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4 **Migrants straddling the 'here' and 'there': Explorations of habitus and hybrid**  
5 **identities among Sri Lankan migrants in New Zealand**  
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9 Shemana Cassim<sup>a\*</sup>, Otilie Stolte<sup>a</sup> and Darrin Hodgetts<sup>b</sup>  
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12 *<sup>a</sup>School of Psychology, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand; <sup>b</sup>School of Psychology,*  
13 *Massey University, Albany, New Zealand*  
14  
15

16  
17 \*E-mail: shemana.cassim@waikato.ac.nz  
18

19 Address: School of Psychology,  
20  
21 Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,  
22 University of Waikato,  
23 Private Bag 3105,  
24 Hamilton 3240,  
25 New Zealand  
26  
27

28  
29 Phone: +64 7 838 4989  
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## Migrants straddling the 'here' and 'there': Explorations of habitus and hybrid identities among Sri Lankan migrants in New Zealand

Migrant settlement is of particular interest to the field of psychology due to a notable increase in the movement of people over the past few decades. This article explores the ways in which Sri Lankan migrants in New Zealand establish a sense of continuity between the host nation and country of origin. The theoretical framework for this research is informed by elements of ethnographic and indigenous research. We provide a rich understanding of migrant experiences that foregrounds the agency and resilience of migrants, and acknowledges the complexities of the notion of identity and migrant settlement. We explore complex, fluid and hybrid cultural identities as experienced by Sri Lankan migrants, and their negotiations of space and place, material practices and objects of significance, such as an educational institution, antique dinnerware and furniture with colonial origins. The present research thereby, argues for the need to acknowledge both the historical and current contexts that shape migrants' sense of habitus and cultural identities.

Keywords: migration, habitus, cultural identity, Sri Lanka, postcolonial

### Introduction

The past 50 years have seen a remarkable increase in the movement of people, both domestically and internationally. Focusing on international migration, in New Zealand, foreign born peoples comprised over a quarter of the nation's population in 2013, most from Asian countries, including Sri Lanka (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). The 2013 census

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3 shows a 35.7 percent increase in the Sri Lankan population in New Zealand since 2006; a  
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5 significantly larger growth, compared to the 18.5 per cent increase in this population  
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8 between 2001 and 2006 (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). These developments necessitate  
9  
10 more culture specific research with these migrant communities to gain a greater  
11  
12 understanding of the settlement experiences of permanent migrants in a new country.

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14 Immigration is not only about arrival and settlement. It also entails the maintenance of  
15  
16 culture, and the re-creation of homes and identities. Often, migrants are required to adapt  
17  
18 to the social settings and norms of other groups. The resulting disruption of taken-for-  
19  
20 granted social support systems, familiar routines, cultural values, language and traditions  
21  
22 that are central to the construction of identities can cause migration to be an intense and at  
23  
24 times challenging process. The present research was conducted within the discipline of  
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26 psychology, and through this article we demonstrate that migrant settlement and  
27  
28 negotiations of belonging and identities in their new homes are more complex and dynamic  
29  
30 than is indicated in previous research in this field.

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33 Traditionally, psychological literature has focused on acculturation models to explore  
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35 the process by which individuals adapt to a new cultural environment. The most widely used  
36  
37 model of acculturation developed by Berry (1997), features the four strategies of  
38  
39 assimilation, separation, integration and marginalisation. According to this model, successful  
40  
41 settlement in a new country is achieved through integration, whereas those migrants who  
42  
43 do not achieve this goal are perceived to experience higher acculturative stress (Berry,  
44  
45 1997).  
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56 Berry (2001) argues that studies of acculturation must consider a range of individual  
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58 and contextual factors in order to gain a full understanding of the phenomenon. However,  
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60 in psychology, an over-reliance on survey designs and psychometric approaches hampers

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2  
3 richer understandings (Hodgetts et al., 2010). Consequently, psychological migration  
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5 research tends to employ acculturation models somewhat rigidly, and assumes a universal  
6  
7 approach (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Safdar & van de Vijver, 2019).  
8  
9 Little attention is paid to the messiness of everyday life, or the complexities of historical  
10  
11 contexts such as colonialism, and the ongoing dynamics of oppression, liberation and  
12  
13 hybridisation, and how these affect settlement. Furthermore, the standard against which  
14  
15 'successful' acculturation is often assessed is determined by the dominant group, silencing  
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17 diversity and dissent within the host society (Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011).  
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24 Although acculturation models may be a useful starting point for discussions of  
25  
26 migrant experiences, we demonstrate that settlement is often not predictable and  
27  
28 sequential. Migration is hardly a simple move from culture A to B, and in today's world,  
29  
30 people are no longer simply from *here* or *there* (Cresswell, 2006). Additionally, it is not  
31  
32 always a migrant's choice whether to integrate, assimilate or separate. A migrant's  
33  
34 (re)settlement journey is thus not achieved by travelling along a unidirectional trajectory  
35  
36 with a fixed end-point (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Hodgetts et al., 2010). Rather, a migrant's sense  
37  
38 of belonging in a new country is something that needs to be continuously negotiated, may  
39  
40 not fit into neat categories, and may never be complete. Migrants can move back and forth  
41  
42 between the different acculturation strategies, and may occupy more than one strategy at a  
43  
44 time, depending on the context. For instance, for migrants from nations like Sri Lanka, as an  
45  
46 ethnically diverse, postcolonial nation, the establishment of a sense of belonging in  
47  
48 bicultural nations like New Zealand is fluid, dynamic and interminable. Belonging, here, is  
49  
50 not a question of affiliation to a single idea of place, home, ethnicity or nationality, it is  
51  
52 about the multivocality of belongings (Fletcher, 2011), where migrants span the distance  
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54 and straddle both the *here* (the host nation) and *there* (the country of origin).  
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3 We draw on Georg Simmel's (1971) discussions of distance, to reflect the taken-for-  
4 granted spatial and temporal differences that constitute social and cultural aspects of  
5  
6 everyday life. Distance is recognised as a double structure, a *di-stance*, that can occur for  
7  
8 example, between the *here* and *there*, the now and then, and me and you (Simmel, 1971).  
9  
10 Accordingly, we perceive distance as not only a geographical concept, but also a social,  
11  
12 relational and imagined construct. The relationship between the *here* and *there* is not a  
13  
14 binary, and will be understood as a set of relational and material processes that occur  
15  
16 between people and places, over time, with greater or lesser regularity (*cf.* Hodgetts et al.,  
17  
18 2011). These processes comprise people's dynamic and lived relationships with their  
19  
20 cultures, practices and histories, or essentially, their ways of being. The notion of di-stance  
21  
22 as negotiated by migrants, alludes to the evolution and adaptation of cultures over time,  
23  
24 and emphasises that cultures are not reducible to homogenous or discrete variables. Such  
25  
26 complexities play an important role in shaping migrants' identities and (re)settlement in  
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28 their new homes.  
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38 Migrant identities do not simply involve the replication of existing cultures within  
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40 new settings, or the adoption of new ones (Hall, 1994). Rather, migrant identities should be  
41  
42 viewed as fluid and hybrid (Fletcher, 2011; Burdsey, 2006). Even core cultural identities are  
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44 mutable, and are reshaped by a myriad of social, cultural, political and historical events,  
45  
46 practices and narratives (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996; Sivasundaram, 2010). Migrants'  
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48 identities are thus an amalgam reflecting both their countries of origin and new settler  
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50 societies (Sirin & Fine, 2007).  
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56 Habitus is central to understandings of shared identities, belonging and social codes.  
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58 According to Bourdieu (1984; 1990), habitus represents the embodied nature of history and  
59  
60 experience that gives rise to ways of thinking and acting that are often taken-for-granted.

