Author/s:
Klocker, N;Hodge, P;Dun, O;Crosbie, E;Dufty-Jones, R;McMichael, C;Block, K;Piper, M;Musoni, E;Ford, L;Jordan, C;Radford, D

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Klocker Natascha (Orcid ID: 0000-0001-7526-3292)

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**Authors**
*Corresponding author:*
Associate Professor Natascha Klocker,
Australian Centre for Culture, Environment, Society and Space (ACCESS)
School of Geography and Sustainable Communities
University of Wollongong, NSW 2522
Email: natascha_klocker@uow.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7526-3292

Dr Paul Hodge,
Discipline of Geography and Environmental Studies
University of Newcastle, NSW 2308
Email: paul.hodge@newcastle.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8633-6159

Dr Olivia Dun,
School of Geography, University of Melbourne, VIC, 3010
And
Australian Centre for Culture, Environment, Society and Space (ACCESS)
School of Geography and Sustainable Communities
University of Wollongong, NSW 2522
Email: olivia.dun@unimelb.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3660-6827

Eliza Crosbie, University of Newcastle
Discipline of Geography and Environmental Studies
University of Newcastle, NSW 2308
Email: eliza.crosbie@uon.edu.au

Associate Professor Rae Dufty-Jones,
Geography and Urban Studies, Western Sydney University
Parramatta Campus, NSW 2150
r.dufty-jones@westernsydney.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1667-331X

Dr Celia McMichael
School of Geography, University of Melbourne, VIC, 3010
Email: celia.mcmichael@unimelb.edu.au

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https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4572-602X

Dr Karen Block,
Centre for Health Equity, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health
University of Melbourne,VIC 3010
Email: keblock@unimelb.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0560-4148

Margaret Piper
Piper and Consultants, Sydney, Australia
Email: margpiper@optusnet.com.au

Emmanuel Musoni,
Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development International, Sydney, Australia
Email: muthon.glapdint@gmail.com

Lynda Ford
iGen Foundation
Email: lynda@igenfoundation.org.au

Carly Jordan
Leadership Great South Coast, Inc.
carly.a.jordan@gmail.com

Dr David Radford
UniSA Justice & Society
University of South Australia
Email: David.Radford@unisa.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1905-6579

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Research data are not shared due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

**Spaces of wellbeing and regional settlement: international migrants and the rural idyll**

**Abstract**

Regionalisation is a hallmark of Australia's approach to international migration, reflecting governments' growing concern with *where* new arrivals live. Residence in regional Australia is encouraged (mandated, for some visas) in response to urban population pressures alongside rural population and economic decline. Parallel to regionally-focused visa schemes exists a pattern of voluntary urban-to-rural migration among some international migrants. Such secondary mobility counters the policy logic that international migrants only live outside cities when required to do so. This paper explores 18 African migrants' motivations for 'urban flight': Australian cities have failed to sustain their wellbeing and they consider rural life a remedy. Their preference for rural locations is not purely instrumental, it is shaped by deep-seated affective connections. Given the challenges of regional population retention, settlement policies should be recalibrated to support the aspirations of international migrants who feel an affinity for rural places, rather than compelling the rural settlement of others who do not.

**Keywords:**

Migrants; refugees; humanitarian migration; secondary settlement; regional settlement; counter-urbanisation

**Introduction: the regionalisation of international migration in Australia**

International migrants not only contribute to raw population numbers, they also shape national population distribution. In some high-immigration countries there is growing concern that immigrant populations are overly concentrated in major cities, at the expense of smaller urban centres and rural areas. This is the case in Australia where, in 2016, 86.4 per cent of overseas-born persons lived in major cities (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016). In response, Australian governments (like those in Canada, the UK and Scandinavia) are increasingly formulating policies that seek to influence *where* new arrivals settle. We contend that, to improve the long-term effectiveness of regional settlement, such policies should be calibrated around migrants' deep-seated attachments to urban or rural places.

The urban concentration of Australia's population has been a persistent topic of political and public consternation. Policies promoting migrant settlement outside metropolitan areas have developed apace amidst concerns about urban 'over-population', alongside population decline and labour shortages in many regional areas (Dufty-Jones 2014; Hugo 2014; Krivokapic-Skoko and Collins 2014). Since the late 1990s, international migration has been explicitly linked to regional development objectives (Hugo et al. 2006, 2008; Dufty-Jones 2014). A raft of visas, known collectively as the State Specific and Regional Migration (SSRM) Scheme, has targeted skilled and business migrants. These visas mandate a minimum period of residence in regional Australia[1] and

[1]In everyday discourse, 'regional' refers to areas outside Australia's major capital cities and is often used interchangeably with 'rural'. For official purposes, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2018) identifies regional areas based on the Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+) while the Department of Home Affairs specifies which postcodes are 'regional' for immigration purposes. We shift between the terms regional and rural in this paper, depending on context. We also refer to 'the country' (e.g. moving to the country) as this phrase was widely used by study participants.

typically follow a two-step process: temporary visa recipients become eligible for permanent visas after meeting regional residence requirements, usually of two to three years (Hugo 2008; Golebiowska et al. 2016). In late 2018, the Prime Minister extended these regional residence requirements to five years for some employer- or family-sponsored skilled migrants (news.com.au 2018). Regional settlement policies focused on humanitarian migrants, meanwhile, have been in place since 2005 (Hugo 2014). The Federal Government has sought to directly resettle 'unlinked' humanitarian migrants (those with no established family ties in Australia) in selected regional areas (Hugo 2014). In April 2019, it announced a target of resettling 40 per cent of humanitarian migrants in regional areas in 2019-20 (Greene 2019). This constitutes a marked departure from the status quo – over the past decade, one Sydney suburb, Fairfield, has alone absorbed around half of Australia's total humanitarian intake (Doherty 2017).

Overall, international migrants' propensity to migrate out of regional Australia – towards capital cities – has increased over the past few decades (Raymer and Baffour 2018). Yet, some immigrant groups have defied this trend, choosing instead to migrate *out* of Australian cities *into* rural areas (Hugo 2008; Taylor-Neumann and Balasingam 2013; Schech 2014; Wilding and Nunn 2018). Such relocations have been driven by diverse factors including: regional employers experiencing labour shortages, local communities and governments seeking to boost their populations and retain services, and communities of international migrants who want to live outside major cities.

In this paper, we explore the regional settlement aspirations of one migrant cohort: international migrants from the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Definitions of the Great Lakes Region of Africa vary, however, they typically incorporate five core countries: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of

the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Republic of the Congo (Congo) and Uganda. In practice, however, the region is loosely defined as also including Kenya and Tanzania (U.S. Department of State, no date). As shown in Table 1, and based on responses to the Australian Census of Population and Housing, migrants from four of the five core countries (Burundi, DRC, Congo and Rwanda) have a growing propensity to live in regional Australia (categorised as per the ABS Remoteness Index). For instance, in 2006, 8.4 per cent of Australian residents born in the DRC lived in Inner Regional Australia, but this increased to 15.4 per cent by 2016. Meanwhile, only 1.4 per cent of those born in Rwanda lived in Outer Regional Australia in 2006, but 7.8 per cent did so in 2016[2]. While most migrants from the Great Lakes Region of Africa continue to live in Australia's major cities, the fact that this proportion is shrinking (for some countries of origin) is worth understanding because it counters the behaviour of the total overseas-born population, and indeed, the Australia-born population (see Table 1 and Raymer and Baffour 2018). Moreover, although the numbers involved are small, other analyses have shown that the addition of even a modest number of international migrants to regional areas can offset population decline resulting from the out-migration of Australia-born people (Longstaff 2017).

[INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE]

In this paper, we argue that regional settlement policy should be underpinned by a thorough understanding of how preferences for particular types of places *matter* to international migrants' integration and wellbeing. Knowledge of these preferences is important because it can support the

[2]It is not possible to ascertain from the Census data whether this shift is due to primary settlement in regional areas, or subsequent mobility once in Australia, but it is likely a combination of both.

goal of long-term population retention in regional areas. Our argument is based on two qualitative empirical studies: one with ten migrants from the Great Lakes Region of Africa who live in Australian cities but wish to move to regional areas; and a second with eight migrants from the same African region who abandoned Australian cities in 2018. Below, we briefly explain our chosen terminology for 'migrants' and 'refugees'. This is followed by an overview of existing research on the regional settlement experiences of international migrants and a discussion of our conceptual approach. Drawing on our two studies, we advocate for greater settlement research and policy focus on the range of connections (from the instrumental to the affective) between people and places.

