Journey From The Midnight Sun To The Land Of The Long White Cloud

- One Story Of Health and Migration

Kerrie Freeman



In June 2007 I commenced a study on how the health knowledge of a Finnish migrant community in New Zealand has developed and changed in the contexts of migration, culture contact and intergenerational transfer. To date I have interviewed a group of first generation Finnish migrants, reviewed health and migration literature, and enjoyed a trip to Finland in June 2008.

Background

Many people have had some experience of the phenomenon Castles & Miller (2003) term the "age of migration". New Zealanders are no exception. The Department of Labour Migration Trends 2005-06 report notes that one in five New Zealanders were born overseas (http://www.dol.govt.nz/). New Zealand Department of Statistics National Ethnic Population Projections (2001-2021 base) predict New Zealand will have even greater ethnic diversity in the future (http://www.stats.govt.nz/).

Migrant health is a global concern. Differing rates of use of health services by migrant groups (as opposed to non-migrants) have been reported in Canada (Epp, 1986), the United Kingdom (Karmi, 1996), and Australia (Powles & Gifford, 1990). Grondin (2004) advocates that "Well-managed migrants' health presents

Kerrie Freeman has just commenced in the role of Service Improvement Leader for the Bay of Plenty District Health Board, in the North Island of New Zealand. She has a Bachelor of Business Studies from Massey University (New Zealand) and a Post Graduate Diploma in Public Health from the University of Auckland (New Zealand). Kerrie is currently working on her PhD through the University of Auckland and this article describes her research. She is interested to hear from others involved in similar research and can be contacted on Kerrie.Freeman@bopdhb.govt.nz

opportunities for improving global health, for the benefit of all societies." Migrants bring with them culture, religion, traditions and health beliefs which can influence whether or not health services are used, or preventative health recommendations are complied with. Migrants also bring with them genetic, socioeconomic, environmental and epidemiological backgrounds that shape their health experience. (Grondin, 2004)

This thesis was born out of my experience as the daughter of a Finnish migrant. Pursuing post graduate studies in Public Health and working in management of service provision at a District Health Board¹ focused this interest on pursuing a health topic in relation to a Finnish migrant group. Actually it's more than that – I have an extra-ordinary Grandfather (Pappa). When Pappa retired from Tasman Pulp & Paper Mill he was overweight, under-fit, and a smoker and drinker. He decided to lose weight, run marathons, quit smoking cold turkey, and moderate his alcohol intake. He has achieved every goal and believes it is possible for anyone to live to more than 100 years old. I've often wondered what makes him believe this, and if this belief does in fact make it possible. At 82 he appears to have made very few concessions to the aging process.

It is within this context that I selected the topics of health and migration for my doctoral thesis. Understanding where health knowledge and migration experiences connect is one way to tell the story of a migrant group in New Zealand. This story can help us to understand and theorize a model of human behavior for this, and other migrant groups. This story can also inform the health policy makers, funders and providers who are charged with meeting the health needs of a multicultural society.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research is to discover the experiential health knowledge and migration experience of

a group of Finns² and their descendants living in New Zealand, and how this health knowledge has developed and changed in the contexts of migration, culture contact and intergenerational transfer. The main research procedures are in-depth interviews with about 30 participants, using auto-ethnographic and narrative methodology. Data will be analysed with a general inductive and narrative approach. The research aims to inform the health policy makers, funders and providers who are charged with meeting the health needs of New Zealand's multicultural society.

The research aims to understand where health knowledge and migration experiences connect, as revealed through the stories of a group of Finns living in the Bay of Plenty. In a similar approach to Elliot & Gillie (1998), the study will focus on the experiences of participants that shape health attitudes, beliefs and values in the shadow of the migration experience. It is proposed that one way to understand the concepts of health and migration is through the context of individual life stories. The research aims to add to the body of knowledge on migrant health. It also intends to take up Anderson's (2006) challenge to expand and refine research within the realist ethnographic tradition through the application of analytic auto-ethnography and narrative as research methodology. To my knowledge, this specific research has not been previously undertaken in New Zealand.

Kawerau Finns

Finns are a migratory people and Finnish seamen were among the first Europeans to sail across the world. Over the past 150 years, approximately 1.3 million Finns have emigrated, mostly to the United States and Sweden. In 1769-70 when Captain James Cook claimed New Zealand and the eastern parts of Australia for the British crown, a Finnish draughtsman and naturalist was part of the crew of the Endeavour. Since the mid-19th century a couple of thousand Finns have settled in New Zealand, including Finnish paper mill workers who were recruited to Tokoroa and Kawerau in the 1950s and 1960s and pioneered the pulp and paper industry in New Zealand. (Koivukangas, 2005) Some of these Kawerau mill workers and their descendants are part of study sample group.