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3 Essentially, habitus refers to a shared set of norms, values, beliefs and expectations that a  
4  
5 person acquires unconsciously through experience and socialization. Habitus can be derived  
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8 from a nation's historical context, and manifests in the present as a particular way of being,  
9  
10 which includes practice, movement and action (Bottomley, 1992). This article exemplifies  
11  
12 how the habitus enacted by the migrants in the present study enabled them to bridge the  
13  
14 distance between the *here* and *there*, allowing for the facilitation of a sense of belonging  
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16 and the (re)construction of hybrid identities in the new country.  
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### 24 **Research context and design**

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27 This research was carried out with Sri Lankan migrants living in New Zealand. The first  
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29 author (Shemana), drew on her own experiences and cultural knowledge as a Sri Lankan  
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31 Muslim (Malay) migrant, to locate and draw meaning from the dialogues and practices that  
32  
33 participants engaged in within cultural and social contexts. While Shemana had lived in New  
34  
35 Zealand for five years during the time the interviews took place, she was born and brought  
36  
37 up in Sri Lanka. The second and third authors supervised this research process, in particular,  
38  
39 the analysis of data.  
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45 The present research approach was situated within the tradition of social constructionism. A  
46  
47 social constructionist stance implies that meaning is constructed through our on-going  
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49 (social) engagements in everyday life (Crotty, 1998; Hodgetts et al., 2010). Our approach  
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51 further involved elements of both ethnographic and indigenous research perspectives<sup>1</sup>,  
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57 <sup>1</sup> Here, we draw on the idea that in today's world, indigeneity means more than first nations peoples. This is not to  
58 disregard the cultural traditions and identities of the *Vādda* people in Sri Lanka (discussed later in the article). Rather, we  
59 argue that in the context of Sri Lanka today, indigeneity incorporates the heterogeneity of the Sri Lankan peoples. While  
60 many Sri Lankans have migrant ancestors, the sheer length of time that has passed means that their distinct cultures have  
developed on the island, and are now indigenous. Thereby, in the context of the present study, we highlight the  
importance of engaging with participants through the concepts and practices germane to them – which in itself is a form of

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2  
3 where a participatory (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Pe-Pua, 2006) and practice-oriented  
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5 (Reckwitz, 2002) strategy was used to gather participant accounts. This strategy responds to  
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7 the spatial and material turn in psychology, and the realisation that actively engaging in the  
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9 *doing* of various practices with participants (cultural or otherwise) tends to change the  
10  
11 nature of the interaction. Thus, resulting in a closer, more engaged and reciprocal  
12  
13 relationship between researcher and participants (Cassim, Hodgetts & Stolte, 2015). The  
14  
15 participants of this research lived in Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand. Shemana, who  
16  
17 resides in Hamilton, was invited to stay overnight at the participants' homes while  
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19 conducting interviews (such visits lasted up to 2-3 days). This enabled Shemana to partake in  
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21 the everyday life-worlds of the participants, rather than just being present during the  
22  
23 interviews. This research strategy was also consistent with the indigenous perspectives that  
24  
25 the study involved, enabling Shemana to build a social bridge with the participants by  
26  
27 establishing acceptance and trust (Cassim et al., 2015; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Pe-Pua,  
28  
29 2006). Consequently, as the research encounters progressed, it was clear that through the  
30  
31 eyes of the participants, Shemana was reconceptualised from being a guest, to being a part  
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33 of the household. The participants began to accommodate her in ways that were more  
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35 familiar; for example by allowing her to help them cook.  
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45 Moreover, Shemana drew on her personal experiences that stemmed from, or were made  
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47 possible by, being part of the culture in which she was immersed. The ethnographic and  
48  
49 indigenous perspectives adopted by our project recognise the need to embrace subjectivity,  
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51 emotionality, and the researcher's influence on the research process, rather than hiding  
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53 from such matters and assuming they do not exist (Cassim et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2011; Pe-  
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indigenous research. Accordingly, the present methodological stance acknowledges and is responsive to the varying religious and cultural expectations of the participants.