**Note on terminology**

Australia's Migration Program and Refugee and Humanitarian Program are separated in the policy landscape, however, we use the umbrella term 'international migrants' for arrivals under both programs (though when discussing existing studies we replicate their terminology). We have avoided splitting migrants and refugees for three reasons. First, 'refugee' is a temporary status not a fixed identity (Ludwig 2013). Once granted permanent protection, people often wish to leave this label behind because of its links to notions of passivity, its connections to a traumatic past, and because refugees are subject to stigmatising public discourses (Zetter 1991; Marlowe 2010; Long 2013). Second, scholars have critiqued the separation of refugee studies from broader migration theories, asserting that '[b]y staring too hard at 'refugees'…we fail to see their 'normality'' (Blakewell 2008:449). In some cases, people's experiences are undoubtedly informed by their refugee backgrounds, but in many others, they may be more closely linked to other, 'ordinary' (Blakewell 2008; Marlowe 2010) aspects of identity. Third, communities of international migrants – including those from the Great Lakes Region of Africa – are diverse. They incorporate individuals

who arrived via student, skilled migrant, refugee, special humanitarian and family reunion visa streams, and so the labels migrant and refugee 'blur in practice' (Long 2013:4). Accordingly, for our analysis, it is neither accurate nor practical to separate migrants and refugees.

**International migrants' regional settlement experiences**

Over the past two decades, a sizeable body of work has explored how international migrants fare in regional locations. Key foci have included strategies for attracting new arrivals to regional areas and the challenges of ensuring population retention once visa restrictions are removed (Dufty-Jones 2014; Hugo 2008, 2014; Krivokapic-Skoko et al. 2014, 2018; Boese 2015). Of central concern (particularly in studies of humanitarian migration) has been what constitutes successful settlement in a new country and whether this can be achieved outside metropolitan areas (Boese et al. 2018; Curry et al. 2018). Widely used indicators of settlement success include labour force participation, language competence, access to housing, educational and health outcomes concordant with the broader population, and social connectedness (Broadbent et al. 2007; Ager and Strang 2008; Fozdar and Hartley 2013). Within this mix, employment is widely considered the key determinant of settlement success (Colic-Peisker 2009); and critics have asserted that 'objective', top-down measures dominate over what migrants themselves consider necessary for a 'satisfactory life' (van Heelsum 2017:2138; Curry et al. 2018).

Research into international migrants' experiences in regional areas has shown that retention is challenging (Taylor and Stanovic 2005; Hugo 2008; McDonald et al. 2008; Krivokapic-Skoko and Collins 2014; El-Bialy and Mulay 2015; Golebiowska et al. 2016; Boese et al. 2018). Key factors believed to underpin retention include:

- access to employment, quality of work and opportunities for upward mobility (Lichter 2012; Dufty-Jones 2014; Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) and Deloitte Access Economics 2015; Boese 2015; Golebiowska et al. 2016; Piper 2017);
- affordable, accessible and appropriate housing (Boese 2015; Golebiowska et al. 2016; Piper 2017);
- adequate healthcare and education infrastructure (Boese 2015);
- access to both 'mainstream' infrastructure (e.g. public transport, recreational and cultural amenities) and migrant-specific services (e.g. language classes, interpreters and culturally-responsive health care) (Dufty-Jones 2014; Boese 2015; Golebiowska et al. 2016);
- a welcoming broader community and freedom from discrimination (Dufty-Jones 2014; AMES and Deloitte Access Economics 2015; Boese 2015; Piper 2017); and,
- a 'critical mass' of co-ethnic persons to bolster access to ethno-specific services and reduce isolation (Taylor and Stanovic 2005; Carter et al. 2008) [3].

Multiple studies have shown that small rural communities may struggle to meet all these needs (Carter et al. 2008; Correa-Velez et al. 2011; Larsen 2011; Krivokapic-Skoko and Collins 2014; Schech 2014; El-Bialy and Mulay 2015; Curry et al. 2018; Boese et al. 2018); indeed (as participants in this study attested), many urban areas do too.

Underexplored in this body of work is how particular locations bolster or diminish international migrants' wellbeing in ways that extend beyond 'instrumentalist' concerns such as employment,

[3]Notably, the absence of many of the factors listed here contribute to broader patterns of regional population decline (i.e. the out-migration of Australia-born persons). It would be a mistake to expect international migrants to be satisfied, over the longer-term, with the very conditions that prompt other Australians to leave rural areas.

housing and services. While these things matter greatly, our contention is that affective connections to (or disconnections from) place also matter. Deeply-felt bonds (or aversions) between people and particular environments, climates, lifestyles, plants and animals have, however, been sidelined in studies of regional settlement. This is likely because they are considered second-order concerns and because studies of internal migration by international migrants have remained separate from counter-urbanisation research (in which affective dimensions *have* featured). This is reflective of a broader disconnect between scholarship on international and internal migration (Skeldon 2006; Hugo 2004; Halfacree 2008). By drawing together these threads, this article recognises the links and interdependencies between international and internal migration, and demonstrates the utility of combining insights from both scholarly fields.

**International migrants and counter-urbanisation**

Counter-urbanisation researchers have identified diverse factors that contribute to population movements towards non-metropolitan areas, including transport and communication technologies that extend urban commuting fields; lower housing and living costs, which may be particularly appealing for lower-income groups (leading to what has been referred to as 'welfare migration'); and employment opportunities (Frey and Johnson 1998; Hugo and Bell 1998; Wulff and Bell 1997). Notwithstanding this complexity, the rural idyll – the draw of (imagined/actual) rural landscapes and lifestyles – remains key (Hugo and Bell 1998; Connell and McManus 2011; Ragusa 2011; Drozdzewski 2014).

Counter-urbanisation research has primarily focused on 'native-born' populations. Recognising this lacuna, Halfacree (2008) called for greater acknowledgement of the international dimensions of

counter-urbanisation, using the example of horticultural labour migrants (e.g. North Africans in Spain). He concluded that these international migrants contribute to the repopulation of the countryside, but 'have relatively little in common [with mainstream counter-urbanisers] in respect of the full biography of their moves' (Halfacree 2008:489). Specifically, Halfacree (2008:487) argued that, for such international migrants, 'the 'rural' character of the place is almost wholly incidental' because economic motives dominate.

The empirical cases that we highlight in this article question the logic that international migrants and other counter-urbanisers lack common ground vis-à-vis the importance of amenity factors in their decision-making. We build on a few existing studies that have foregrounded environmental attractors in the settlement of international migrants. For instance, Sampson and Gifford (2010) identified the role of therapeutic landscapes[4] in supporting the wellbeing of recently arrived refugee youth in urban Melbourne. In rural Australia, Krivokapic-Skoko and Collins (2014) showed that 'natural attractors' (e.g. beautiful landscapes, an appealing climate) are drawcards for international migrants. Meanwhile in Canada, El-Bialy and Mulay (2015:58) found that refugees who were settled in St John's (a small city in Newfoundland), over time identified 'the ocean, hills, and the island's natural flora and fauna as powerful sources of emotional healing'. They ultimately chose to remain there, despite few economic opportunities, because they experienced it as a therapeutic landscape. The authors concluded that, 'the natural environment' ought to be 'incorporated as a determinant of wellbeing in future studies of refugee resettlement' (El-Bialy and Mulay 2015:58).

[4]Therapeutic landscapes are places where 'physical and built environments, social conditions and human perceptions combine to produce an atmosphere…conducive to healing' (Gesler 1996:96).

International migrants' connections to particular landscapes may develop over time in their settlement locations, yet Morén-Alegret's (2008) research with international migrants in Spain adopted the conceptual lens of topophilia to signal a more ingrained bond with rural or urban places. Topophilia is 'the affective bond between people and place or setting' (Tuan 1974:4). Morén-Alegret (2008) explored the ruralphilia and urbophobia – or the reverse, urbophilia and ruralphobia – of international migrants. He found that ruralphilia was common amongst those participants who had lived in small localities pre-migration, meaning they expressed an affinity for quiet places and attractive 'natural' environments. Meanwhile, those international migrants who felt rural Spain would not meet their social integration needs were chiefly former metropolitan dwellers. Morén-Alegret (2008:549-550) concluded that the respective size of international migrants' origin and destination localities 'seems to be influential in immigrant integration processes'. The upshot of this argument is that international migrants arrive with existing preferences for particular types of localities and lifestyles. Here, we explore these links using the spaces of wellbeing framework (Fleuret and Atkinson 2007). As explained below, this framework offers scope to consider how assemblages of diverse humans and non-humans (Atkinson 2013) shape international migrants' wellbeing in their places of settlement, while remaining attentive to the more instrumentalist concerns that dominate most studies in this field.

**The spaces of wellbeing framework**

Health geographers emphasise the significance of space to wellbeing. Fleuret and Atkinson's (2007) spaces of wellbeing framework provides scope to explore multiple inter-related aspects of this relationship. It accounts for 'objective' measures and determinants of health and wellbeing (e.g. standardised indicators like income, life expectancy) alongside more 'subjective' accounts and self-

evaluations (Gorman-Murray and Bissell 2018). Moreover, the framework considers how affective connections to place shape wellbeing (Atkinson et al. 2012).

