

Mitigating developmental crises for migrants from South Africa: The role and significance of “a sense of belonging”

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Introduction and Literary Context

Three hundred years ago, people lived in largely agrarian societies and were connected through work and face-to-face connections with others. Their community, loyalty and connections were fixed to their locality (Bessant & Watts, 2007, pp. 21-24), and their “rootedness” was predominantly found in their immediate context, whether that was their town, country, language or ancestry (Wampole, 2016). Such previous generations had a more fixed and determined identity and individuals could typically find their social self, their autonomy, agency, dignity and self-development within this locality, tradition or nation (Bauman, 1996, pp. 18-19; Hsu, 2011, pp. 139-140). This is no longer the case. Our time is one of globalisation, which has resulted in the unprecedented migration of people within and between continents, shrinking the concept of distance across the globe, and offering people “new kinds of continuity and growth” (Wampole, 2016, p. 8R). Community is no longer locality based and, as globalisation continues to change the world, this results in the disappearance of context for the individual’s social identity (Hsu, 2011, p. 140), and challenges people to create and conceptualise their own communities and contexts based on their connectivity and relationships. This has the potential to create crises for individuals who are suddenly confronted with diversity and a profusion of interactions previously unknown (Elliot, 2011, p. xx). A variety of behavioural styles and patterns present the individual with many choices of who to be, or, where and how to belong (Bauman, 1996, pp. 18-19). The question that stands open is how this increase in choice can be reconciled with individual identities (Wampole, 2016), how migrants navigate this terrain and how it collectively affects the individuals’ sense of belonging and social identity (Rifkin, 2009).

Globalisation affects lives locally because of the interconnectedness of the world through trade, finance, political ideas, media and products (Friedman, 2005; Rifkin, 2009; UNDP, 2009), resulting in the migration of people across countries and borders. This “multiplicity of global and cross-border connections” is called transnationalism (Marotta, 2011, p. 192), and looks more directly at the effect on the individual migrant and the “process in which [migrants] construct and maintain multiple relations linking their societies of origin with their societies of settlement” (Marotta, 2011, p. 193; Levitt, 2001, p. 14). Such migrant transnationalism is related to the traditional concepts of assimilation and integration but, in addition, gives recognition to the fact that migrants today have different and multiple identities, as well as multiple attachments across borders and states which, in an era of globalisation, is virtually unavoidable (Vertovec, 2009, pp. 82-83).

In looking at how people develop identity, traditional psychology has contributed to a predominantly individualistic view of persons with the resulting effect that counsellors or mental health practitioners, who may be approached by these transnational migrants, are typically using therapies that focus on the client as an individual (Bukhori-Muslim, 2015, p. 21). The origins of these individualistic theories and therapies can be traced back to Freud (2010/1923, pp. 2,3) and his work on the power of the unconscious in influencing a person’s identity development. Subsequent theorists recognised the additional effect of the environment, such as the behaviourist Arnold Lazarus (1971) who developed new discoveries from the work of Pavlov (2015/1927), establishing that the individual’s environment inevitably conditions the identity development of that individual. The cognitive behaviour theorists Albert Ellis (1973) and Aaron Beck (1976) highlighted the reprogramming of thought patterns whereas Abraham Maslow (1968) and Carl Rogers (1951), focussed on the individual’s capacity for self-actualisation. The constructivist understandings of the twenty-first century gave rise to therapies that focus on the individual’s story, creating more of an understanding of such stories imbedded in society (White & Epston, 1990). Notwithstanding that traditional psychology provides valuable insights into both the psychological well-being of a person and the factors that might contribute to their identity development, this study suggests that an understanding of a person’s identity based only on an individual basis neglects other important aspects of identity formation.

To fully understand identity formation, humans need to be viewed as born to be relational and interdependent, drawing a sense of self from their engagement with, and attachment to, others (Bowlby, 1988; Gergen, 2009, pp. 89-90;). The existential question of “Who am I?” is both psychological and social (Bukhori-Muslim 2015, p. 23; Elliot, 2011; Hogg, 2006; Shani, 2011, Hsu, 2011), and the answer suggests a notion of identity that recognises both objectivity and subjectivity, an external as well as internal construction. (Elliot, 2001, p.xv). The internally-constructed sense of self, where a person has the subjective ability to reflect on themselves as an individual person (Stets, 2006, p.88), is incomplete without a socially and culturally influenced sense of that constructed self within a community where the self has a particular role and is verified within a particular social identity (Stets, 2006, p.103-104). The self, therefore, when functioning within a relevant social order, is in

a “continuous process of becoming”, motivated and shaped by both external and internal forces. This is even more so for the transnational, where the “process of becoming” is so much more complex (Hogg, 2006, p. 116).