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3 Pua, 2006). Therefore, the theoretical orientation adopted required Shemana to  
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5 acknowledge that her habitus as a Sri Lankan, and her personal experiences could offer a  
6  
7 useful entry point into a richer and more detailed understanding of the complexities of the  
8  
9 research setting (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). This approach provided an alternative to  
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11 doing research where data collection involves a far more linear, unidirectional and delimited  
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13 process. Instead of simply reporting her experiences and/or those of the participants, there  
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15 was a level of analysis that went beyond drawing on Shemana's insider status (Pe-Pua,  
16  
17 2006) as a Sri Lankan. Rather, Shemana was able to apply a degree of reflexivity and was  
18  
19 able to use her own experiences and cultural knowledge to make sense of, and attribute  
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21 meaning to the various actions and events that occurred within the research context (Ellis et  
22  
23 al., 2011; Cassim, 2018). Accordingly, we engaged with our participants as collaborators in  
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25 knowledge production. Such dynamics within each participant interaction further  
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27 functioned to counter power imbalances that may have occurred between researcher and  
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29 participant. In saying this however, it is important that reflexivity does not lead to research  
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31 being more about us/the researchers rather than our participants – a notion that we were  
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33 mindful of throughout our research process.  
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## 46 **Method**

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49 Eight Sri Lankan migrant households were recruited for the study via the first author's social  
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51 networks, resulting in a total of 17 participants (aged 40-70). All participants were originally  
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53 from Colombo (Sri Lanka) and had moved to New Zealand between 1989-2003. In particular,  
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55 the participants of the present study were first generation migrants who had moved  
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57 voluntarily from their home county to New Zealand, arriving as skilled migrants. Therefore  
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3 we acknowledge that their experiences may be distinct to that of migrants arriving under  
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5 different visa categories, such as students or refugees. It is important to note that although  
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7 our participants had moved voluntarily, their reasons were related to Sri Lanka's 25-year-  
8  
9 long ethnic conflict. All households participated in 3-4 interviews that were enhanced  
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11 through the use of photo-elicitation (taking and discussing photographs of their everyday  
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13 lives), space and material object-related methods (going to particular spaces, and showing  
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15 and discussing key objects of significance to them). As such, repeat encounters, go-along  
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17 interviews and discussions of material objects, spaces and images helped draw out their  
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19 situated narratives, and allowed Shemana to view and photograph the various objects,  
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21 places and practices significant to the participants in their (re)settlement experiences.  
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29 Audio recorded interviews were transcribed in the languages used by the  
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31 participants (English, Sinhalese and/or Tamil). Thus, some transcripts were analysed as  
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33 bilingual texts. While this increased the complexity of these data sets, it did not affect our  
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35 ability to analyse them, as Shemana is fluent in Sinhalese, and is familiar with Tamil. The  
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37 participants themselves and a cultural advisor were able to expand on and explain  
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39 unfamiliar terms or concepts. The primary stage of analysis was carried out in the languages  
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41 spoken, as a means of preventing various cultural ideologies and concepts, not necessarily  
42  
43 familiar to the English language, from being lost.  
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49  
50 Our analysis was an iterative and interpretive process that involved engagement  
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52 with participant accounts, field notes and images, to unpack the various meanings behind  
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54 the taken-for-granted everyday practices of the participants. [Transcripts of participant](#)  
55  
56 [accounts and field notes pertaining to each household were arranged chronologically to](#)  
57  
58 [form one biographical narrative for each of the eight households. This data was then](#)  
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3 categorically and interpretively analysed with respect to the substantive issues that formed  
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5 the initial basis of the study. Here, the interpretive aspect entailed engaging with  
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7 participants, and also reflecting on Shemana's own experiences to draw out meaning from  
8  
9 the accounts – consistent with the ethnographic, insider and social constructionist  
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11 perspectives discussed previously. Literature was also used as an interpretive tool to provide  
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13 context to, unpack and develop additional issues that became apparent. This strategy for  
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15 analysis held exploratory power, allowing for a range of sub-themes to emerge. Overall, our  
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17 analysis drew on the notion that each of the households we engaged with were situated  
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19 cases and embedded in everyday life, rather than being part of a decontextualized and  
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21 culturally denuded 'sample' (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012).  
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29 Accordingly, we draw on work by Hodgetts and colleagues (Accepted/in press), who  
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31 establish similarities between their approach to everyday life and the work of early  
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33 impressionist painters. Where, 'rather than trying to capture or duplicate a frozen moment  
34  
35 plucked from 'real' lives' (Hodgetts et al., Accepted/in press, p.3), similar to impressionist  
36  
37 painters, our research aims to offer readers an overall impression of the dynamics of  
38  
39 migrant settlement and identity negotiations. In producing such impressions, we move  
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41 between specific descriptions of a local scene and theoretical abstractions that afford a  
42  
43 means of invoking more general negotiations of socio-structural and historical contexts. The  
44  
45 result is an 'intensified picture of actuality that is comprised, at least metaphorically of  
46  
47 incomplete brush strokes' (Hodgetts et al., Accepted/in press, p.3). Such 'impressions' hint  
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49 at, rather than fully entrap the everyday lives, and thus the settlement experiences of Sri  
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51 Lankan migrants living in New Zealand.  
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## Findings and analysis

The key findings from the present study centralised three substantive issues of habitus, hybrid cultural identities and interconnected spatialities. Through the first, we discuss the notion of Anglo-colonial habitus adopted by Sri Lankan migrants, demonstrating how seemingly mundane 'Old English' dinnerware can connected our participant back to her family and life in Sri Lanka. Through the second, we highlight how antique colonial furniture can speak to the hybrid nature of Sri Lankan cultural identities. Through the third, we explore how a colonial school can provide a sense of familiarity for migrants, by establishing interconnected spatialities between the *here* and *there*. Each of these themes will be discussed in further detail in the following sub-sections of this article.

### *Anglo-colonial habitus*

Identities are constituted by varying factors including historical, political and social forces. A nation's history is instrumental in shaping the identities of its peoples, and how these identities are enacted once they move to a new place. To explore the cultural practices and felt identities of migrants from nations such as Sri Lanka, there is a need to gain an understanding of the country's history.