For Fleuret and Atkinson (2007), spaces of wellbeing have four key dimensions: capacitating, integrative, secure and therapeutic. *Spaces of capability* support people's opportunities for self-fulfilment and capacity to reach their potential; *integrative spaces* encompass networks of social associations and services that sustain wellbeing; *spaces of security* afford a sense of physical security and provide material support; *therapeutic spaces* are experienced as emotionally or physiologically healing (Fleuret and Atkinson 2007; Gorman-Murray and Bissell 2018). Notably, Fleuret and Atkinson's (2007) conceptualisation of therapeutic spaces draws upon the therapeutic landscapes concept. More recent iterations of the latter have adopted a relational approach that incorporates human-to-human interactions, alongside 'a myriad of interactions between people and things (e.g. machines, texts, vehicles), and people and other biological entities (e.g. microbes, animals and trees)' (Conradson 2005:339).

The spaces of wellbeing framework shifts focus away from the individual as having 'achieved' wellbeing or not, instead studying space 'for its virtues which are conducive or unconducive to wellbeing' (Fleuret and Prugneau 2015:112). Crucially, the framework conceives of places as actively shaping wellbeing, rather than as mere stages upon which people live their lives (Fleuret and Atkinson 2007; Atkinson et al. 2012). Accordingly, wellbeing is understood 'as a set of effects produced in particular times and places' (Fleuret and Prugneau 2015:142). This reference to particular times is important for understanding change, including across the life course. In the context of our research, it prompts consideration of how particular residential settings (e.g. cities)

may support the wellbeing of some international migrants when they first arrive in a new country, but may fail to do so over the longer-term.

**Methods and participants**

This article brings together rich empirical insights from two qualitative studies focused on international migrants' regional settlement aspirations. Study 1, conducted in 2018, focused on ten international migrants from the Great Lakes Region of Africa resident in three Australian cities, Sydney (n=7), Newcastle (n=2) and Wollongong (n=1) (see Table 2 for participant attributes). Participant recruitment was led by Emmanuel Musoni from the Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development International (GLAPD). This organisation supports the secondary mobility of international migrants from the Great Lakes Region of Africa from urban to rural Australia. GLAPD maintains a list of applicants seeking support with regional settlement. This list was used for targeted participant recruitment which continued until data saturation was achieved. Study 2 was conducted in 2019. It incorporated eight international migrants, also from the Great Lakes Region of Africa, who moved to regional Australia in 2018 as part of a secondary settlement project that was initiated by organisations which have opted to remain unnamed, to protect participants' privacy. Natascha, Olivia, Paul and Eliza (all authors of this paper) were invited to evaluate that project. The eight study participants lived in diverse Australian cities – Melbourne (n=5), Sydney (n=1), Brisbane (n=1) and Adelaide (n=1) – before relocating to regional Victoria (see Table 2). The researchers invited all adult migrants who were part of the abovementioned secondary settlement project to be interviewed, but six (of fourteen) were unavailable or did not wish to participate.

[INSERT TABLE 2 AROUND HERE]

In both studies, semi-structured interviews of one to three hours duration were conducted in participants' homes, in their preferred languages (primarily English, but sometimes Kinyrwanda or Kiswahili with an interpreter). The English language components of audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim. The interview schedules explored participants' urban settlement experiences and rural settlement aspirations. We asked about their lives in Africa, specifically whether they had lived in urban or rural locations, and about the places they had lived since arriving in Australia. In Study 1, we asked about participants' experiences of their current city; their participation in the workforce or study; their social connections; their desire and/or ability to access land for growing food; their reasons for wanting to leave the city and move to a rural area; and how they felt moving to a rural area would impact their lives. In Study 2, the focus differed because it was an evaluation of an existing secondary settlement project. Nonetheless, some questions overlapped sufficiently with Study 1 to enable comparative analysis. Specifically, we asked these participants what they liked about their previous Australian cities of residence, what they found challenging, and their reasons for leaving, as well as what motivated their move to the country.

Both studies proceeded with ethics approval from the University of Wollongong. Participants in Study 1 are referred to by their real first names or pseudonyms in this paper, according to their preferences. Those in Study 2 are uniformly referred to using pseudonyms because it was a formal evaluation and so confidentiality was key. Coding of both datasets followed an inductive, thematic approach. The spaces of wellbeing framework did not influence the projects' design or interview

questions; but emerged as a useful tool for understanding the participants' experiences when the interview transcripts were reviewed.

In the following sections, we first discuss how Australian cities shaped participants' wellbeing and then turn to consider their motives for moving to the country. We interpret their narratives through the spaces of wellbeing framework, shedding light on the types of spaces they consider capacitating, integrative, secure and therapeutic. While reading our findings, it is important to note that most participants were farmers and/or rural dwellers in their countries of origin or countries of first refuge (Table 2). Further, both studies intentionally recruited individuals who were motivated to move to rural Australia. We do not claim that all migrants from the Great Lakes Region of Africa, or from other parts of the world, would feel similarly. Nonetheless, that the two studies yielded comparable results (Tables 3 and 4) underscores the reliability of the emergent themes.

**Results I: Exploring international migrants' urban lives through the spaces of wellbeing framework**

According to participants in both studies, Australian cities have largely failed to function as spaces of wellbeing, for them. A sense of disconnect from urban Australia was palpable (Table 3). For some Study 1 participants (who were still resident in cities when interviewed), the desire for change was acute, but the barriers to initiating a move felt insurmountable. As Mande told us:

> [T]here is nothing I love here [in Wollongong]… if I had capacity and resources I would go [to the country] as soon as possible. But with…no means that becomes difficult, it just remains as an idea and ideas are as heavy and breaking as anything…dreams sometimes make you become crazy…if dreams go too high without realisation.

Significantly, no participants described Australian cities as therapeutic spaces (Table 3), instead emphasising the negative physiological and psychological implications of urban residence.

[INSERT TABLE 3 AROUND HERE]

### *i. Urban Australia: a space of capability?*

Spaces of capability enable people to achieve their goals and realise their potential. Jobs and education were front of mind for the study participants. Many had taken up opportunities to study in the city (6 of 10 in Study 1; 4 of 8 in Study 2) and/or had experienced employment in the city (5 of 10 in Study 1; 6 of 8 in Study 2). In many cases, however, their jobs were casual and unreliable, below their level of qualification, or not linked to their pre-existing capacities or current aspirations. On the latter point, Samuel (Study 2) felt reluctant to 'sacrifice my life…my active years' to work in factories. For others, like Esther and Rugaruza (Study 1), finding work in the city was difficult despite completing tertiary studies in Australia. The employment challenges facing former refugees, including discrimination, are well-established (Colic-Peisker 2009). Another key capability-related theme identified by participants pertained to growing food, given most had done so from childhood to the point of arrival in Australia. Five participants in Study 1 had access to a space where they could grow food at some point while living in Australian cities (either a small kitchen garden or community garden). At the time of interview, however, eight of ten were unable to do so either due to tenancy restrictions or insufficient space. We did not ask a comparable question for Study 2. As explained later, the desire to grow food was not a second-order concern for either study group, it was a key driver of participants' desire to move to the country.

### *ii. Urban Australia: an integrative space?*

Integrative spaces provide social networks and diverse services and supports (Gorman-Murray and Bissell 2018). Participants in both studies commented that, upon arriving in Australia, they were satisfied (impressed, even) by the available services, diverse attractions, transport connections and friendly people. Joseph (Study 1), whose family formed close relationships with the broader community through their church, recalled, 'what…impressed me most was the friendliness, people here are very inviting… everybody wanted to chip in and help us…we felt very welcome.' A few participants, including Joseph, also reported having good neighbours and strong connections with their co-ethnic community in the city, and Louis (Study 2) appreciated that people in cities are accommodating of diverse cultures. Nonetheless, the participants' comments were weighted towards a view of cities as places that undermine connections (Table 3). Concerns primarily centred upon their children, specifically, that parent-child relationships were being eroded by negative peer influences (associated also with risk-taking, as described below) and by a lack of time (linked to traffic congestion and lengthy work commutes). Esther (Study 1) explained that her daughter's friends were encouraging her to be disobedient, and attributed this to them being 'city people'. Mande (Study 1) was worried because negative peer influences and ready access to public transport made it difficult for him to know his children's whereabouts:

> when they [children] go out, they disappear…sometimes…with bad friends…it's difficult to raise children in the city…I am just sitting here [in Wollongong] and maybe some of my children are already in Sydney and I can't know.

Similar concerns emerged in Study 2. Gilbert explained that in Melbourne he did not have enough time to spend with his children and feared they would slip into risk-taking behaviours, like drug use, as a result:

> [I didn't] have enough time to sit with my children to tell them, "Guys, I know…you have your friends, but…not everything your friend tells you is true. You need to look after yourself"…I do not want my children to copy that behaviour.

