

Although struggles with isolation, language and cultural barriers are evident in most migration stories, in this paper I will consider the way plain sewing as a creative and habitual practice can be a means of physically and memorially re-experiencing home even though a person is displaced. My maternal grandmother, Catterina, is a trained seamstress, and has maintained her practice of plain sewing for over 65 years. This practice constitutes a deep part of the fabric of herself and is integral to the sense of belonging she achieved first in Africa and later in Australia.

Catterina Moiso met Vincezo Rossetti, thirteen years her senior, in Italy in 1951 (Figure 1). Three months later they were married and en route to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) where Vincenzo had been held as a prisoner of war during World War Two, and where he had been assigned to work on a farming estate in the country's North East. Rhodesia held a special place in Vincenzo's heart, and so Catterina, deeply in love, followed her new husband on this adventure into Africa. According to Catterina her first impressions of Rhodesia were good - it was a beautiful country with a lovely capital city, and the family who employed Vincenzo on Hinton Estate were very kind to them. However, her first feelings were also of trepidation as the reality of language barriers and isolation set in for the young, cosmopolitan, Italian woman - living alone in staff housing on a remote part of the Estate, not having any English or Shona (the native language of Zimbabwe). Misery soon set in, and Catterina recalls crying every day for the first 6 months, causing Vincenzo to wonder if they should return to Italy. But Catterina is not the quitting kind, and she soon pulled herself together and went about the business of belonging.

In this paper I wish to discuss the *situatedness* of habitual practices outlining the importance of Catterina's plain sewing as practiced in Zimbabwe and then Australia (Figure 2). In addition, Edward Casey's concept of Habitual Body Memory is applied when discussing displacement and the need for orientation in new circumstance as experienced by immigrants. Habitual memories are posited as sustaining, and constitute everyday activities which aid belonging. In closing I will address the way I recollect memories from the farm homestead in Zimbabwe through observing my grandmother's sewing.

To belong is described in the Collins dictionary as 'to have a proper and usual place' and 'to be acceptable' (2008). To expand on the notion of having a 'proper place' Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling in their book titled *Home* present and discuss multiple methods of actively belonging which migrants employ in their new country of residence. Of particular interest to

this narrative is the importance of house style and material culture within the home as aiding a sense of belonging for migrants. Immigrants literally build memories and understandings of *home* into the new environment. For example, architectural styles, decorative features and material culture such as fabrics and imagery from the country of origin are incorporated into the house. This is not to say that aspects of the new place of residence aren't accepted and celebrated by immigrant communities when they incorporate or replicate house styles from their country of origin. As Sallie Westwood and Annie Phizacklea, note,

This [building] is an importation of vernacular architecture which changes the visual and aesthetic spaces of the urban, contributing to the sense of a hybrid, diasporic spatial aesthetic. The remaking of housing...[is] part of a remembering which is active, *not simply a nostalgia for the familiarity of home but an attempt to make a home in a new landscape.* (2000, p.63-4) (My emphasis)

The buildings I refer to in Catterina's migration story are European in style and have ignored traditional buildings of the Shona and Matabele people of Zimbabwe. This aspect of Zimbabwean settlement and culture is beyond the scope of this paper. The present discussion focuses on the settlement of an Italian immigrant family into an already established European, commercial farming community in Rhodesia. Given the context of pre-independence, Catterina was settling into another form of European community in the Colonies. I mention buildings here to reiterate the importance of the dwelling in notions of belonging (Figure 3). Once Catterina and Vincenzo purchased their own farm, Marston, in 1954 it was several years before they built a new homestead, adjacent to the original farmhouse (which Catterina disliked for its style, a traditional English colonial house that didn't allow much light into the building due to wide verandahs.)