Sri Lankan cultural identities for instance, have been shaped by the movement of people into the island over centuries. Sri Lanka's current social and cultural development began to take shape when the Aryans from Northern India arrived around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, into the island already populated by the *Vādda* people. These newcomers were soon followed by the Tamils from Southern India (Obeyesekere, 2004). Additionally, the island accommodated the scattered, and at times transient arrivals of Indonesians, Arabs, Africans

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2  
3 and Chinese, to name a few. More significantly, Sri Lanka was also part of the colonial  
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5 empires of the Portuguese, Dutch and finally the British, from whom the nation gained  
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7 independence in 1948 (Reeves, 2013).  
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10  
11 While Sri Lanka is indeed a postcolonial nation, the affix 'post' in 'postcolonial' does  
12  
13 not mean there was a neat separation between the period of colonial rule and the period  
14  
15 following independence. In fact, the colonial past is still visible in the postcolonial present of  
16  
17 many nations (Bhatia & Ram, 2009), albeit in different forms, examples of which will be  
18  
19 presented in the subsequent sections of this paper. Such significant historical events have  
20  
21 resulted in hybrid cultures that include elements of the past and present, a reality that is  
22  
23 clearly apparent, in the instance of the Sri Lanka people and traditions.  
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29 Consequently, today, Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse nation. Aside  
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31 from identifying with one (or more, or even none) of seven major ethnic groups: Sinhalese,  
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33 Sri Lankan Tamil, Indian Tamil, Sri Lankan Moor, Indian Moor, Malay and Burgher, Sri Lankan  
34  
35 people also follow a diverse array of religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity  
36  
37 and Islam. This further indicates variations in cultural practices between these groups. Since  
38  
39 most Sri Lankans were migrants into the island at some point, the nation comprises multiple  
40  
41 and hybrid ethnicities due to thousands of years of intermarriage and mixing of bloodlines  
42  
43 and traditions – a reality that may be true for many other nations across the globe, given  
44  
45 human mobility. Thus, Sri Lankan cultural identities enacted within space, through material  
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47 practices and objects, are dynamic and multifaceted (Wickramasinghe, 2006).  
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54 The concept of habitus becomes important here, to gain an understanding of the Sri  
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56 Lankan peoples and their cultural identities. For example, during the time of British rule,  
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58 many Sri Lankans who were partial to British lifeways were inclined towards 'Anglophilia'  
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3 (Roberts, 2007). According to Sri Lankan folk talk, the term 'middle class' described Sri  
4  
5 Lankans who occupied the top rungs of the social hierarchy directly below the British rulers  
6  
7 (Roberts, 2007). The period of colonial rule re-emphasized class differences on the island by  
8  
9 piggy-backing on Sri Lanka's existing class hierarchy (Jayawardena, 2002). Thus, the  
10  
11 members of the middle class mainly comprised the aristocracy of pre-British times who  
12  
13 adopted certain 'valued' attributes from the British to function among the colonial elites.  
14  
15 Such attributes or assets included a fluency in the English language, and a Westernised  
16  
17 lifestyle, such as wearing European attire (Wickramasinghe, 2006). For example, middle  
18  
19 class Sri Lankan men wore trousers outside their homes during their everyday public  
20  
21 activities, whereas the men who did not belong to this group wore sarongs (Roberts, 2007).  
22  
23 It was not only the aristocrats of the Sri Lankan indigenous population who adopted this  
24  
25 Anglo-colonial habitus. For Sri Lankans on the lower rungs of the social hierarchy this new  
26  
27 way of being was presented as a means by which they could lead a better life  
28  
29 (Wickramasinghe, 2006). While this was largely the action of Sinhalese people, some Tamils  
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31 (including the ancestors of the participants) also adopted the Anglo-colonial habitus.  
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40 Overall, the Anglo-colonial habitus formerly adopted by the Sri Lankan people, has  
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42 lasted through the generations. Such norms, values and beliefs are enacted through the  
43  
44 practices of present-day Sri Lankans, including the participants of this study. Nelumi of  
45  
46 household #6, is a Sinhalese Christian female in her 50s, who has been living in New Zealand  
47  
48 with her two sons, for 27 years. For her, the Anglo-colonial habitus assumed by her family  
49  
50 also extended to include various tangible material objects that were used around the home.  
51  
52 Nelumi spoke at length about such prized objects:  
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3 Nelumi: ...I've got a cabinet with all my nice dishes. Because I love old stuff. I've  
4  
5 got lots of Old English stuff. I was waiting for my mother to give some to me  
6  
7 [laughs]. Because she has got a lot of old English stuff.  
8  
9

10 Shemana: Old English?  
11  
12

13 Nelumi: Like you know.... the cutlery and crockery. Like I've got cups and saucers...  
14  
15 you know the old Johnson Brother's English [dinnerware]... My grandmother  
16  
17 had a lot of Johnson's stuff... and my mother had Royal Doulton stuff which I  
18  
19 really loved. So here [in New Zealand] it's readily available. I use them when  
20  
21 we have a dinner or lunch or something like that.  
22  
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24  
25 Shemana: So back in Lanka with your grandmother and all, having English things  
26  
27 was a sign of having status wasn't it?  
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30 Nelumi: Yes it was. I had no idea that that was the case at the time. I remember  
31  
32 she – my grandmother- used to lay the table for special occasions with all her  
33  
34 fancy dinnerware. So my mother has a whole dinner set. That must be really  
35  
36 worth a lot now come to think of it [laughs].  
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40 The use of 'Old English stuff' by Nelumi's grandmother was her way of signifying and  
41  
42 maintaining her social status, particularly in front of guests. Nelumi's grandmother, like  
43  
44 many other Sri Lankans at the time, was aligning herself with status symbols from the  
45  
46 colonial era. Nelumi still replicates her family's tradition of laying out 'Old English'  
47  
48 dinnerware when guests arrive. Yet, this practice is now more a re-enactment of memory, of  
49  
50 doing things like they were when she grew up, and reflects a habitus that she was socialized  
51  
52 into. At a young age, she was unaware of notions of Anglo-colonial habitus or social  
53  
54 hierarchy. In effect, Nelumi's statements highlight the unstated symbolic power held by the  
55  
56 colonial way of life, and the power of taken-for-granted practices. Nonetheless, to her, the  
57  
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1  
2  
3 'Old English stuff' also represent something much more - heritage and memory. While her  
4  
5 'nice dishes' are not the actual dinnerware used by her grandmother or mother, as Nelumi  
6  
7 has purchased them since arriving in New Zealand, they stand for something. Today, each  
8  
9 time Nelumi sets the table with her 'nice dishes', she is enacting memory, providing a sense  
10  
11 of continuity, linking her back to the time she lived in Sri Lanka, with her parents and  
12  
13 grandparents.  
14  
15  
16  
17