While concerns about raising children in the city dominated, some participants discussed other integrative challenges, such as making their own friends. Bishasha (Study 1) found it difficult to establish connections in his neighbourhood, where many residents are renting, 'people keep moving and…[so] you don't have permanent neighbours who you are friendly to'. Eric (Study 2) recalled that only one of his family's four neighbours in Melbourne was friendly enough to say hello. Interviewees observed that city people are too busy to be helpful or supportive, 'everyone is busy…even if you ask someone [for help]…there is no time to listen to you' (Obadiah, Study 1). Moreover, some Study 2 participants who had lived in Melbourne felt that negative public discourses surrounding African Australians in that city exposed them to racism and undermined their children's safety. Henri (Study 2) recalled facing racial slurs on a weekly basis. On balance, then, participants did not view Australian cities as integrative spaces. Several felt unable to build meaningful connections with the broader community and to maintain connections within their own families.

### *iii. Urban Australia: a secure space?*

Secure spaces offer physical safety and material security. Some participants described Australia as safe, and they appreciated this upon arrival. Nonetheless, Australian cities were chiefly described as

spaces of insecurity (Table 3). Key concerns included perceived risks to their children and the financial trials of urban life. Participants feared that their children's peers would expose them to truancy, drugs and alcohol. Clementine (Study 2) explained that city teenagers are 'so silly' and 'mess up in their lives', and Gilbert (Study 2) recalled regularly seeing children in Melbourne 'with their school bags in the street', skipping school. He was worried his children would 'start losing their vision or their goals' if they remained in the city. Marie (Study 1) explained that her son was experiencing addiction and was adamant that if she had another child she would not raise them in Sydney. Bishasha (Study 1) shared these concerns:

> you have maybe a neighbour…whose children are drug users or they are alcohol users, your children get to be affected with those sorts of things…I do think that [these problems] are much more city-related.

Financial pressures were also front-of-mind. Participants struggled with high urban living costs. They described spending most of their income on rent, with little remaining for other needs. As Esther (Study 1) explained, 'everything in Sydney is very expensive…I pay…too much rent and I don't have anything left.' Confronted by this reality, participants felt that home ownership would remain out of reach in the city. Coming from a cultural context in which renting is uncommon, this was a distressing prospect that exacerbated their sense of insecurity. 'That's not a life to live', said Mwungura (Study 1). Although Gilbert (Study 2) had managed to buy a house in the city, being unable to own farmland there meant he continued to feel insecure:

> [The] mentality in Africa [is] regardless how much you have money, if you don't have land you are nothing. Because we believe that money at any time can end…but the land will stay there…having land in African culture is something significant.

As discussed below, participants' inability to access farmland in the city was also a drawback for other significant reasons.

### *iv. Urban Australia: a therapeutic space?*

Therapeutic spaces are physiologically or psychologically healing, or health promoting. Australian cities were not perceived as therapeutic spaces by these international migrants (Table 3). Instead, they recounted a litany of ways in which their health and wellbeing were compromised. For Mande (Study 1), the disjuncture between fast-paced urban life and the slowness of his pre-migration life was overwhelming. Mwungura (Study 1), meanwhile, drew a link between financial strains and deteriorating physical and mental health, 'the stress…ends up damaging the whole of your body…if you can't manage to save [money]…life becomes bad.' Esther (Study 1) experienced 'too many headaches' living in the city and Marie (Study 1) struggled to sleep due to traffic noise. Multiple Study 1 participants used the metaphor of a cage, or prison, to describe urban life. Harrison said, 'because I am living in a confined space, I am somehow in a kind of jail'; and Obadiah referred to feeling 'congested…like I am caged, there's no breathing space'. Mande described this in more detail:

> the space is small, there is no space for me. The air around…you feel compacted, completely squeezed in a way…it's not about the house, it's about the whole space that is more congested…in the city we are like in prison.

Samuel (Study 2) evocatively described the mental health challenges of being settled in the city as a former rural-dweller:

> imagine taking somebody who has been living on a farm…you take him from [the] farm straight to those tall building[s] in Melbourne...their mind kind of collapsed somehow

> because you're like, "Wow, I'm in the wrong area"…if he's a farmer…there's no chance for him to survive in the cities.

Participants without reliable employment in the city – such as Esther and Mande – discussed experiencing idleness, further undermining their wellbeing by making them feel lethargic and sick.

Multiple participants identified their inability to access fresh, home grown, chemical-free foods as a negative health outcome of urban life. They were concerned about the types and quality of foods available in supermarkets that have been 'frozen for years' (Moise, Study 1), about hormone-fed chickens (Samuel, Study 2), and 'disturbing McDonalds rubbish' (Rugaruza, Study 1). Some, like Samuel (Study 2), associated a lack of food-growing opportunities with declining fitness:

> farmers in Africa they use a lot of strength…It's even harder than gym. So if you…bring him to the city, you give him Centrelink money – he'll be drinking soft drinks…eating those chemicalised chickens…eating those fertilised food…sitting on the couch watching TV. He'll get big…that's why they [African migrants] get caught by diabetes…[and] different diseases…because he is not as strong as he used to…[because] he is no longer active.

As discussed in the following sections, for many of these international migrants a key motive for moving to the country was to access land on which to grow fresh, organic produce.

**Results II: Interpreting international migrants' anticipated rural lives through the spaces of wellbeing framework**

Participants in both studies identified a move to the country as a remedy for their urban malaise (Table 4). Their expectations were informed by pre-migration experiences in Africa and a deep-seated ruralphilia (and urbophobia) (Morén-Alegret 2008), as well as exploratory visits to rural

Australian towns and conversations with fellow international migrants who had already moved to the country. The observations presented here counter the broadly accepted logic that international migrants must be forced to live in rural areas. As Eric (Study 2) commented, with appropriate supports 'people…come themselves, they [the government] don't have to be pushing'.

[INSERT TABLE 4 AROUND HERE]

### *i. Rural Australia: a space of capability?*

Some participants envisaged that jobs would be easier to find in rural Australia, including work related to their pre-migration farming experience. Bishasha (Study 1) identified farm work, particularly in the dairy industry, as something 'we are so much familiar with' and could readily do. Mwungura (Study 1) believed he could draw on his experience as a 'cattle keeper' and hoped that smaller populations in rural areas would lessen competition for jobs. Mande (Study 1), meanwhile, had spent months commuting between Wollongong and Cowra, a weekly ten-hour round trip, to work in the dairy industry and make the most of his pre-migration experience. He described having skills for looking after dairy cows 'in the [his] blood' and hoped to move to Cowra but identified housing availability as a barrier.

Participants across both studies were highly motivated to move to the country to access farmland – even more so than employment (see Table 4). Esther (Study 1) felt this desire keenly, telling us, 'Oh God…I *have* to do the farming'. Samuel (Study 2) said that having a farm would 'be my happiness', and Louis (Study 2) powerfully described land as the 'passion' behind his move:

> I was actually following the land… I was…triggered by the land…I want to be independent…that's what I always wanted… I'm actually…planning to buy one [farm] and I believe it's actually affordable here…it's going to be hard…but I would have to try…because I really want to find myself [living] in the same way that my dad lived and my grandad lived.

Some participants hoped that established farmers would initially lend them some land until they could afford to purchase their own (not an unrealistic proposition given this has transpired in other rural areas[5]). Even Obadiah (Study 1), with 'solid employment' in Sydney, desired to 'go back to my roots…with what I know best – and what I know best is farming'. Nine of ten participants in Study 1, and six of eight in Study 2, articulated a clear long-term desire to own a farm, and perceived business opportunities in growing culturally-important foods from their countries of origin, like maize, or organic crops for a broader market. If able to achieve that dream Harrison (Study 1) would be 'the happiest person…[an] African farmer in Australia'. Joseph (Study 1) planned to start by renting farmland, then saving the profits to purchase his own farm. 'I want to become a farmer' he said, 'body and soul'.

Participants in both studies also thought that rural life would be capacitating for their children, with improved educational outcomes due to a lack of distractions and negative influences (Table 4). Gilbert (Study 2) felt that country-life would enable him to escape urban time pressures, and so to spend more time supporting his children's learning. Others envisaged teaching their children important cultural and life skills associated with food growing. Only Moise (Study 1) expressed

[5]For example in Mildura, Victoria (see ABC 2017) and in Coleraine, Victoria (see Dyer 2019).

concern that the quality of education in rural Australia may be lower than in cities, and both Joseph and Rugaruza (Study 1) felt that rural life might limit opportunities for children's tertiary education and subsequent careers.

### *ii. Rural Australia: an integrative space?*

One of the strongest integrative themes to emerge from interviews was the importance of non-human connections – affinities for and relationships with nature, farming landscapes, crops, animals and soil. These connections have been underexplored in existing research on international migrants' settlement experiences. They were particularly pronounced amongst Study 1 participants who were still resident in cities. Their narratives were full of longing for what they were missing. Bishasha (Study 1), originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), explained the importance of his cultural connection to cattle:

> if you have cows…and…they look nice, they are fat…You feel amazing…If I may add, for you to understand how we like cows…we don't call cows animals…calling them domestic animals – it's not enough. We call them human because we love them…each cow has its name and…when you call them by name…they know their name.