Importantly, it was through the building process that Catterina was able to specify and construct her *place* in the home – the sewing room. Material and visual culture as aids within the new home is significant here, as objects and references in the home assist belonging by actively importing remembered landscapes of the original home into the new residence (Blunt, 2006, p.215). This concept is particularly associated with imported imagery within the new dwelling, for example photographs or paintings. I propose that material culture as a form of remembering 'home' could be applied to materials and designs used in Catterina's plain sewing practice. Sewing in this instance is less decorative and more utilitarian, but nevertheless is a style of work Catterina learned in one home and transferred

to the new home environment of Rhodesia. Buildings and the materials and objects within them condense culture in one place, this depth of culture gives places what Casey describes as '*longue durée*' (1993, p.31),

Place, already cultural as experienced, insinuates itself into a collectivity, altering as well as constituting that collectivity. Place becomes social because it is already cultural. It is also, and for the same reason, historical. It is by the mediation of culture that places gain historical depth. We might even say that culture is the third dimension of places, affording them a deep historicity, a *longue durée*...Buildings are among the most perspicuous instances of the thorough acculturation of places. *A building condenses a culture in one place.* (Casey 1993, p.30-31) (Author's emphasis)

Along with her habitual sewing practice, the depth of culture afforded by the built homestead gives Marston Farm a tangible presence in Catterina's memory, and my own. Despite the sustaining nature of Catterina's sewing without this depth of culture the memory of Marston would not be as tangible when recalled from the displaced position of life in Australia.

According to Edward Casey, habitual body memories allow for continuity and familiarity in the face of change (2000, p.155). When Catterina found herself in unfamiliar circumstances in Rhodesia, one way of creating personal meaning and a sense of belonging in this new context was to draw on her experience as a seamstress. Each sewing design must be contemplated and problems solved accordingly, but it is the foundational processes of sewing that comprise body memory – measuring, cutting, ironing, fitting together, stitching and constructing a garment. Casey argues that the importance of body memory in forming the individual is related to the role of *tradition* in cultural history, 'The role that "tradition" plays in the constitution of cultural history is here paralleled by a set of habitual body memories that are the unique possession of a given individual' (2000, p.151). Therefore *tradition* can be understood as aiding *belonging*, and thus habitual body memory qua *tradition* can be seen as aiding Catterina's sense of belonging in Rhodesia and later on in Australia.

In addition Casey suggests another key aspect of habitual body memory is its ability to orient a person in a new environment, 'Getting oriented is to learn precisely which routes are possible, and eventually which are most desirable, by setting up habitual patterns of bodily

movement. These patterns familiarize us with the circumambient world by indicating ways we can move through it in a regular and reliable manner' (2000, p.151-52).

Hence habitual body memory can be considered to mean, for example, driving a car, the placement of regularly used objects in a kitchen or bedroom, and the routines established by human beings during their day (Figures 4-6). When applied to a habitual practice such as plain sewing it is evident that Catterina is able to use a familiar practice in new environments to feel oriented. For Catterina sewing is a comfortable, sustaining activity that allows her to carry something of herself into unfamiliar circumstances, to feel oriented.

Casey goes on to say that habitual body memory enables one to get the familiar necessities imbedded quickly in our new environment, leaving room for the development of other ways of adapting to new circumstances and places – there is a reliance between embedded habitual body memory and the ability to adapt and acquire new body memories in order to exist,

To remain oriented in a given circumstance, the formation of new habits must give way to consistent habitual responses: the unsettlement of the unknown is only finally vanquished by the acquisition of settled propensities to act. And for these latter to inhere in our behavior, habitual body memory is required. (2000, p.152)

During Catterina's 49 years living on Marston Farm in Zimbabwe she obtained a deep sense of belonging in that place (Figure 7). Over time new habitual responses formed – how to run a household, to manage servants, to be a mother, to supervise on the land when Vincenzo was visiting town or at the tobacco sales etc. But it was her sewing practice that built the foundation of her belonging in Zimbabwe. It was also this practice that connected her in a tangible sense to the broader community. Catterina would sew garments for the women of the farming community. Most frequently women would visit the homestead at Marston for measuring and fitting. Once again the importance of the built environment comes to the fore – the social habits of farming communities mean that everyone arrives via the back door, and the design of Marston Farm's main house meant that Catterina had a clear view of the back door from her sewing room, she always knew who was at the entrance in advance.