18  
19 Admittedly, globally, there is an ongoing heated debate regarding the detrimental  
20  
21 effects versus the benefits of indigenous peoples willingly or unwillingly adopting the ways  
22  
23 of the colonisers. However, in the particular context of Sri Lanka, irrespective of its  
24  
25 connotations, the fact remains that such events in history have shaped the present. This  
26  
27 needs to be acknowledged more often in discussions of culture and identities. The reality of  
28  
29 the Sri Lankan context is that the habitus acquired by the people of the island throughout its  
30  
31 history, has persisted over time, through the generations. The result being that such norms  
32  
33 and practices have fused into, and formed a hybrid set of cultural identities that have come  
34  
35 to represent the notion of Sri Lankan-ness today.  
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#### 44 *Hybrid cultural identities*

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47 The idea of a fully unified, static and coherent identity is an illusion (Burdsey, 2006). In  
48  
49 reality, cultural identities, are dynamic and constantly being shaped and reshaped by a  
50  
51 myriad of social, cultural and historical events. An apt example is that of the Sri Lankan  
52  
53 peoples, whose cultural identities have been shaped not only by the adoption of and/or  
54  
55 exposure to Anglo-colonial habitus, but also by the intermarriage of colonial settlers and  
56  
57 indigenous peoples, and voluntary and involuntary migration (*cf.* Reeves, 2013).  
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3 The Island's diverse history has given rise to a number of material objects that have  
4 now come to be symbols of Sri Lanka's hybrid cultural identities. Nirmala of household #7, is  
5 a Sinhalese Buddhist female in her 40s, who has been living in New Zealand with her  
6 husband, daughter and parents-in-law for 18 years. She discusses the significance of antique  
7 furniture that they had brought with them when they moved to New Zealand:  
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15  
16 Nirmala: ...When we bought our house and established ourselves [in New Zealand],  
17  
18 we brought this one here [points to a piece of furniture – see figure 1]... the  
19  
20 haansi putuwa [loosely translates to a chair for relaxing]. Yeah. The planter's  
21  
22 chair. It's a Sri Lankan thing. It's called a planter's chair where apparently the  
23  
24 up-country planters would just lounge on it with their feet up [laughs]. It's the  
25  
26 Sri Lankan version of the Lazy-boy I think.  
27  
28  
29

30 Shemana: My parents have one in their house in Sri Lanka too...

31  
32  
33 Nirmala: Yeah yeah and it's not very comfortable aye. But I like the look of it. You  
34  
35 can't really find them here.  
36  
37

38 Shemana: So why did you think it was important to bring this here [to New Zealand]?

39  
40  
41 Nirmala: Because I really like them. The colonial type furniture, it's Sri Lankan...  
42  
43 like...you know?  
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49 [insert figure 1] Figure 1. Nirmala's planter's chair.  
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55 Nirmala repeatedly refers to her antique furniture as '*Sri Lankan things*' that '*you can't get*  
56  
57 *anywhere else*'. To Nirmala and her family, the planter's chair is a representation of a  
58  
59 uniquely Sri Lankan identity. This holds true to many other Sri Lankans including Shemana's  
60