Three others, also from the Congo or DRC, shared this sentiment. Moise (Study 1) said that 'cows really define who we are' and that he wants to live in 'an environment that is closer to cows'; Mande (Study 1) had spent months commuting to Cowra 'to feel that smell of cattle'; and Rugaruza (Study 1) aspired to live in a place where he can talk to 'sheep, goat[s] and cows'.

Participants also expressed strong connections to rural landscapes, soil and crops. Henri (Study 2) wanted to live where it is 'beautiful, green [and] looks like home', and Sylvania (Study 2) desired closeness to nature, to be able to see grass and farms. Joseph explained that farming is in his 'blood' and that 'Mother Nature, soil and me – we are inseparable'. Rugaruza (Study 1) expressed a similar connection, 'I can feel my soul is connected to the soil'; and Moise (Study 1) referred to 'an identity between myself and…crops because…they define us'. For Harrison (Study 1), farming landscapes invoke a spiritual connection to God and make his 'heart…complete'. Participants were highly motivated to move to rural Australia to re-establish these cherished non-human relationships. The depth of these relationships has not been laid bare in existing studies. For these migrants, from the Great Lakes Region of Africa, these non-human connections were fundamental to their self-conception and capacity to feel whole.

Another key integrative theme, across both studies, pertained to parent-child bonds (Table 4). Participants considered the upbringing of children in rural areas to be more disciplined and perceived this would facilitate closer relationships. Parents would spend less time working and commuting and so have more time with their children, in turn reducing risks like drug use, truancy, school drop-out and gang membership. Joseph (Study 1) described rural children as 'more parent-inclined' meaning:

> they listen to their parents, they are more obedient, they are down to Earth…kids who are brought up in the city…are very spoilt…and it's the [rural] lifestyle…they aren't being polluted by…bad kids in the city…In the country…when you live with your kids you are living with your kids. If they want to go to a neighbour's house they need permission, but in the city they just…meet in the park…they spoil one another, they intermingle very easily

but in the country…you know where your kids are 24 hours…you can control [your children] very easily.

Rural areas were also considered to have greater integrative potential vis-à-vis the broader community. Participants felt they would make longer-lasting friendships in the country because 'it's more likely that people are permanent[ly] living here and you will become friends forever' (Bishasha, Study 1). Some said that country people would, 'have time to talk to you' (Henri, Study 2), be welcoming and supportive and have an 'authentic culture…of helping others' (Mwungura, Study 1). Sylvania (Study 2) was motivated to move to the country by the prospect of connecting 'to a small community' where she could 'get involved…invite people over, grab a neighbour's kid and do some gardening'. And Henri (Study 2) thought that life in a small town would allow him to share his culture and change 'what people think about Africans in Victoria. We are not gangs. We are not criminals'. Nonetheless, three Study 1 participants expressed concern about possible exposure to racism in rural Australia, or at least uncertainty about whether they would be welcomed.

Existing studies have emphasised that a critical mass of co-ethnic community members supports international migrants' successful regional settlement (Taylor and Stanovic 2005; Carter et al. 2008). Participants in Study 2 had relocated as part of a project focused on migrants from the Great Lakes Region of Africa; while those in Study 1 felt confident that if they moved, others would follow – enabling these co-ethnic supports. The possibility that rural life would bolster transnational connections, specifically to family members in countries of origin, was also raised. Louis (Study 2) thought that raising his children in rural Australia – and showing them how to grow crops – would

help them fit in if they ever returned to Burundi. They would at least develop a sense of how 'life looks in Africa' (Louis).

Integrative spaces also connect people to services. A few participants identified rural Australia as well-serviced compared to rural Africa. As Obadiah (Study 1) explained:

> in Africa when we talk about the rural area, what comes into your mind is the place with no roads…no water…no electrical connection. But in Australia, even in the so-called rural area…the basic facilities…are provided for.

While participants were not motivated to move to the Australian countryside to access available services (other connections being more significant), most did not anticipate that access to services would be a hindrance (see Table 4).

### *iii. Rural Australia: a secure space?*

Two dominant themes emerged regarding the country as a space of security: children's safety and financial security (Table 4). Children's safety was discussed in the integrative section, so will not be repeated here. In terms of financial security, participants expected that their rental costs would be lower in the country and were confident this would enable them to save. Several also noted that other living costs would decrease if they had land on which to grow crops. As Rugaruza (Study 1) explained, people in the country 'have no relationship with Woolworths [a major Australian supermarket chain]…because they grow their own food' and so 'all [the] money that…could buy all those…junk foods, is saved'. For these international migrants, the capacity to reduce living expenses was a key motive for relocating to rural Australia, because they could work towards home ownership (renting is uncommon in their countries of origin). As Bishasha (Study 1) surmised, 'we

don't want to keep renting, we want to have our own house…because that's how you can live sustainably'. Louis (Study 2) even compared living in a refugee camp favourably with renting, because he associated renting with an utter lack of control. Moreover, as discussed earlier, farm ownership was a key aspiration. For some, like Gilbert and Louis (Study 2), farm ownership promised greater security than waged employment alone. Money can run out and jobs can end, they contended, leaving people vulnerable if they do not have land on which to subsist.

***iv. Rural Australia: a therapeutic space?***

Study 1 and 2 participants were motivated to move to the country to improve their mental health, and to feel a sense of belonging and completion (Table 4). Esther (Study 1) explained that coming to another culture is 'very confusing', but moving to rural Australia would help her to maintain her culture and feel comfortable. In the city 'you see the wrong houses', Esther said, but the country 'looks like…back home'. Gilbert (Study 2) shared this sentiment – for him, a move to rural Australia was associated with memories of home and he proclaimed, 'I can feel that I am belonging to the farming'. Rugaruza (Study 1) envisaged being able to overcome his homesickness, 'if we could live a life like home here in Australia'. For Mande (Study 1), meanwhile, feelings of being at home were tied to the particular landscape of Cowra: 'it has that complete environment that looks like…back home…the topography looks exactly like the one back home with those hills'. He spent months commuting to Cowra from Wollongong, a ten hour round trip, 'because of how much it felt like home'. Joseph (Study 1) described feeling 'in love with the rural life' because it is an 'extension of what I've been doing…since I was a young child'. He drew an explicit link between rural landscapes, distant vistas and health, 'there's something natural…that wakes in me…I actually like seeing far…that works for me in terms of health and…wellbeing'.

Rugaruza (Study 1) explained that being 'called a farmer is part of my identity'. Similarly, being able to grow familiar crops in rural Australia would make Harrison (Study 1) 'a complete person', and Obadiah (Study 1) described the farming lifestyle as 'everything – it's in me…it…brings that sense of…completion in oneself'. These reflections point towards an ingrained ruralphilia – stemming from pre-migration lives in the Great Lakes Region of Africa – and underscore that successful settlement in cities may be elusive for these international migrants. Without farmland, participants' successful resettlement was hampered. Louis (Study 2) stated, 'I don't see myself fitting this society when I don't have anything in the ground', and Samuel (Study 2) explained that being able to grow crops would help members of his community to 'settle themselves…and feel as local Australians'.

Some participants also thought they would be more relaxed in rural Australia. For Mwungura (Study 1), stress was linked to the expenses of urban life – which he considered would be resolved in the country. Marie (Study 1) said rural life would be relaxing because her sleep would not be disrupted by traffic noise and her mind would feel less 'busy'. Joseph (Study 1) described rural life as 'free range…a beautiful life' with 'no rat race' and 'room for you to move around'; and Harrison (Study 1) dreamt of not being confined, of 'seeing things in bigger perspective'. Rugaruza (Study 1) described his dream of owning a rural property where he could create a 'retreat' for his co-ethnic community – to assist with mental health challenges:

> suppose we have a small farm, maybe 10 acre[s]…where I can grow veggies, I can have…one, two, three cows and some sheep. It will be a recreational centre for…all the people who need somewhere to stay for a while when they are depressed…you feed them

> fresh food and then you say, "Let's remember home"...it will be a good opportunity to cure the depressed people…Imagine such a good place, it's a dream.

Finally, participants in both studies considered that their physical health would improve by moving to the country. By far the most dominant theme was a desire to grow healthy, fresh, organic food. Esther (Study 1) wanted to eat straight from the backyard: 'I don't like to use any chemicals…the more you eat good food…the more…the sickness will leave your body'. Many others shared this perspective (Table 4). Participants were also motivated to move to the country by the opportunity to grow culturally-important foods that are hard to access in Australia. Samuel (Study 2) explained that amaranth was an important, health promoting, part of their pre-migration diets in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Its absence from their Australian diets was problematic:

> if the body is used to those kind of foods and…you can't get access to them anymore, that means you lost your roots…You are no more yourself, you are living something else, that's why they [migrants] face diabetes, cancer.