A part of an individual’s social identity is their sense of belonging which forms part of their social self. The “social self” was defined by Eschle (2011) as the “process by which social actors recognise themselves as part of broader groupings, and develop emotional attachments to them” (p. 366). Individuals find belonging by viewing the attributes of a certain group and then categorising themselves within a group where they share values or meanings (Shani, 2011, p. 381). The result is an individual who is no longer viewed through a personal lens but rather through the collective consciousness of the group (Rifkin, 2009). This gives the individual uniformity, trust, liking, solidarity and emotional attachment (Hogg, 2006, pp. 116-119; Eschle, 2011, p. 366). The group also creates boundaries on “values, myths and memories” (Shani, 2011, p. 381) and on what it means to be a member of the group, replete with corresponding roles, responsibilities and positions. Further, the security of the group gives members a sense of belonging, a sense of self-worth and self-definition, and defines who does what and who one is (Stets, 2006, pp. 89-90). This results in numerous benefits for people, such as experiencing significance, help with emotional and behavioural regulation, psychological comfort, and increased coping abilities (Bukhori-Muslim, 2015, pp. 30-32; Shani, 2011, p. 381). For migrants, such previous connections have often been severely disrupted, and the impact of this is often underestimated by the migrants and their counsellors or mental health practitioners. These social disconnections can severely disrupt the migrant’s social identity, especially in cases where the migrant’s previously constructed ways of belonging and their previous attachments come into conflict with the experiences they have where they subsequently find themselves (Eschle, 2011, p. 374). Resultant repercussions may range from loneliness, anxiety and family dysfunction to confused identity, isolation and marginalisation (Khatib, 2014). Unfortunately, these negative coincidental side-effects “are seldom recognised explicitly by either the public or mental health professionals” (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008, p. 40).

Another concept that will be challenged in this discussion is that identity is often seen as static and determined, somehow still “fundamentally rooted in a single place” (Levitt, 2001, p. 202). Increasingly, though, scholars seem to be abandoning this idea in favour of seeing identity as reflexive, fluid and continually developing (Levitt, 2001, p.202). This perspective is especially appreciated by migrants and transnational community members (Levitt, 2001, p. 202) whose lived experience reflects and confirms that identities are fluid and adaptable across their worlds (Elliot, 2011, p. 17). Historically, however, migrants have traditionally faced the clear expectation and corresponding pressure to assimilate into the culture of their host country. Previous models of migrant acculturation, although still helpful in part, came with the assumption that people can only call one place home, and then, when the migrant fails to succeed in this assimilation exercise, to place the blame squarely and exclusively on the migrant (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008). Various acculturation models, such as the concepts of assimilation, integration, isolation and marginalisation designed by Berry (1997), the concept of assimilation and biculturalism

designed by Ward and her colleagues (2001) or the concept of counterbalancing referred to by Bukhori-Muslim (2015), are used to address the psychological adaptation of migrants. These models seek to measure how well the migrant has settled into their new country. However, these acculturation scales, further discussion of which falls outside the scope of this article, typically assume that new migrants should ultimately become “like” the residents of the new country (Robins, 1996). *Transnationalism* offers an alternative perspective.

Belonging in terms of transnationalism is, in contrast to the expectation of acculturation, an alternative strategy for working with and assisting migrants (Vertovec, 2009). This research underscores that transnational migrants keep connections, activities and identities across borders, and this does not necessarily affect their integration as defined by “acculturation”. Rather than identity being determined and static, the transnational migrant retains the ability to change, adjust and “flow creatively” across diverse relationships (Pollock & Van Reken, 2002). This skill, called “cosmopolitanism” by Vertovec (2009, p. 70), implies that the migrant has a practical competence to flexibly manoeuvre through different systems. Moreover, it requires not only analytic, emotional, creative and behavioural competence but also flexibility. Taken together, these skills enable the transnational migrant to cultivate and maintain a multitude of belonging opportunities in multiple habitats, coupled with the ability to navigate and negotiate them across multiple levels of their social, economic and political lives (Vertovec, 2009, p. 77; Levitt, 2001, p. 203; Pollock & Van Reken, 2002). Transnationalism also acknowledges the reality that migrants may have dual or multiple belonging, retaining loyalty and a sense of attachment across multiple countries, and recognising the inherent psychological and emotional benefits of living among worlds as “global nomads” (Pollock & Van Reken 2002, p. xi; cf, Vertovec, 2009; Levitt, 2001, p. 8; McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008, p. 35). In addition, multiple ways of belonging provide transnationals with skills that are globally transferable. Such skills as cultural competence, knowledge of different beliefs and values, positive attitudes towards minorities, bicultural efficacy and communication abilities, and the required flexibility to situate the self in a specific context, are invaluable in a multicultural world (Bukhori-Muslim, 2015, p. 19; Pollock & Van Reken, 2002). The idea of identity being more fluid therefore supports the transnational reality experienced by numerous migrants and transnational community members (Levitt, 2001, p. 203) and challenges the notion of linear or static human lifespan development (Koser, 2005; UNDP 2009) from previous generations who viewed identity as fixed and determined within a particular locality, tradition or nation (Bauman, 1996, pp. 18-19; Hsu, 2011, pp. 139-140).

