therefore is determined by the cost of one's ability to maintain a certain level of freedom, whether to retain or regain a certain way of life. In all six studies, participants noted that personal freedom, and the freedom to live a peaceful existence

was the motivating factor when considering to move or not to move. In the Tuvalu study, Mortreux and Barnett (2009) found that the free and relaxed lifestyle experienced by islanders was a key factor influencing people's decisions to stay on Tuvalu when asked if they had considered migrating. This theme is highlighted in one of the participants' statements.

*Is good here. It is my paradise. I can sleep wherever I want, do whatever I want. I can visit my sister and just talk – and sleep there if I want... I can sleep and work when I want.* (Mortreux and Barnett, 2009, p. 108).

Political and religious freedoms were themes that emerged from four of the studies. People who experienced displacement through forced migration (Rosbrook & Schweitzer 2010) described their motive for moving was to search for a better life for themselves and their family. This seemed to be the case in all family groups unless their lives were in danger or their displacement was a result of conflict. One of the participants indicated that they wanted their children to 'see the free world' (Greene et al. 2011, p. 408). A similar but reverse situation was evidence where the *Fulbe* chose not to migrate and live in permanent settlements in order to maintain personal freedom from political control. Despite recognising the benefits of living in permanent settlements and adopting the diversification measure taken by the *Rimaiibe* through labour migration and project work, the *Fulbe* would rather accept the hardships of living in isolated family groups in the bush. Freedom from the subjugation to foreign rule and dependency on others was morally correct and valued over material gains.

*Out here I am free. . . I don't have to worry about what my neighbours does, where my animals are, I just have to look after myself and my family.* (Nielsen & Reenberg 2010, p. 149).

### **Staying Close**

The process of 'uprooting' from one's homeland involves severing longstanding ties with families, friend and community (Greene et al. 2011). This change disrupts the individual's routine daily activities and day-to-day physical and emotional help is withdrawn. All six studies emphasised the invaluable support from within the family, especially those living together (Rosbrook & Schweitzer 2010) or in close proximity (Murakami-Ramalho & Durodoye 2008; Kingston a& Marino 2010). The multi-generational space of the family home was valued in the Karen and Chin refugees study. Their understanding of 'home' is described as sharing a physical dwelling with others as well as being a place of 'giving and receiving care and support' (Rosbrook & Schweitzer 2010, p. 165).

Home can be experienced as both a tangible place and an intangible perception which would include the space for family or community. The closeness of community and family is missed when displaced as in the case of the Hurricane Katrina evacuees who had to rebuild their lives in other parts of the country. 'I miss the closeness, the family thing at home. Family and friends they are the same and one to me' (Murakami-Ramalho & Durodoye 2008, p. 125). Family support was a significant part of living in New Orleans where people came together to celebrate festivals over food and dance. Physical closeness for the King Islanders living at East End guaranteed the protection and survival of language, dance, and traditions (Kingston & Marino 2010). The knowledge of kin relationships was also retained and practiced as people interacted on a daily basis. The movement to Nome resulted in many young people neglecting traditional practices as they became reliant on a cash economy.

### *Forming anchor*

The process of recreating home elsewhere is likened to setting down an anchor. Staying connected with family back home, or making new friends in the new location tends to enable people to establish themselves in new environments. Families also formed anchor by investing in their children's education and future (Greene et al. 2011). Being accepted in a new place, to be valued and welcomed, also facilitates the course to anchorage. People on the move can often remain in a state of limbo between the old and new worlds. Having to sever well-established ties can leave people feeling uncertain and vulnerable. Restoring the old sense of being is achieved by connecting with ethno-cultural communities and surrounding oneself with the art, food and language of the former country (Greene et al. 2011). Murakami-Ramalho and Durodoye (2008) found in their study that the New Orleans evacuees found meaning by revisiting past lives in order to make sense of the new situation before being able to move forward. Reminiscence of what was left behind enabled participants to recover their loss and restore order in their lives once more, often under unreceptive and difficult conditions.