Samuel considered growing such foods, an 'urgent matter' to avoid migrants' bodies being 'shocked by that big shift' to a western diet. Moreover, participants felt moving to the country would promote physical health via farming as a form of exercise that fits with cultural norms (unlike going to the gym). Louis (Study 2) also drew a strong link between physical and mental health – which he felt could be achieved via a rural, farming lifestyle, 'You're going to be strong if you're…doing farming activities…your brain, everything will be connected, you will be alright'.

**Discussion**

Our interviews with two groups of international migrants from the Great Lakes Region of Africa uncovered a deep-seated urbophobia and its counterpart, a strong and abiding ruralphilia (Morén-Alegret 2008). Additional research needs to establish whether international migrants originally from urban areas – who are compelled to live in rural areas (by the settlement policy levers outlined earlier in this paper) – also feel an innate sense of being in the wrong place. Place attachments develop via formative experiences, becoming 'a fundamental part of who people think they are' (Jack 2012:89). Having spent their formative years in rural areas, these international migrants did not experience urban Australia as a space of wellbeing. They felt unable to fulfil their capabilities and aspirations in the city. They also, by and large, did not experience urban Australia as integrative, secure or therapeutic. The contrast between participants' experiences of urban life, and their expectations of rural life, were stark. They were motivated to move to the country in order to achieve key life goals, develop strong human and non-human connections, achieve safety and financial security, and improve their mental and physical health.

Participants' accounts highlight that the four dimensions of the spaces of wellbeing framework (capacitating, integrative, secure, therapeutic) which we have, so far, treated separately, are integrated. For example, participants perceive that a move to the country would enable them to spend more time with their children (integrative), which would in turn reduce their children's risk of problematic behaviours such as drug use (security) and increase their focus on school (capability). All of this would, in turn, reduce parents' stress levels (therapeutic). Such interconnections are important because they portray the cascading effects that participants' perceive would emerge from a move to the country. Moreover, such interconnections signal that by providing support for international migrants' key aspirations, settlement service providers and support organisations can

make an impact across multiple wellbeing domains. For example, participants linked their key aspiration of 'access to farmland' to: capability via farm ownership and income-generating opportunities; integration via more-than-human and family relationships; security via reduced living expenses and the ability to sustain one's family; and therapeutic outcomes via the mental and physical health benefits of farming.

Having observed the intensity of participants' longing to leave the city, we asked those in Study 1 whether they would have preferred to settle in the country immediately upon arriving in Australia. (This question is most relevant to humanitarian migrants because they lack agency in determining their resettlement location). Marie recalled making her desire to live in a farming area clear after arriving in Australia. She told service providers 'every single day – *we are the farmers*…if you can have somewhere we can put the vegetable, we [are] going [to] be ok'. But Marie felt that her preferences were met with disbelief and condescension, 'when…you say that, everybody look at you [they ask] "Why you want to go back there where you coming from?"' In her recollection, service providers viewed rural life as a backwards step. Mande's experiences also signalled a problematic lack of agency in the resettlement process. He explained, 'I wouldn't even have come to Sydney or Wollongong at all. Take me straight to the country'. When asked if anybody involved in the resettlement process had enquired about his preferences, Mande replied, 'No one asked me. They just brought me here [to Wollongong]'. The ongoing impact of this initial lack of consultation meant that many of these international migrants were enduring urban life, not actively choosing it. The same question was not asked of all Study 2 participants, but similar sentiments emerged. Samuel lamented the inattentiveness of the resettlement process to the fit between people's places of origin and destination. If a refugee arrival is a farmer, he commented,

> you could bring them to [rural towns]…and they'd be like, "Oh, it's kind of home"…it'd be a relief…So they [government] should consider those settings…it would be a good idea if they could…take that into consideration…If he is a farmer, just take them at least close to farmers.

Gilbert (Study 2) similarly conveyed,

> the government of Australia, I think they made a mistake, from my point of view…I think when they bring people here they could ask them, "Would you like to live…to match up…with your previous job or would you like to change your lifestyle?" So if they could give them the option….myself, we didn't have choice…We didn't have [any] idea [during the resettlement process] if [we're] going the town [or] if [we] were going the countryside.

Of course, the realities of rural Australia may not live up to the participants' ideals. And indeed, this eventuality has been documented in existing investigations of international migrants' experiences in rural areas, as summarised earlier in this article. Disappointments are likely because, as our interviews revealed, there are significant misconceptions about rural Australia. Perhaps the most fundamental of these related to land ownership, with some participants in both studies hoping that the Australian government would provide free land on which to build a house and establish a farm. These perceptions, Rugaruza (Study 1) explained, were shaped by pre-migration experiences with different systems of land tenure and access. The idea that jobs are easy to come by in rural areas was another potential misconception; existing studies have shown that international migrants may struggle to secure employment in the country (Taylor and Stanovic 2005). Additionally, the expectation that their children would be safer from illicit drugs in rural Australia is countered by available evidence of drug use patterns in urban and rural areas (Australian Institute of Health and

Welfare, 2019). Our findings signal the importance of ensuring that organisations promoting secondary regional settlement (of which there are a growing number) have a deep understanding of the aspirations, perceptions and (potential) misconceptions held by the international migrants involved. It is imperative to clearly articulate what specific rural destinations can offer (Piper 2017; Regional Australia Institute 2019).

Existing studies have found that rural areas – in Australia and elsewhere – may attract international migrants but struggle with retention (Taylor and Stanovic 2005; Krivokapic-Skoko and Collins 2014; El-Bialy and Mulay 2015; Boese et al. 2018). When international migrants relocate to a rural area, then subsequently move again, this is often cast as a failure (e.g. McDonald et al. 2008). This is problematic for two key reasons. First, there has been an inordinate focus on rural areas' so-called failures when it comes to settling international migrants. Yet, as participants in both of our studies laid bare, urban areas do not necessarily 'perform' better. While a move to the country would likely lead to some disappointments, remaining in urban Australia – by their own accounts – offers these migrants little prospect of a satisfying life and may even be unbearable. Second, we concur with Boese et al. (2018) and Piper (2017) that settlement should be understood as an evolving process that may entail multiple moves. As Joseph (Study 1) commented, 'I am one of those people who believe…life is…always changing. You can't get stuck in one place*;* you should keep changing'. In some cases, it might take multiple moves before international migrants are able to find a location that sustains their wellbeing. In other cases, certain localities may function as spaces of wellbeing during a particular life course stage, but not continue to do so as migrants' needs evolve (Boese et al. 2018). Diverse aspects of individuals' and families' wellbeing may be fulfilled in different places, and the relative importance of these may be re-prioritised over time. Rather than

problematising mobility and viewing stasis as the ultimate signal of settlement success, it is important to acknowledge that international migrants are active agents who 'employ reflexivity, creativity, and strategy in their secondary-migration decision-making processes and actions' (Boese et al. 2018:3; see also Marks 2014). The spaces of wellbeing framework provides scope to explore wellbeing as relational and dynamic, as something that can 'be achieved in and through practices of mobility' (Gorman-Murray and Bissell 2018: 236). Longitudinal applications of this framework to international migrants' lives – in and between rural and urban areas – offer a fruitful avenue for future research.

**Conclusions**

The regionalisation of Australia's Migration Program and Refugee and Humanitarian Program, while not new, has recently attracted renewed emphasis in response to population pressures in already large cities, and population and economic decline in some rural areas. Notwithstanding the growing research focus on international migrants' regional settlement experiences, understandings of *how place matters* remain limited. Dominant understandings of international migrants' settlement experiences are framed by instrumentalist concerns about employment opportunities and (to a lesser extent) social supports. Further, there are widespread assumptions that – if given the choice – all international migrants will choose to live in cities.

The findings presented in this paper show that researchers and policymakers need to adopt a wider lens that considers diverse migrants' deep-seated affinities for urban or rural lifestyles and landscapes, and affective bonds to the non-human dimensions of landscapes and place (e.g. animals, crops, soil). Among participants in our studies, these connections are more than preferences – they

are core to their being, identities and wellbeing. Following Morén-Alegret (2008:550) the significance of individuals' urbophobia and ruralphilia (or vice versa) ought to be an important consideration for those who 'aim to channel migrants' into particular areas. A lack of choice in settlement destination is likely to result in a lack of satisfaction and wellbeing, which, in turn, compromises the long-term success of settlement policy outcomes.

Our findings have five key implications: i) non-human connections are fundamental to some international migrants' wellbeing and inform their preferences to live in particular types of locations, but have been neglected in much research and policy; ii) in supporting the voluntary internal migration of international migrants, it is important to understand individuals' aspirations and to ensure that these are not informed by significant misconceptions about life in rural areas; iii) research and policy often frame secondary mobility as a rupture in the settlement process, but it is a negotiation that occurs in response to the reality of life post-migration, and an important step on the path to feeling settled; iv) preferences for urban or rural lifestyles are often deep-seated and affective; and v) supporting migrants' key aspirations can have cascading effects across multiple wellbeing domains.