Olavi Koivukangas (1996) documented aspects of the migration of the Kawerau Finns in his book From the midnight sun to the long white cloud – Finns in New Zealand (Chpt 8). In 1951 the National Government entered into a joint venture with the Fletcher Group to form the Tasman Pulp and Paper Company Ltd (Tasman), the largest company in New Zealand at that time. This company was formed to process the pine trees that were being felled in the Kaingaroa Forest, which had been planted primarily by depression labour in the 1930's, and were now reaching maturity. At that time, Kaingaroa was the largest manmade forest in the world, covering 160,000 hectares. Tasman began construction of a pulp and paper mill in Kawerau in 1953 which included construction of a pulp and paper plant, sawmill, wood preparation plan, and a paper finishing plant. At the time of construction, it was the largest project undertaken in New Zealand. Fletcher Construction also built the housing required to accommodate the Mill workers in Kawerau. In 1954 nationwide newspaper advertisements were placed in Finland to recruit experienced staff for the Kawerau mill. (http://www.fclarchives.co.nz/companies.php, http://www.businesshistory.auckland.ac.nz/fletchers/ company_profile.html)

On November 18th 1954, 12 Finnish men were selected for employment at Tasman, and journeyed to New Zealand with their families aboard the ship Captain Cook. Four additional families migrated in 1955, and in 1959 my family arrived – Paavo and Toini Sandberg and their two girls, Hannele and Maria. In 1962, Toini Sandberg's sister and brother and their families arrived, along with a number of other Finnish migrants (Koivukangas, 1996). Conditions in Kawerau have been described by first generation participants as desolate:

Well coming to Kawerau, coming down the Rotoma Hills, we thought we'll never ever get back from here. We are so behind the God's back that we never ever get back. And then coming to Kawerau, because there was no town, there was only about I would say 100 houses ready, or maybe 150, and the town was full of sand hills and hundreds of construction men, and ah then we were told that 101 is your house, and 98 is the road you are in!

Kawerau was nothing, full of hills and sand and sandflies. Just big mountain and nothing here, nothing. It was just eramaa³ eramaa – desert, eramaa.

However, the Finns quickly adapted to this "created community" (James, 1979) building a Lutheran Church, Sauna and setting up a Finnish Club to organize sports and cultural activities. (Te Ara, 2008) One first generation participant remembered that there were 18 different nationalities in Kawerau when she arrived and that:

The New Zealanders were so open and so loving... but Kawerau particularly had that because everybody in Kawerau had come from somewhere – it was a new place.

The Research Design

Analytic auto-ethnographic and narrative methodologies have been selected for the research design. This selection reflects my membership of the sample group, and the aspect of story-telling that has emerged from the initial interviews.

Analytic Auto-Ethnography

Ethnography is a qualitative research method where fieldwork, such as participant observation, interviews and documents, are utilised to understand a way of life. The hypothesis is that if we understand a group's culture we can develop theories of human behaviour for the particular group being studied, and also apply this theory to other groups. Ethnography has been described as "a portrait of a people", and a "written description of a particular culture, the customs, beliefs and behaviour, based on information collected through fieldwork". (Harris & Johnson, 2000 in Gensuk, 2003). This method aims to "tell the story" of a particular group (Hammersley, 1990 in Gensuk, 2003). Gensuk (2003) also notes that the role of the researcher as a participant observer is to "share as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the people", and "develop an insider's view". The aim is to "feel what it is to be part of the group". But what if you already have an insider's view?

Auto-ethnography is a methodology related to ethnography, that also aims to utilise observation, interviews and documents to understand a group's culture, but from the perspective of an insider (either member of a group or not). Denzin (2006) notes a definition of

auto-ethnography by Ellis as "research, writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness and introspection." Burnier (2006) notes that auto-ethnography "offers a way to situate the self within the research process and its written product". Auto-ethnography enriches the ethnographic "portrait of a people" (Harris & Johnson, 2000 in Gensuk, 2003) through a portrait of self. This methodological choice aims to lay transparent and celebrate my insider status, and to recognise the inherent and rich bias this status brings to all aspects of the study.

Specifically, a variant of auto-ethnography – analytic auto-ethnography - is proposed as described by Anderson (2006). In this methodology the researcher is: an opportunistic4 and complete member of the group, a highly visible and social actor in published texts (guarding against self-absorbed digression!), and committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena, utilizing empirical data. Ellis & Bochner (2006) note that Anderson (2006) wants to "use the world of experience primarily as a vehicle for exercising his head" and that he thinks of ethnography as a destination and not a journey. They believe Anderson's (2006) analytic autoethnographic paradigm overlooks how stories work. Like Ellis & Bochner (2006), as part of my journey I too "want to linger in the world of experience, you know, feel it, taste it, sense it, live in it". Therefore, a narrative approach also forms part of the study methodology.

Why Narrative?