In concluding I wish to focus on Catterina's second immigration, from Zimbabwe to Australia. In considering her first emigration from Italy to Zimbabwe, Catterina made a choice to move

based on her love for and recent marriage to Vincezo, and the prospect of adventure and a new life together in Africa post-World War Two. Catterina's second emigration is quite a different circumstance, with Marston being redistributed under Mugabe's land reform policies. This was a forced emigration from her home of over 49 years. Catterina was lucky to have the option of where to move (Australia) but had no choice but to leave Marston Farm. And so she found herself in Australia, attempting the business of belonging once again. Her first stop was at our home in Palmyra, Perth. We had emigrated from Zimbabwe in January 2001 and were renting a property here. The spaces within this home were significant as our formal lounge served as a stopping point for a number of immigrant families from Zimbabwe new to the country. The last immigrant to stop with us was my grandmother. She lived in our lounge room on a fold out sofa for 2 years at Waddell Road. Although limited in space, Catterina sewed constantly during that time. Catterina was displaced from her Zimbabwean home, with its sewing room and forced to adapt to a new cramped environment.

Over time we bought a property, and as various siblings moved out of home Catterina once again established a sewing room in the house. A key aspect of Catterina's sense of belonging in Australia has been associated with the objects she chose to bring here from Zimbabwe. Much was lost, and could not be brought here when the farm was acquired and Catterina displaced. As testament to the sustaining ability of her sewing practice as habitual body memory she chose to bring her sewing machines (1 Elna and 1 overlocker) and her mannequin. Jean-Sébastien Marcoux in his essay *The Refurbishment of Memory* expands on the importance of the objects people carry with them when moving house,

we could say that the things that people take with them, those 'aide-mémoires', help preserve a certain consistency and continuity. Going further, we could also say that memory may be constituted in motion through the displacement of objects. *Bringing things with oneself, then, is to make the choice of remembering.* (2001, p. 73)  
(my emphasis)

Catterina chose to bring with her to Australia those objects and tools which most assist her habitual plain sewing practice, which has already been demonstrated as aiding her sense of belonging in new contexts.

The final aspect of Catterina's migration story to be addressed is related to habitual practice as a means of physically and memorially re-experiencing home even though a person is displaced. My grandmother's sewing, as a habitual body memory can be described as a personal tradition (Casey 2000, p.150). Traditions are made for sharing and passing on, and the memory of 'home' is perpetuated as I observe my grandmother sewing, and as she teaches me this tradition. When describing habitual body memory, Edward Casey states, 'Part of the very activity of habitual body memory consists in this information, a subtle structuring of behavior along the lines of a personal or collective tradition that becomes readily reinstated in certain circumstance' (2000, p.150). Marston Farm is bound in my memory by Catterina's sewing, and in a physical sense, when Catterina and I sew together we recollect home (Figure 8).

Catterina has overcome struggles with isolation, language and cultural barriers by building a strong sense of belonging primarily on the foundation of her habitual sewing practice. By employing a deeply orienting habitual body memory early in her immigration experience my grandmother was able to establish other means of belonging in Zimbabwe - those things associated with farming and running a household etc. Once displaced from Marston Farm, unable to bring with her all the memories (in material form) of a lifetime, Catterina chose those items of most importance to her sense of self worth and belonging – her sewing machines. Now residing with my family here in Perth, Australia, Catterina has once again established her place within a new dwelling and continues to sew in this, her third country of residence. As we stitch together I am constantly reminded of her existence on Marston Farm and the trials associated with moving country, building a home, losing a home and beginning again. Catterina's ability to continue to perform these habitual actions within the home space has underpinned her sense of belonging and in addition influenced my modes of remembering home - from Italy to Zimbabwe to Australia.