1  
2  
3 own family in Sri Lanka. Shemana was able to reflect on her memories as a child, trying  
4  
5 unsuccessfully to relax on the *haansi putuwa* or 'relaxing chair', but instead slipping down,  
6  
7 as its angle and the woven cane or rattan back seemed to serve as a mini-slide. This  
8  
9 discussion with Nirmala reminded Shemana of how she was in awe of her father and  
10  
11 grandfather (and other extended family members who also owned a planter's chair), who  
12  
13 did manage to successfully relax on this chair. These mutual experiences allowed Shemana  
14  
15 to foreground a shared history between herself and these participants, which materialises in  
16  
17 such objects.  
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23  
24 Moreover, by also saying '*The colonial type furniture, it's Sri Lankan...like...you*  
25  
26 *know?*', Nirmala was attempting to relate to Shemana, to understand how significant this  
27  
28 furniture is to their sense of identity and cultural heritage as Sri Lankans. Such objects are  
29  
30 artefacts of habitus, and enable its enactment. Here, we draw on Heidegger's (1927/1962)  
31  
32 argument that through a relationship with tools such as a hammer, the builder recognises  
33  
34 him or herself. Similarly, material objects such as the furniture mentioned by Nirmala, can  
35  
36 hail selves or identities into being.  
37  
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41  
42 Interestingly, the planter's chair, while being commonly used and passed down by  
43  
44 generations of Sri Lankans, was in fact introduced in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The use of free  
45  
46 standing domestic furniture by the pre-colonial Sri Lankan people was minimal, and limited  
47  
48 to a stool or mats often woven out of rattan or coconut leaves. 'Western' furniture was  
49  
50 brought to Sri Lanka by the colonial Dutch (Jones, 2002/2003). The planter's chair was also  
51  
52 popular and widely used at the tea plantations during British rule. Thus, the colonial  
53  
54 influence shifted the Sri Lankan norm of sparsely furnished homes to a situation where high-  
55  
56 backed chairs were used by the wider populace.  
57  
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3 Colonial furniture can also be found in other parts of the ancient British colonial  
4 empires such as India and Guyana, and to these peoples, represent their own unique  
5 cultural identities. For example, the 'planter's chair' is known as a Berbice chair in Guyana,  
6 and is a symbol of the Guyanese cultural heritage (Henderson, 1993). To the colonial  
7 settlers, such forms of furniture were not merely practical, but were also reassuringly  
8 familiar objects, in a place thousands of miles away from their homes (Jones, 2002/2003).  
9  
10 Thus, like Nirmala and her family now, for the colonial settlers of the time, the existence and  
11 use of familiar furniture from their own home countries provided them with a sense of  
12 belonging and connection with the people, places and lives they had left behind.  
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26 Hybrid material objects such as furniture can be historically revealing, as they can  
27 reflect long-term trends and breaks that are not contained in the average lifespan of a  
28 human being (Wickramasinghe, 2004). For instance, colonial furniture began as culturally  
29 and materially significant objects for the Dutch colonists, followed by the British, as material  
30 reminders of home, and now have come to represent Sri Lankan cultural identities.  
31  
32 Additionally, for Sri Lankan migrants in New Zealand, they now come to represent *their*  
33 sense of home, connecting contemporary Sri Lankans to their cultural heritage.  
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44 Moreover, in the instance of Sri Lanka, objects such as a planter's chair are epitomes  
45 of the hybrid nature of Sri Lankan cultural identities. Despite its original design coming from  
46 Europe, and the order or request to make such an item was typically given by a European,  
47 the item itself was created by an indigenous craftsman. Regardless of the origins, for the  
48 participants of the present study, the planter's chair has come to stand for something that is  
49 truly Sri Lankan. Examples such as the planter's chair, further serve as metonymic objects of  
50 referential generalisability (*cf.* Hodgetts et al., 2019-in press) representing broader  
51 narratives of colonialism, postcoloniality and hybrid identities.  
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3 Overall, the use of hybrid material objects by the Sri Lankan peoples is complex. For  
4  
5 some, such objects have offered a means by which they could gain status and function  
6  
7 alongside the colonial settlers, whereas for others, this was seen as a contamination of  
8  
9 authentic Sri Lankan culture. For yet another group of Sri Lankans, cultural hybridity was a  
10  
11 way of undermining the implacable oppositions of East/West, traditional/modern and  
12  
13 primitive/civilised that were instituted by the process of colonialism (Wickramasinghe,  
14  
15 2004). Although Sri Lanka's history has included conflict, the island's hybrid history can also  
16  
17 be seen as a strength. For migrants living away from Sri Lanka, several hybrid objects stand  
18  
19 for notions of cultural identity, heritage, adaptability and Sri Lankan-ness.  
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26 The significance of the historical context of a nation for the settlement experiences  
27  
28 of its modern-day migrants, has been argued by many scholars (e.g. Espiritu, 2003; Kelly &  
29  
30 Lusi, 2006; Marshall & Foster, 2002; Bottomley, 1992). Such works however, tend to focus  
31  
32 only on the *differences* between the habitus of the country of origin and the new country.  
33  
34 Yet, there is also scope to extend this focus to explore the similarities between the *here* and  
35  
36 *there*. For instance, the participants of the present study moved from one country which  
37  
38 was once a part of the British colonial empire to another. While we acknowledge that the  
39  
40 British empire operated differently in Sri Lanka and New Zealand, we maintain that for these  
41  
42 migrants moving from the former to the latter, there were common aspects of that empire  
43  
44 in both the *here* and *there* that made their transition to, and settlement in their new home  
45  
46 easier. We argue that some aspects of habitus, more specifically an Anglo-colonial habitus,  
47  
48 may facilitate a sense of familiarity and belonging for a migrant in a new country through  
49  
50 interconnected spatialities. Thus, the habitus of people from different parts of the world  
51  
52 may carry common threads due to the extensive histories of human movement.  
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### *Interconnected spatialities*

British colonisation was simultaneously about the expansion of their territory and networked encounters. As such, one of its legacies has been an interconnected postcolonial world characterised by stretched and hybrid cultures, imprecise borders and 'spaces of global culture' (Jazeel, 2012). Thereby, for many countries such as Sri Lanka and New Zealand that were part of the British colonial empire, there exists the element of a common thread linking these nations to one another, despite achieving independence from Britain over 50 years ago. An example of a colonial footprint which instigates interconnected spatialities between Sri Lanka and New Zealand is colonial architecture.

In South Asia in particular, a number of buildings and urban constructions found in the subcontinent have arguably been some of the most tangible and enduring legacies of European colonialism (Jazeel, 2012). Many of South Asia's formerly colonial cities such as Mumbai, New Delhi and Calcutta, in India, or Colombo and Galle, in Sri Lanka, showcase architectural history that can be directly attributed to colonialism. That is not to say that there is nothing authentically local about a Sri Lankan or Indian city. Rather, the point here, is to highlight the interconnected spatiality of these now *postcolonial* cities (Jazeel, 2012), to illustrate that colonial institutions have now become institutions of continuity between places. These common threads provide a connective landscape between the various South Asian nations, and also extend to other postcolonial nations such as New Zealand.