During the first generation interviews, story-telling emerged as an aspect of the communication process. Some stories were evocative and provided rich analogy:

When you go further North, more North than Kemi, I went to Lapland before I came to New Zealand and I travelled by train for over an hour, then the railway finished. Then I travelled by bus for 10 – 11 hours for bus, and then the road finished and there, even trees don't grow. This is so-called Lapland – Arctic Circle. And when the road finishes, the bus leaves you on the

bottom, the road finishes by the huge big mountain huge Ailigas Mountain, and there is a hotel/motel on the end there because that's where everybody has to stay. Except there is a Tenoyoki River who runs 110kms further North to the Northern most village of Finland and in the winter it's snow covered and ice, and the snow cat, or some kind of a snow mobile, it's a tractor sort of with the aeroplane engine at the front, and that takes you the last 110kms. When you are left by the bus under that big mountain you know for the sure that if you were left there by yourself you couldn't survive. So, you need to be with them people that were in the bus, you wouldn't survive there by yourself. So and that's when you sort of, that's how most of the Finnish families still live and still feel close knit yes. And you need to have a close knit to be surviving in the Arctic Circle.

Some bought us to tears in the interview, and later in the privacy of my study while transcribing tapes:

We were sitting there and I was holding my eyes open so that they ached so that I wouldn't cry and I remember saying to her — you know this came up, and she was rubbishing my father who was only thing in my life, and then I said "yes but you wanted to adopt me, and Dad didn't let you so he must have cared about me." "Oh, none of us cared about you" she said. It's true, (name) was sitting there. "Oh no no, Pappa and Mamma took (name) because she was older and not so much trouble — nobody wanted you, you were too young, you were too much trouble".

And some painted a picture:

Not this last trip but trip before last, I went berry picking with my brother and we had buckets fill of lingonberries, red beautiful juicy lingonberries. And it is so lovely on the dry autumn day because the lingonberries grow on the dry ground, blueberries need a bit of moist, but lingonberries are growing on a grey curly moss, and I felt so happy picking lingonberries one autumn day that I looked and I was ready to die there because I was that happy.

This emergence of story-telling caused me to reflect on my initial study methodology. How was I going to do justice to these sometimes painful, sometimes poetic, and sometimes funny stories in this study?

Hendry (2007) claims that "through telling our lives we engage in the act of meaning making. This is a sacred act. Stories are what make us human." Hendry (2007) further argues that "treating stories as objects of study...is a violation of the sacredness of humanity. It is an unethical act". However, if we must engage in this unethical act, then we must do it in a way that "honours the sacredness of our humanity" by shifting from the utilitarian purpose of production of a knowledge product to focussing on the sacred encounter between two human beings. Hendry (2007) proposes this can be accomplished by "being present in the encounter with no other purpose than attending to and being open is what makes it sacred and illuminates its potential spiritual dimensions." Ellis & Bochner (2006) note that "The difference between stories and traditional analysis is the mode of explanation and its effects on the reader. Traditional analysis is about transferring information, whereas narrative inquiry emphasizes communication. It's the difference between monologue and dialogue, between closing down interpretation and staying open to other meanings, between having the last word and sharing the platform." Georgakopoulou (2006) notes that taking special methodological account of "small stories" with the aim of "tapping into human experience", allows us to construct identity. In Smith's (2007) commentary of the State of the Art in Narrative Inquiry, he notes that narrative inquiry can mean different things to different people, and that like the stories themselves, multiple perspectives are required. Two approaches to narrative are discussed - formulaic and playful. The formulaic approach utilises highly standardised procedures and analysis in an attempt to unlock or crack the narrative code. The playful approach may or may not apply standardised procedures, and attempts to "play with ideas and narrative in an artful manner". Smith (2007).

From the very first interview I realised that the participants desired a "sharing of the platform". To that end, I have reduced the interview schedule down to a few broad questions and intend to continue to enjoy the "sacred encounter" as it unfolds. In terms of what analysis approach is required to "construct identity" from these "small stories", I plan to take Smith's (2007) advice and investigate multiple perspectives for analysis that takes into account the holistic nature

of the various data collected, and the interpretative analysis within the various contexts that emerge during the research.

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Endnotes

1. District Health Boards in New Zealand are organisations established by the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000, responsible for ensuring the provision of health and disability services to populations within a defined geographical area. There are 21 DHBs, 15 in the North Island and 6 in the South Island. DHBs receive public funding from the Ministry of Health on behalf of the Crown, based on a formula which takes into account the to-

- tal number, age, socioeconomic status and ethnic mix of their population.
- 2. The term "Finns" or "Finnish" is used in English to mean "a native or inhabitant of Finland". (Ollila 1998, Sovijärvi 2005).
- 3. "Eramaa" translation provided as "desert" (Paavo Sandberg, 2008).
- 4. Anderson's (2006) term for: born into, thrown into group by chance, or acquired familiarity.

~ Merkkipäiviä ~

70 v. 2.4.2009

VTM Pertti Paasio

Siirtolaisuusinstituutin hallituksen puheenjohtaja (Suomi-Seura r.y.)



60 V. 14.5.2009

Maakuntajohtaja Juho Savo

Siirtolaisuusinstituutin hallituksen varapuheenj. (Varsinais-Suomen Liitto)



50 V. 21.5.2009

Tohtori Elli Heikkilä

Siirtolaisuusinstituutin tutkimusjohtaja