We have shown that the spaces of wellbeing framework (Fleuret and Atkinson 2007) can generate valuable insights in efforts to understand international migrants' place-based experiences, preferences and aspirations – from the instrumental to the affective. The framework underscores that affective dimensions are highly significant, despite being sidelined in most existing settlement policy and research. For international migrants, formative pre-migration experiences engender deeply-felt bonds with particular types of places. Policies that work against international migrants'

place-based affinities and aversions – and that constrain their agency in the settlement process – risk undermining wellbeing and may therefore prove ineffective in achieving population redistribution goals.

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**Table 1: Proportion of Census respondents born in the Great Lakes Region of Africa residing in regional Australia by ABS remoteness index[i] (comparison between 2006 and 2016 Australian Census data).**

| Country of birth | Inner regional Australia | | Outer regional Australia | | Major cities | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2006 % (No.) | 2016 % (No.) | 2006 % (No.) | 2016 % (No.) | 2006 % (No.) | 2016 % (No.) |
| *Core countries, Great Lakes Region of Africa* | | | | | | |
| Burundi | 8.9 (67) | ↓5.9 (123) | 1.9 (14) | ↑4.7 (99) | 89.2 (672) | ↓88.7 (1,863) |
| Congo, Democratic Republic of | 8.4 (52) | ↑15.4 (623) | 5.5 (34) | ↑6.9 (279) | 84.5 (522) | ↓77.3 (3,125) |
| Congo | 9.2 (48) | ↑16.2 (229) | 6.2 (32) | ↓5.9 (84) | 85.2 (443) | ↓77.0 (1,090) |
| Rwanda | 7.4 (15) | ↑10.3 (89) | 1.5 (3) | ↑7.8 (67) | 91.6 (185) | ↓81.4 (703) |
| Uganda | 10.7 (184) | ↓10.6 (346) | 5.8 (99) | ↓4.7 (155) | 82.1 (1405) | ↑83.8 (2,741) |
| Total for core countries, Great Lakes Region | 9.6 (366) | ↑12.1 (1,410) | 4.8 (182) | ↑5.8 (684) | 84.8 (3227) | ↓81.4 (9,522) |
| | | | | | | |
| *Additional countries, Great Lakes Region of Africa* | | | | | | |
| Kenya | 10.2 (1,012) | ↓8.1 (1,403) | 5.3 (531) | ↓4.9 (845) | 83.2 (8,268) | ↑85.7 (14,753) |
| Tanzania | 9.9 (228) | ↓8.3 (312) | 4.1 (94) | ↓5.4 (204) | 84.4 (1,942) | ↑85.2 (3,212) |
| | | | | | | |
| Total overseas born population (in Australia) | 9.6 (422,609) | ↓8.3 (502,203) | 4.5 (199,855) | ↓4.2 (252,637) | 84.8 (3,744,090) | ↑86.4 (5,237,286) |
| Total Australia-born population | 23.1 (3,250,788) | ↓22.3 (3,414,874) | 10.9 (1,536,362) | ↓10.1 (1,543,505) | 63.2 (8,889,393) | ↑65.2 (9,998,570) |

[i]Remoteness areas divide Australia into five classes of remoteness on the basis of a measure of relative access to services https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/remoteness+structure. Remote Australia and Very Remote Australia are also part of the ABS remoteness index but are not included here as the numbers involved are extremely small.
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2006, 2016)

**Table 2: Overview of participants (n=18)**

| Name | Country of birth/refuge[i] | Rural/farming family background | Name of program under which the participant came to Australia | Study 1: Australian city of residence at time of interview Study 2: Last Australian city of residence/place of residence at time of interview | Year of arrival in Australia | Spouse/children | Interview conducted in English |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Study 1 participants (n=10)** | | | | | | | |
| Bishasha | DRC[ii]/Kenya | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Sydney | 2017 | Yes/Yes | No |
| Mwungura | DRC/Kenya | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Sydney | 2018 | Yes/Yes | No |
| Marie | DRC/Tanzania | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Sydney | 2004 | No/Yes | Yes |
| Esther | Rwanda/Tanzania | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Sydney | 2004 | Yes/Yes | Yes |
| Joseph | Kenya/Not applicable | Yes | Migration program | Sydney | 2005 | Yes/Yes | Yes |
| Moise | Congo (unspecified) /Burundi | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Newcastle | 2018 | Yes/Yes | No |
| Rugaruza | Congo (unspecified) /Rwanda and Kenya | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Newcastle | 2009 | Yes/Yes | Yes |
| Harrison | Kenya/Not applicable | Yes | Migration program | Sydney | 2015 | Yes/Yes | Yes |
| Obadiah | Kenya/Not applicable | Yes | Migration program | Sydney | 2014 | Yes/Yes[iii] | Yes |
| Mande | DRC/Uganda | No[iv] | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Wollongong | 2009 | Yes/Yes | No |
| Study 2 participants (n=8) | | | | | | | |
| Samuel | DRC/Tanzania and Mozambique | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Melbourne/rural town[vi] | 2013 | Yes/Yes | No |
| Clementine | Tanzania[v]/ Mozambique | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Melbourne/rural town | 2013 | Yes/Yes | No |
| Sylvania | Rwanda | No | Unclear | Sydney/rural town | 2014 | No/Yes | Yes |
| Eric | Rwanda/Congo, Kenya, South Africa | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Brisbane/rural town | 2009 | Yes/Yes | Yes |
| Louis | Rwanda/Tanzania | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Melbourne/rural town | 2008 | Yes/Yes | Yes |
| Immaculée | Rwanda/Tanzania | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Melbourne/rural town | 2008 | Yes/Yes | No |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Henri | DRC/Rwanda, Ethiopia | No | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Adelaide/rural town | 2010 | No/No | Yes |
| Gilbert | DRC/Tanzania | Yes | Refugee and Humanitarian program | Melbourne/rural town | 2010 | Yes/Yes | Yes |

[i]For participants from refugee backgrounds we have listed their country of birth and their country/countries of refuge prior to Australia, as most spent several years in refugee camps. Note, all participants identified as coming from the Great Lakes Region of Africa, though three were Kenyan. As explained earlier in the paper, Kenya and Tanzania are included in 'loose', on-the-ground definitions of the Great Lakes Region of Africa.
[ii]Democratic Republic of the Congo
[iii]Child lives in Kenya
[iv]When in the DRC, this participant lived in the city but owned a cattle farm in the country.
[v]Although Clementine was born in Tanzania, her family was from Burundi.
[vi]Town names are not included, to protect participants' confidentiality. Towns are in regional Victoria with populations of <10,000 and <2,000 people respectively.

**Table 3: Participants' self-assessments of their lives in the city, evaluated against the spaces of wellbeing framework (n=18)**