## Figures

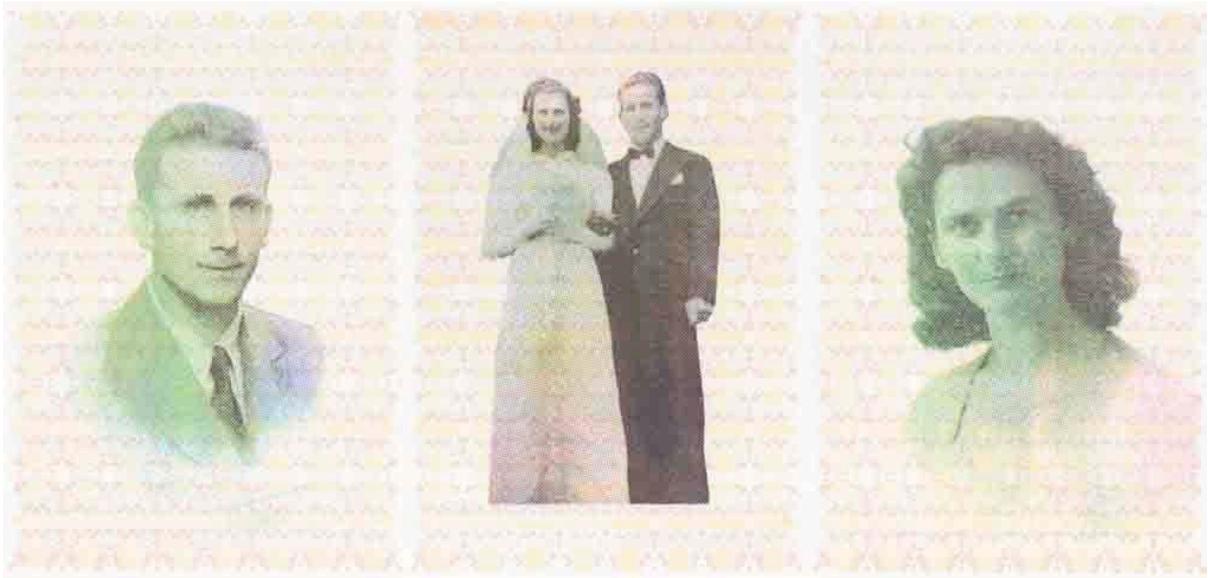


Figure 1: *Catterina and Vincenzo 1951*, 2011, screen print on Stonehenge 12 x 17 cm each.



Figure 2: *Terrain Revisited (aerial view of the journey to Marston Farm)* 2011, screen print on Stonehenge, dimensions variable 14 x 30 cm each.