Members of household #1, Kamal (male) and Udeni (female) are both in their 50s, identify as Sinhalese Buddhist, and have lived in New Zealand with their two sons for 16 years. A discussion with these participants reveals how they gravitated towards the familiar colonial landscape of a school:

1  
2  
3 Kamal: ...There was another family whom I contacted... sent me details when I was  
4  
5 shopping for schools. Auckland Grammar [a boy's school in New Zealand] came  
6  
7 up... and he sent me the websites and photographs and all that...to see, Royal  
8  
9 [Royal College, a boy's school in Sri Lanka, which Kamal and later his children  
10  
11 had attended prior to moving to New Zealand] and Auckland Grammar were  
12  
13 the same [smiles]....Maybe the curriculum was different...but school-  
14  
15 wise...building-wise...the main hall-wise it was the same. That's a high school.  
16  
17 There were a few years for my oldest to get there...but yeah that was another  
18  
19 reason for us to come to Auckland.  
20  
21  
22

23  
24 Udeni: Hmm [nods]. Yeah it has English type buildings you know?  
25

26  
27 Kamal: Shemana you won't believe, you walk into the main hall of the school...there  
28  
29 is no difference. You get the balcony...you get the hall...you get the wooden  
30  
31 seats...chairs...benches.... it's all British influence. That school was started by  
32  
33 British in Colombo....Royal...and Auckland Grammar was a British school...  
34  
35

36  
37 Shemana: So would you say that seeing pictures of Auckland Grammar, that it was a  
38  
39 lot like Royal...was kind of comforting to be able to send your children there..?  
40

41  
42 Kamal: Yes! That is coming from my father's vision. My father was not in a family who  
43  
44 was able to afford sending children to Royal. But he did that, right. He wanted  
45  
46 to educate us in the best school possible. So he wanted to put us to Royal.  
47  
48 From the family background they –my parents- were coming, Royal was far  
49  
50 away. Royal was very much a supreme high calibre school then. So coming  
51  
52 from there...I learned the lesson...and I looked for the best school here in New  
53  
54 Zealand.  
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3 As a new migrant in New Zealand, the existence of a school which resembled his own  
4 (colonial) school back in Sri Lanka helped Kamal, and his family, feel less alienated by their  
5 new surroundings. The school was one of the driving factors that led members of household  
6 #1 to choose Auckland as their new home. Here, Kamal and Udeni were making connections  
7 between the place they were moving to, and the places familiar to them in their life back in  
8 Sri Lanka. The appearance of the Auckland Grammar School in New Zealand prompted  
9 memories of Kamal's school life in Sri Lanka, and of his late father, who worked hard to send  
10 Kamal and his brothers to the prestigious Royal College. For Kamal and Udeni, the discovery  
11 of Auckland Grammar School in the otherwise foreign setting of New Zealand was a sign of  
12 the familiar, it was a sign of home.

13  
14  
15 Moreover, for Kamal and his family, the significance of these two schools extends  
16 beyond the similarities between the appearances of their buildings. The architectural  
17 features of these two schools also bring forth connotations of British elitism and Anglo-  
18 colonial habitus. To elaborate, in Sri Lanka, educational institutions established by British  
19 missionaries were a sign of class and status, as they followed the English education system  
20 and also taught in the English language (Jayaweera, 1990). Only people who lived in urban  
21 cities and had the monetary means, were able to afford to send their children to these  
22 schools. English education provided by these missionary schools thus became an agent of  
23 upward socio-economic mobility, expanding the new middle class (Jayaweera, 1990;  
24 Jayawardena, 2002). Receiving an education through these schools increased social status  
25 for children and their families on the lower rungs of the social hierarchy, and also  
26 maintained or enhanced the existing status of elites.

27  
28  
29 Although Royal College is now run by the state and also teaches in Sinhalese, Tamil  
30 and English, the school remains prestigious. Kamal and Udeni's perception of Royal College

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3 and Auckland Grammar School as being similar, resulted in them transferring this status  
4  
5 ascribed to the former, to the latter. By sending his children to Auckland Grammar School,  
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7  
8 Kamal was maintaining the social standing that his father worked to achieve for his family.  
9  
10 Therefore, Auckland Grammar School enabled Kamal to connect back to Sri Lanka, his past,  
11  
12  
13 life and family.  
14  
15

16           Affective significance attributed to a certain otherwise foreign landscape can at  
17  
18 times provide a sense of familiarity, and assist in personal negotiations of how one might  
19  
20 belong in a new place (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). While memories prompted by place can  
21  
22 sometimes exacerbate the negative shock of the new, they can also be a restorative means  
23  
24 of envisaging how life can continue beyond the strange and unfamiliar. In the context of  
25  
26 migration, places like Auckland Grammar School associated with past memories linked to a  
27  
28 similar setting back in the country of origin, can shape a migrant's sense of belonging,  
29  
30 allowing migrants like Kamal and Udeni to develop rootedness *here*. Thus, threads of  
31  
32 history, personal as well as national, can weave a complex pattern of experiential  
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34 knowledge and memory linking not only the past and present, but also the *here* and *there*.  
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## 44 **Conclusion**