Mourning the loss of familiar people, places, practices and landscapes was constantly negotiated in the new world, so was the remoulding of personal identity (Rosbrook & Schweitzer 2010). To be able to smell familiar scents (Greene et al. 2011) and revisit the physical landscapes of one's childhood (Rosbrook & Schweitzer 2010) evoked pleasant memories for participants. This loss of familiarity and certainty was experienced when people

move away from physical landscapes that were once foundational places of childhood memories (Rosbrook & Schweitzer 2010). Having a sense of belonging also meant having somewhere to return to emotionally, psychologically, spiritually as well as physically, despite danger (Rosbrook & Schweitzer 2010). Greene et al. (2011) found that participants overcame these senses of loss by developing connections within their new environment, achieving financial stability and seeing the benefits in the lives of their children.

## **Discussion**

The overarching construct that became apparent from the synthesis of the studies was that people needed to maintain a continuity of being through valuing their personal, social, religious and political freedom, and the importance of maintaining or forming strong social and family networks. In seeking a *continuity of being* it was important to have an enabling environment where there was freedom to be, and where individuals were able to stay close to family, culture, language and tradition. The process of resettling and forming an anchor in the new world enable people to recover and regain their sense of wellbeing. It is also for these reasons, of maintaining self, family and culture that people had chosen not to migrate despite hardship.

Although the assumption is that people move to increase their prospects of a better life, the challenges fraught in the new location may outweigh the hardships experienced at the place of origin. Where migration is a conscious and voluntary decision, poverty and the poverty of opportunities (Connell and Viogt-Graf 2006) is often the motive for migration, coupled with the presence of kin in the destined location. When being forced to migrate, it is often those who are already vulnerable that have to move with little hope of returning. The displacement of Hurricane Katrina evacuees is evidence of vulnerability in first world nations, as it is often the poor that live in hazardous areas and who are unable to recover from their loss (Cernea 1997). The belief that people migrate for better opportunities can have the reverse effect on people's lives when confronted with additional stressors and disenfranchisement. Better employment opportunities also means longer working hours and less time to carry out cultural and family obligations. Oftentimes, cultural obligations to extended families and community increase with the rise in income and living standards (Hanna 1998).

To maintain one's culture can be a source of strength for new migrants and studies have suggested that the experience and processes of resettlement can be supported by regrouping

with ethno-cultural groups of similarities (Becker 2003; Adamo 2010; Greene et al. 2011). Recreating these environments during the initial phases of migration may improve the resettlement experiences of displaced people. Integrating objects and practices that are familiar into one's home provides a space for recovery and restoration. Conversely, cultural systems can become impediments to social integration as in the case of the *Fulbe* whose resistance to modify their traditions reduces their ability to diversify (Nielsen & Reenberg 2010).

Resettlement strategies adopted by migrants are also moderated by individual factors, again relating to situations and experiences prior to migration and as well as upon arrival. Individual factors may include age, gender, social status and degree of distance between two cultures (Mortreux & Barnett 2009). Moderating factors that obstruct the transitional phases of resettlement include: discrimination, coping strategies, and resources and social support received (Berry 1997). There is however an emerging field of psychosocial approaches which may offer an alternative for exploring the experiences of migration as encompassing a psychological dimension which relates to the social, material and cultural issues that influence and facilitate this process (Stillman, McKenzie & Gibson 2009).

## **Conclusion**

This study shows that metasynthesis is a valuable methodology, It has uncovered sensitising concepts for future research on Torres Strait Islander internal migration. When researching the experiences of Torres Strait Islanders it will be necessary to focus on motivations for moving such as, but not limited to, questions of freedom, and to understand the processes for staying connected to kin and homeland. The results from the metasynthesis clearly highlighted the need to develop ways to support resettlement experiences that help people maintain a continuity of being that enable them to form an anchor under conditions of uncertainty and vulnerability.

The need to look at the experience of migration more closely is ever more critical as Torres Strait Islanders are compelled to move involuntarily in the context of future climate change. A comparison of key themes in studies from quite different locations has shown that the desired outcome of social integration and economic participation generally means leaving some of the old ways behind and adapting to situations in order to move forward. Extended

family ties can be weakened and strengthened at the same time. While physical distance may separate people, the increased use of technology can bridge this divide by keeping families close. Staying close to self, family and one's culture is essential at the first stages of resettlement. The aim is to find a balance between the two worlds – the old and the new. To firmly form an anchor, there must be room to move freely and space to allow for the continuity of self, family and culture. These concepts will be central to investigations of climate-related migrations, especially among such under-researched peoples as Torres Strait Islanders.

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