Intended Contribution of this Research

Comprising scholars with different professional backgrounds, this group of researchers has sought to tackle an interdisciplinary research project that combines different fields of study. As a migrant from South Africa, the principal investigator and lead author of this study has long identified with the experiences of other migrants, an interest that ultimately led her to conduct in-depth research on the impact of migration as part of a thesis entitled “Finding Belonging within Migration: A Study of the South African Migrant into

Australia”.¹The research from which this article emerged aimed to deepen understanding of migrants’ sense of belonging as part of their social identity, the importance of belonging, where and how it may be found, what factors impinge on it, and how it is navigated. Of interest was the extension of the relationship between transnationalism and the role and value of relationships in the maintenance and development of a sense of belonging. This research was limited in scope to South African migrant residents in Adelaide, Australia. At the time of conducting this research, the lead investigator of this study could not find other research on the South African community on this specific topic, although research in other parts of the world has shown migration to be a rich, diverse and dynamic field of study (Luetz, 2013 & 2017) especially when relating transnationalism to multicultural concepts of integration and assimilation (Vertovec, 2009, pp.82-83).

The relevance of South African migrants to Australia goes as far back as the 1850s when gold fields attracted people to Australia’s shores (Museum of Victoria, n.d.). This link has only become stronger. Figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in June 2014 showed the total number of South African migrants into Australia at 161 600, forming the 6th largest group of migrants into Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014) mentioned that, in the period 1997–2007, 86.3% of these migrants arrived through skills migration where they have to satisfy a points test, be proficient in English, and have particular skills. These migrants contribute significantly to the Australian social fabric with skills, knowledge, economic growth, social interaction and cultural enrichment; yet, there are few resources available to assist them with what is often an emotional roller coaster of complicated, often disenfranchised loss of identity, social status, housing, employment, friends, family, social connections, and professional networks. Stereotypical assumptions of others, differentiation struggles with home and family, and the confusing concept of where “home” is, are real. South Africans of Caucasian heritage can “fit in” as they often look the same, speak the language and like their sport and barbeque; on the sidelines, however, some struggle quietly with a loss of belonging, a sense of loneliness, a deep grief of many unforeseen realities, a constant evaluation and re-evaluation of their decision, or the effects of memories from a past country all too often plagued by violence and trauma. For these individuals, such struggles are a regular reminder that all is not well. This research aimed to contribute in this space by understanding the value of belonging and thereby assisting those migrants who struggle. In summary, this research contributes to the call from the late Kofi Annan who, in 2005, reporting on the Global Commission on International Migration, made a fervent call for comprehension of the “current migration dynamics against the backdrop of globalisation” and the contribution of transnationalism on these globalisation processes (Vertovec, 2009, p.159). This research also extended previous research regarding the three aspects of identity as highlighted by Stets (2006, p.103) and Hogg (2006, p.127), and on bicultural identities as highlighted by Hartley (1995, p.23) and the acculturation of migrants (Khatib, 2014).