| | **Capacitating** *(e.g. able to achieve goals and utilise capabilities)* | **Integrative** *(e.g. connections to people, culture, place and non-humans; access to services)* | **Secure** *(e.g. safety, physical and material support, financial security)* | **Therapeutic** *(e.g. physiologically or psychologically healing or health promoting)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Wellbeing sustained** | **Study 1 (n=10)** | | | |
| | **Education:** opportunity to study (n=6); good schools for children (n=1)<br>**Jobs:** job opportunities available (n=5)<br>**Food growing:** access to community garden (n=3); able to grow food in home garden (n=3) | **Services:** services met primary needs upon arrival (n=4)<br>**Broader community:** friendly people upon arrival (n=4); good relationships with neighbours (n=2); strong connections with church community (n=1)<br>**Co-ethnic community:** strong connections with co-ethnic community (n=2) | **Safety:** sense of safety on arrival (n=4); lives in a safe suburb (n=1)<br>**Financial security:** achieved home ownership (n=1) | |
| | **Study 2 (n=8)** | | | |
| | **Education:** opportunity to study (n=2); good English language training opportunities (n=1); good schools for children (n=1)<br>**Jobs:** job opportunities available (n=6); possible to get certain jobs without English (n=1) | **Services:** services met primary needs upon arrival (n=3); many attractions to visit (n=1); ease of access to shops/culturally-important foods (n=1); access to public transport (n=2)<br>**Broader community:** people are culturally aware (n=1); many multicultural events (n=1); children make friends easily (n=1)<br>**Co-ethnic community:** strong connections with co-ethnic community (n=4) | **Financial security:** achieved home ownership (n=1); can earn good money (n=1) | |
| **Wellbeing undermined** | **Study 1 (n=10)** | | | |
| | **Food growing:** lack of space to grow food (n=7); not permitted to grow food at rental property (n=4); cannot achieve farm ownership (n=2) | **Family relationships:** eroding relationships between parents and children (n=6); children have too many friends in the city, bad influence (n=5); children are independently mobile in the city, undermining parents' control (n=4); | **Risks to children:** from bad peer influence, drugs, alcohol, sex (n=7)<br>**Financial insecurity:** high cost of living (n=6); | **City life bad for mental health:** feel stressed and overwhelmed by life in busy city (n=5); feel over-crowded by dense population (n=3); feel confined/caged (n=3); noisy (n=2); |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Jobs:** difficult to get a job (n=5); available work does not meet aspirations (n=2); available jobs require English skills (n=2)<br>**Housing:** cannot achieve home ownership (n=2)<br>**Education:** poor quality education/crowded classrooms (n=1) | high cost of living prevents travel to Africa to visit family (n=1)<br>**Broader community:** difficult to form relationships with neighbours (n=4); city people are too busy, unhelpful (n=3); conflict with neighbours due to proximity/noise (n=2)<br>**Non-human relationships:** no opportunity to connect with cows (n=2)<br>**Co-ethnic community:** lack of land undermines capacity to grow and share food with co-ethnic community (n=1)<br>**Services:** language barriers accessing services (n=1) | expensive rent (n=4); home ownership unachievable (n=3)<br>**Safety:** threatened by neighbours over children's noise (n=1) | being idle due to unemployment is bad for mental health (n=2); child suffering from poor mental health (n=1); apartment life is unenjoyable (n=1); traffic is overwhelming (n=1)<br>**City life bad for physical health:** Unhealthy foods, not fresh (n=5); pollution (n=2); stress impacts physical health (n=1) |
| | **Study 2 (n=8)** | | | |
| | **Food growing:** lack of space to grow food (n=2); cannot achieve farm ownership (n=1)<br>**Jobs:** difficult to get a job (n=2); available work does not meet aspirations (n=1); available work is not culturally appropriate (n=1); available jobs require English skills (n=1)<br>**Housing:** cannot achieve home ownership (n=1); difficult to secure suitable rental accommodation (n=1)<br>**Education:** risk to children's education from truancy/peer influence (n=2); private schools very expensive in city (n=1) | **Services:** congestion makes it hard to get around (n=2); many services are hard to access due to high population and demand (n=1)<br>**Family relationships:** eroding relationships between parents and children (n=1); children have too many friends in the city, bad influence (n=1); parents have insufficient time with their children (n=2)<br>**Broader community:** difficult to form relationships with neighbours (n=3); city people are too busy, unhelpful (n=3); people in cities are racist (n=1); negative perceptions of African people (n=1); ad hoc socialising is hard in cities (n=1); cities are lonely places (n=1)<br>**Non-human relationships:** feel disconnected from nature (n=1); lack of belonging because not farming (n=1)<br>**Co-ethnic community:** lack of land undermines capacity to grow and share food with co-ethnic community (n=1); presence of co-ethnic community makes it harder to learn English (n=1) | **Risks to children:** from bad peer influence, drugs, alcohol, sex (n=4); stereotypes of African gangs put children at risk (n=1)<br>**Financial insecurity:** high cost of living (n=2); expensive rent (n=2); home ownership unachievable (n=1); cannot feel secure if unable to own land (n=1)<br>**Safety:** risk of crime including break-ins (n=1), exposure to drunk people in city (n=1) | **City life bad for mental health:** feel stressed and overwhelmed by life in busy city (n=4); feel over-crowded by dense population (n=1); traffic is overwhelming (n=2); lonely despite being surrounded by people (n=1)<br>**City life bad for physical health:** Unhealthy foods, not fresh (n=2); lack of exercise because not farming (n=2) |

**Table 4: Participants' expectations of life in the country, and motivations for moving, evaluated against the spaces of wellbeing framework (n=18)**

| | **Capacitating** *(e.g. fulfilling capabilities, able to achieve goals)* | **Integrative** *(e.g. social capital, access to services, connections to non-humans, connections to culture)* | **Secure** *(e.g. safety, physical and material support, financial security)* | **Therapeutic** *(e.g. physiologically or psychologically healing or health promoting)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Wellbeing sustained** | **Study 1 (n=10)** | | | |
| | **Food growing**: opportunity to farm in rural areas (n=10); aspiration to own a farm/have a farm business (n=9); potential to access free farmland (n=4); children will learn farming as cultural/life skill (n=3); business opportunities through growing African crops (n=2)<br>**Jobs:** easier to get jobs than in the city (n=7); availability of jobs linked to farming experience (n=3); able to create employment for others via farming (n=2); small population so less competition for jobs (n=1)<br>**Education:** better education for children (n=4)<br>**Housing:** home ownership affordable compared to city (n=3); opportunity to live in a larger house, with land (n=2)<br>**Other:** able to save money to achieve larger goals (n=4) | **Non-human relationships:** strong cultural connection to land/farming (n=7); strong connection to nature, crops and animals (n=6)<br>**Services:** rural areas of Australia are well-serviced with key infrastructure (n=7)<br>**Family relationships:** improved relationships between parents and children (n=6); children less exposed to negative peer relationships (n=5); cheaper cost of living enables connections/support for family members still in Africa (n=1)<br>**Co-ethnic community:** able to establish a critical mass of co-ethnic community members (n=5)<br>**Broader community:** country people are welcoming and helpful (n=4); opportunity to make long-term friendships (n=3); able to connect to other farmers, share knowledge (n=3); strong church communities in country areas (n=1)<br>**Spiritual:** connecting to God through landscape (n=1) | **Safety:** safer for children (n=8); country children are better disciplined (n=4)<br>**Financial security:** cheaper housing (n=8); lower cost of living overall (n=5); growing own food reduces living expenses (n=4); home ownership more feasible (n=3) | **Rural life good for mental health:** feeling of completeness because identity is connected to country living/farming (n=9); less stressful/more relaxing life (n=7); feeling of freedom/space/open landscape (n=6); feeling of belonging/home in rural areas and through farming (n=6); peaceful/quiet (n=3); able to feel hopeful (n=3); less time being idle (n=2); less crowded than city (n=2); children happy when parents are not stressed (n=1); reduced homesickness (n=1); child's mental health will improve (n=1); opportunity to create a rural retreat for co-ethnic community members (n=1)<br>**Rural life good for physical health:** access to healthier, chemical-free home grown food (n=7); farming as exercise, good for health (n=3); children have room to play (n=3); fresh air/no pollution (n=2) |
| | **Study 2 (n=8)** | | | |
| | **Food growing**: opportunity to farm in rural areas (n=6); aspiration to own a | **Non-human relationships:** strong cultural connection to land/farming (n=3) | **Safety:** safer for children (n=2); country children | **Rural life good for mental health:** feeling of completeness because |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | farm/have a farm business (n=6); potential to access free farmland (n=2); land is affordable (n=1); children will learn farming as cultural/life skill (n=1); business opportunities through selling crops to broader community (n=3); farming fits with existing skills (n=4)<br>**Jobs:** chance to be own boss/independent through farming (n=2)<br>**Education:** children will focus on education, less chance of dropping out (n=1); less truancy (n=1); more time for parents to help children with school work (n=1)<br>**Housing:** home ownership affordable compared to city (n=3) | **Family relationships:** improved relationships between parents and children (n=1); children less exposed to negative peer relationships (n=2); children will learn more about their African family farming heritage (n=1); parents have more time to spend with children (n=2)<br>**Co-ethnic community:** farming maintains connection to family in Africa (n=1)<br>**Broader community:** country people are welcoming and helpful (n=3); opportunity to connect with neighbours (n=2); able to contribute to community by farming and sharing African culture (n=3) | are better disciplined (n=1)<br>**Financial security:** cheaper housing (n=3); lower cost of living overall (n=1); growing own food reduces living expenses (n=4); home ownership more feasible (n=3); cost of land cheaper (n=1); chance to build own house on land (n=1); owning land represents security (n=2) | identity is connected to country living/farming (n=2); farming is dream job, source of happiness (n=2); less stressful/more relaxing life (n=3); big open spaces (n=1); feeling of belonging/home in rural areas and through farming (n=4); peaceful/quiet (n=2); less time being idle (n=2); less crowded than city (n=2)<br>**Rural life good for physical health:** access to healthier, chemical-free home grown food (n=3); farming as exercise, good for health (n=3); children have room to play (n=1); prevents adults and children from becoming lazy (n=2) |
| **Wellbeing undermined** | **Study 1 (n=10)** | | | |
| | **Jobs:** lack of jobs for children while studying (n=1); lack of job opportunities for highly educated (n=1)<br>**Education:** difficult for children who want to go to university (n=1), poorer education for children (n=1)<br>**Food growing:** farmland is too expensive (n=1) | **Broader community:** fear of discrimination (n=3)<br>**Services:** lack of public transport (n=1); distance to access medical care (n=1) | **Housing:** shortage of housing (n=1) | |
| | **Study 2 (n=8)** | | | |
| | **Jobs:** available jobs require English skills (n=1)<br>**Food growing:** farmland is too expensive (n=1) | **Services:** less services available (n=1) | | |