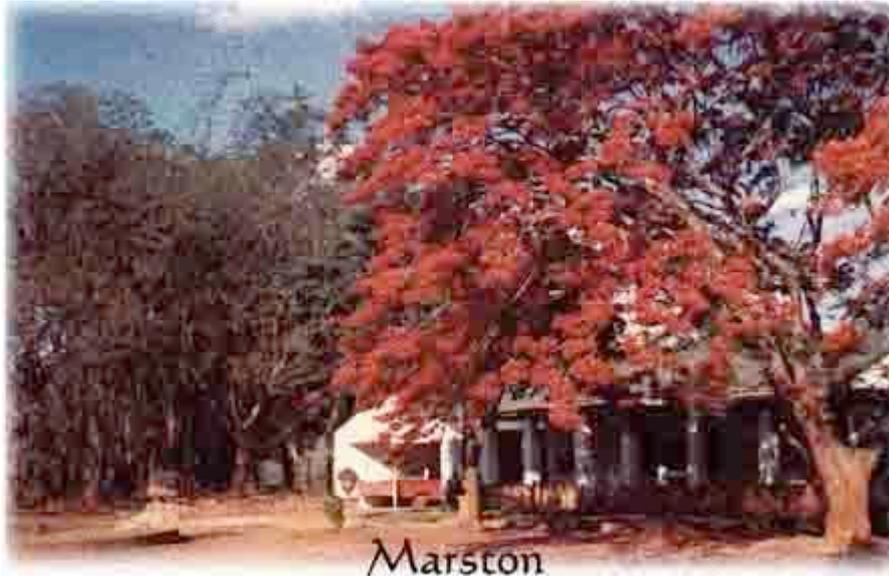


Figure 3: *Marston Farm old house.*

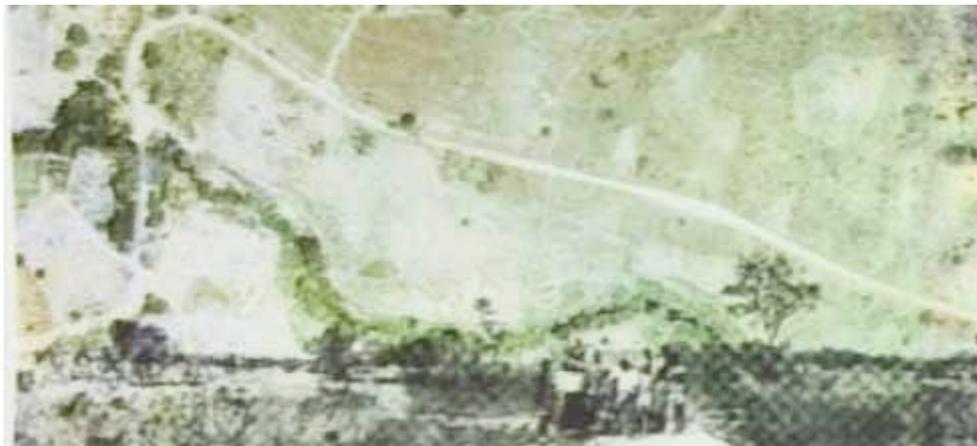


Figure 4: *Untitled*, 2011, screen print on Stonehenge, 20 x 42 cm.  
Aerial view of Marston Farm with image incorporated of Vincenzo and farm workers standing on a bridge they have constructed.



Figure 5: *Untitled*, 2011, screen print on Stonehenge, 17 x 56 cm.  
Catterina amongst the maize plants at Marston Farm.

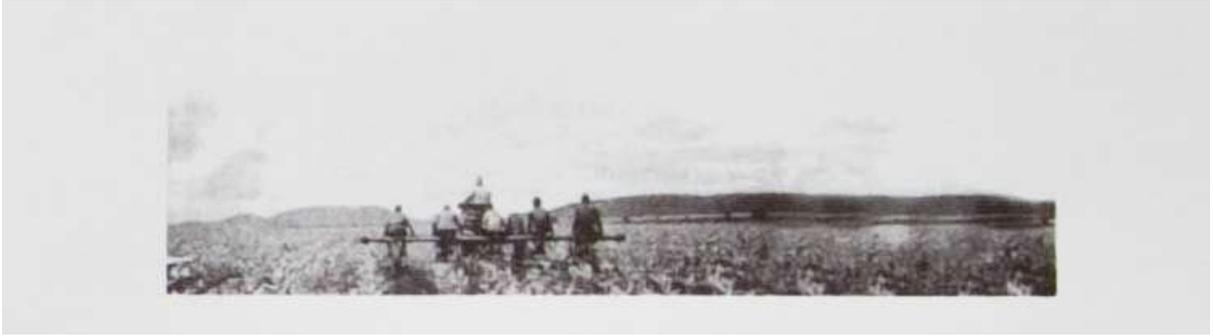


Figure 6: *Untitled*, 2011, screen print on Stonehenge 17 x 56 cm.  
Vincenzo and farm workers balancing on a tractor, reaping tobacco at Marston Farm.