Methodological Approach, Data Collection and Analysis

The methodology for this study was a qualitative approach set in the conceptual framework of social constructionism. The research design was grounded theory as developed further by Charmaz (2006). The participants were six adult Caucasian migrants from South Africa, one male and five female, between the ages of 40 and 56 years. These participants had good verbal and written command of English, were either citizens or permanent residents of Australia, and had been in Australia between two to twenty years. The participants were recruited from a social media network site called "South Africans in Adelaide" and provided responses to two different questionnaires. An initial questionnaire comprised seven questions aimed at exploring their sense of belonging in South Africa before and after migration, in Australia after migration, and factors affecting such belonging. These questionnaires were designed to be open-ended with no pre-set categories, so as to minimise the risk of leading questions and/or binary answers. The responses provided "initial points of departure" (Charmaz, 2006, p.15) from which the researcher made notes, developed ideas, fine-tuned data, drew comparisons, and captured ideas and thoughts. This process provided tentative concepts and categories, which in turn gave rise to three questions in a second questionnaire. The second questionnaire was then used to test, expand and deepen some of those categories. The deepened concepts were then tested against previous research and literature in order to create a conceptual framework and interpretative theory.

There were three research questions: (1) Do South African migrants have a felt need for a sense of belonging in Australia? (2) What factors are at play before, during and after the migration process, that enable or hinder the emigrant to maintain or develop a sense of belonging in Australia and/or South Africa? and (3) How important are relationships in the migrant's sense of belonging? The obtained results were analysed by using the initial coding and focussed coding process of grounded theory. Initial results from this study were obtained during the data collection phase (both questionnaires) and the first coding phase (initial coding). The results from both the first and second questionnaires were used for the initial coding. During focussed coding, the researcher then compared the established categories to the original research questions, evaluating how they answered those questions and then identifying the most explanatory and descriptive ones. This was regarded as the second coding phase (focussed coding), and those results are presented below. Ethical approval was obtained from Christian Heritage College (CHC) under Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) project number [2016:04].

Results and Key Findings

From this research, key findings emerged that have been synthesised and consolidated below. Analysis of the responses revealed that migrants felt a need for a sense of belonging, most often presenting as a dual belonging within both South Africa and Australia, with a weakening sense of belonging towards South Africa over time. This dual belonging within both countries served as a strength for the migrants when viewed in terms of transnationalism and its benefits. Relatedly, the findings also identified factors which played either a helpful or hindering role before, during and after migration. The significance of relationships, especially those where migrants found emotional

attachments, identity verification and relational contact, were other discoveries highlighted by this research. Synthesising these findings revealed the overall importance of a sense of belonging for the development and nurture of social identity. From this information, strategies for migrants and mental health professionals who work with migrants in this transnational development were developed. These strategies, as enumerated in the conclusion of this article, address the migrant's fracture in their sense of belonging and social identity and sought to strengthen the migrant's resilience, highlight their strengths and encourage them with hope. Briefly stated, the four strategies provided discuss

- the importance of strengthening an internal sense of self, thereby alleviating some aspects of emotional distress and resulting in more inner peace;
- supporting a sense of belonging, including some ideas on how to do this;
- constructing a social identity by providing information and helping migrants establish their values and beliefs and enhance their self-esteem and
- constructing or reconstructing transnational identity by introducing the rhizome metaphor.

Expressed in simple language, results identified three key themes that will be elaborated below: belonging in South Africa and Australia; core factors affecting belonging; and loss or weakening of belonging over time.

Belonging in South Africa and Australia

Participants had a sense of belonging in South Africa before coming to Australia and most indicated that they also had a sense of belonging in Australia. Correspondingly, there were three areas of significance that were recurrently raised by participants: places of belonging; support from relationships where migrants had belonging; contact with previous places of belonging.

Places of belonging. The participants' belonging in South Africa was associated with the towns they lived in, the schools they attended, communities and groups they shared life experiences with such as church, friends, family or work colleagues, which was often strengthened by an understanding of the history, heritage, heroes and nation-achievements, as well as their love for Africa. Belonging in Australia was found in similar groups where shared values, views or circumstances strengthened belonging. Participants talked about identifying with parts of themselves by supporting their rugby heroes or revisiting places where childhood holiday memories were made. Belonging provided them with security, love and health, although the belonging was challenged and sometimes lost when the life experiences or focus of participants changed, causing them to withdraw. Participants also expressed that, in Australia, cognitive belonging often came before emotional belonging. Cognitive belonging was enhanced by what one participant referred to as "honouring your choices" whereas emotional belonging often came later in the wake of feeling safe and finding people who share values and developing friendships in Australia. Most participants' sense of belonging in Australia did not seem to be adversely affected by their sense of belonging in South Africa. Rather, there were

suggestions of either the same level of belonging to both countries or a stronger belonging in Australia, unless crisis happened, in which case the belonging was affected either in one or both countries.