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47 Through this article we explore the notion of hybrid identities, and how such identities play  
48  
49 out in the context of migration. Drawing on the complexity of Sri Lanka's colonial history as  
50  
51 a point of referential generalisation (*cf.* Hodgetts et al., 2019-in press), we emphasise that  
52  
53 contemporary cultural identities are shaped by a nation's past. We contest the assumption  
54  
55 of a clear binary between the colonising them and the colonised us, the colonial and the  
56  
57 *postcolonial*, and the traditional and the modern. For countries like Sri Lanka, today, such  
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3 distinct oppositions may not necessarily be as simple. Rather, for these nations, national  
4  
5 and/or cultural identity is a question of multiplicity (Hall, 1996). This article illustrates that in  
6  
7 all the ex-colonies and dominions, the colonial past strongly informs the present. Aspects of  
8  
9 past cultures, may it be colonial or otherwise, have been appropriated by the peoples of  
10  
11 postcolonial nations such as Sri Lanka, and continue to be present as unique cultural  
12  
13 markers, or symbols of national identity in such nations today. That is not to say that there  
14  
15 is nothing unique or original about a Sri Lankan cultural identity. Rather, for the purpose of  
16  
17 the present article, we draw on the particularly hybrid aspects of Sri Lankan culture.  
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23 Bourdieu's (1990; 1984) notion of habitus is central to the arguments made in this  
24  
25 article. The people of colonial Sri Lanka had to adopt an Anglo-colonial habitus, as a survival  
26  
27 strategy that enabled them to function alongside the European rulers. The Anglo-colonial  
28  
29 habitus has further played out across generations, and still manifests today in the life-worlds  
30  
31 of Sri Lankans. Moreover, today, colonial values and norms have merged with, and shaped a  
32  
33 hybrid set of cultural identities that have come to represent the notion of Sri Lankan-ness.  
34  
35 The concept of habitus has traditionally been used fairly uniformly and in relation to an elite  
36  
37 class. In the present context, the term illustrates the multiple and hybrid reality of norms,  
38  
39 values, social codes and identities, and the agency of the supposedly subdued colonised  
40  
41 'other'.  
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48 In light of its rich history, nations such as contemporary Sri Lanka are comprised of a  
49  
50 melting pot of cultures and cultural identities. We explore the significance of historical  
51  
52 objects such as furniture as referential (*cf.* Hodgetts et al., 2019-in press) markers of cultural  
53  
54 identities and heritage for contemporary Sri Lankans. While such objects may have foreign  
55  
56 origins, over time they have come to represent something that is truly Sri Lankan. For  
57  
58 migrants living overseas, their national identities as Sri Lankans are embedded in, and  
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2  
3 articulated through particular objects and practices, which connect them back to their  
4  
5 country of origin. Connections between nations such as Sri Lanka and New Zealand have  
6  
7 also been made through common historical threads. Consequently, colonial architecture can  
8  
9 help migrants moving from nations like Sri Lanka to New Zealand feel more at home in the  
10  
11 new country. Not only do the interconnected spatialities forged by common historical  
12  
13 elements provide a sense of familiarity, it can also help migrants develop feelings of  
14  
15 rootedness. Through the examples portrayed in this article we highlight the complexity of  
16  
17 migrant identities that is often overlooked.  
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23 The perception of culture as dichotomous and oppositional, traditional or Western,  
24  
25 fails to grasp the complex realities of the everyday lives of the peoples from postcolonial  
26  
27 nations like Sri Lanka. In the context of migration, this level of complexity further increases,  
28  
29 where these migrants negotiate hybrid cultural identities, rather than insular and discrete  
30  
31 identities as Sri Lankans or New Zealanders. Culture no longer sits in singular, confined  
32  
33 places. Rather, culture is hybrid, dynamic and is more about routes than roots. Furthermore,  
34  
35 mobility, particularly as enacted by migrants, is not just about a singular human agent, but  
36  
37 also involves the relationships between people, things, places and histories that together  
38  
39 produce new effects across spaces within a landscape (Cresswell, 2006). In saying this, we  
40  
41 do acknowledge that this article has a primary focus on the accounts of Sinhalese peoples,  
42  
43 and omits an in-depth discussion of the dynamics and implications of class and caste. Due to  
44  
45 the multifaceted nature of Sri Lanka and its history, other complexities relating to Sri Lankan  
46  
47 culture (in terms of the dynamics of class, gender and ethnicity) could be an avenue for  
48  
49 future research.  
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58 Nonetheless, through the present study, we demonstrate that for these migrants  
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60 from Sri Lanka, the (re)settlement process is fluid, dynamic and often unstable. Thus,

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2  
3 contributing to recent arguments made in a review of acculturation research and its  
4  
5 applications by Safdar & van de Vijver (2019), we argue that a migrant's (re)settlement  
6  
7 journey is not something that can be achieved by travelling along a unidirectional trajectory  
8  
9 with a fixed end point. Rather, a migrant's integration and establishment of a sense of  
10  
11 belonging in a new country is something that needs to be continuously negotiated, may not  
12  
13 fit into neat categories, and may never be fully complete. Migrants can move back and forth  
14  
15 between the different acculturation strategies discussed previously, and may occupy more  
16  
17 than one strategy at a time, depending on the context.  
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23  
24 Overall, the present research challenges the tendency to look for standardised,  
25  
26 cause-and-effect relationships in psychology, and the assumption that people's experiences  
27  
28 can fit into the discrete categories of a stage model. Reducing people's everyday lives in this  
29  
30 way is problematic, as too much can be lost. Without an in-depth understanding of the lived  
31  
32 experiences of migrants, there is a risk of assumptions that do not adequately reflect the  
33  
34 life-worlds of particular migrant groups. Consequently, discussions of migrant settlement  
35  
36 need to take a bottom-up approach, acknowledging the dynamics of complex and hybrid  
37  
38 cultural identities, historical contexts, everyday lived experiences, and people's ways of  
39  
40 being. Moreover, a sense of belonging as experienced by these migrants, is not purely a  
41  
42 psychological response, neither is it a question of affiliation to a single idea of place, home,  
43  
44 ethnicity or nationality. Belonging in the context of migration, is about the multivocality of  
45  
46 belongings experienced by migrants straddling both the *here* and *there*. Migrants negotiate  
47  
48 multi-layered socio-cultural identities that may be situated across locales, and are  
49  
50 constantly in a state of transition and regeneration.  
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58  
59 In psychology, migration is often perceived as a loss of something, as disruption and  
60  
as a sense of dislocation from lives, cultural traditions, people and places. Our research

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2  
3 illustrates that migration can also involve a sense of continuity and can enrich lives.  
4  
5 Migration can encourage intercultural communication and understandings, and can open up  
6  
7 new worlds, possibilities and identities. The migration experience can make people more  
8  
9 resilient and can showcase the agency of migrants, as it involves the active re-working of the  
10  
11 self, and learning about other cultures. The experience of migration challenges static and  
12  
13 homogenous understandings of the self, identity and culture, by making people acutely  
14  
15 aware that notions of culture and the self are not fixed, but are a context specific,  
16  
17 continually evolving and dynamic social process. In the contemporary context where  
18  
19 mobility across borders is an increasingly 'normal' aspect of people's everyday lives, our  
20  
21 research demonstrates how much migrants can essentially gain from the migration  
22  
23 experience.  
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Figure 1. Nirmala's planter's chair.

Peer Review