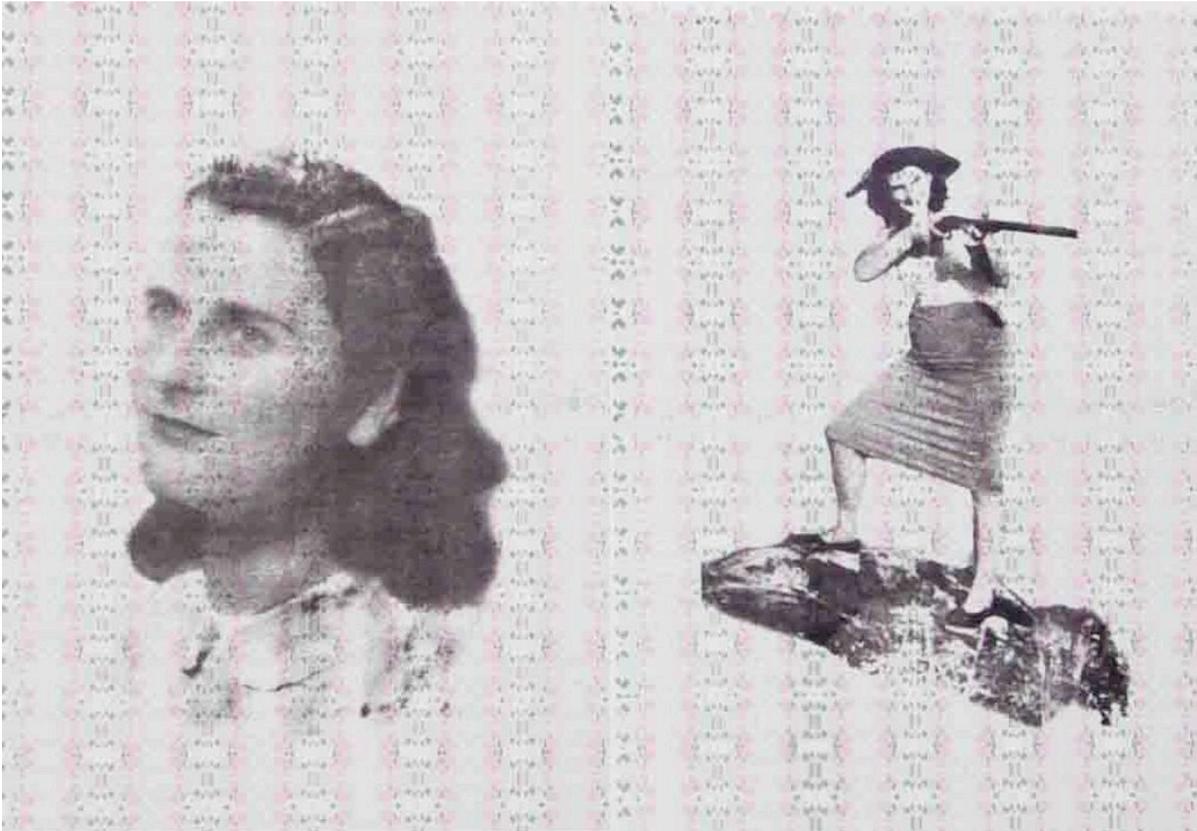


Figure 7: *Catterina Rossetti (née Moiso) I & II*, 2011, screen print on Stonehenge, 76 x 56 cm each.



Figure 8: *Untitled*, 2012, screen print on calico with embroidery thread, 50 x 39 cm  
Catterina with Kita in her sewing room, overlooking the garden and back entrance at Marston Farm in the new house circa 2000.



Figure 9: *Untitled*, 2012, screen print on calico with embroidery thread, 50 x 39 cm (back view).  
Example of dense stitching on the reverse side of screen print of Catterina in her sewing room.

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