Support from relationships where migrants had belonging. Participants felt a mix of support from their previous connections. Those who understood the migrant's reasoning or the emotional impact and complexity, were supportive and this made the migrant's adaptation into Australia much easier. Unsupportive relationships suffered damage and those relationships displaying ambivalence led to conflict, arguments and inner confusion, which caused the migrant to struggle with their sense of belonging in both Australia and South Africa. The exception was when the migrant had their own inner peace with their decision, in which case the lack of support was not so acutely felt. One participant explained: "I made peace before telling anyone of my plans to move. Dealing with that loss before announcing my move, made it a lot easier to deal with negative reactions". Upon migrating to Australia, most participants agreed that the groups where they found belonging were supportive, accommodating and welcoming to them, finding them interesting and willing to teach them and learn from them. One participant mentioned the value of a "welcome home" card from an Australian friend on her return from a trip to South Africa.

Contact with previous places of belonging. Participants nurtured regular contact with those friends and family who supported them, which helped them develop strong belonging to both South Africa and Australia. Those with less support had diminished contact and sense of belonging in South Africa over time, causing estrangement and loss of connection. Yet participants encouraged other migrants not to forget their country of origin and saw that as part of who they were. They encouraged people to embrace both their worlds and indicated that they did not have to choose, but could get involved in their new country by participating in a variety of contexts, whilst maintaining some aspects of their original culture and customs. Nevertheless, participants indicated a gradual shift towards Australia and normalised this without the need to feel guilty. One participant discouraged migrants from looking back as it "stops you from sprouting new roots and growing". Instead, participants suggested an attitude of gratitude, appreciation, positivity, and willingness to learn new ways and foster relationships. Participants also highlighted the benefits of technological advances in keeping contact with friends and family.

Core Factors affecting Belonging

Participants discussed several factors affecting belonging, including the factor of inner peace and the factor of economic activity.

The factor of inner peace. All participants except one stated that they had a sense of peace about their decision to move to Australia. They expressed the importance of this peace for enabling their sense of belonging in Australia. The source of this peace varied from the safety, upkeep, beauty and lifestyle of, and in Australia, the opportunities for their children, their work, their home, or their parents' blessing. One participant found their peace in the fact that Australia is not that different from South Africa. Inner peace was

also obtained once participants felt their heart had connected with Australia. The one participant who had no inner peace stated that his/her/their peace was/is hindered because of the disappointment of their prior expectations about Australia resulting in an ambivalence, disillusionment and frustration, hindering the development of belonging towards the country.

The value of inner peace was clearly seen in how participants dealt with ambivalent support when they left their country of origin. One participant had inner peace with the decision to migrate and remained able to connect with supportive loved ones in South Africa whilst accepting the disconnect with others; another participant did not have the inner peace and remained internally conflicted, making connection with the ambivalent support in South Africa very difficult and causing withdrawal. The value of inner peace, described as a connection point between heart and mind, between the cognitive knowing and decision-making and emotional belonging, is recognised by educators as an important ingredient for resilience and self-worth (Brooks, 2000). Brooks found that students who had close relationships and social belonging felt emotionally nurtured, resulting in them better coping with stress and pressure. Such emotional belonging enabled inner peace.

The factor of economic activity. When participants experienced discrimination or prejudice in their employment, their sense of belonging suffered, but when they had fulfilling employment or economic activities and pursuits, this enhanced their sense of belonging. The significance of economic activity as a core factor for fostering belonging through enhancing migrant self-esteem and sense of value is also highlighted in other research that has found gainful employment and schooling opportunities to be significant contributing factors for successful human migration experiences (Bukhori-Muslim, 2015, p. 226; Luetz, 2013, 2017).

Weakened or Lost Belonging over Time

Finally, this research indicated that previous memories and corresponding strong belonging to a place or country, did not guarantee continued strong belonging. The loss of a dream or vision for a country or the disappointment of an expectation in a country can result in fractured or weakened belonging over time. But even though there may be weaker belonging, this research indicated that there is not necessarily less engagement with particular loved ones such as parents.

Discussion

This research focussed especially on migrants' sense of belonging as a part of the migrants' social identity, thereby addressing the problematic effects on migrants' identity formation if counsellors and mental health practitioners only focus on the traditionally individualistic view of persons. Second,, this research aimed to extend the view of persons to allow for fluidity of identity beyond the traditional models which often see identity as static and determined, rooted in a single place. Hence, this Discussion section

looks particularly at the efforts made by migrants to find a sense of belonging and the significance thereof. The discussion also shows the migrant's lived experience of dual belonging and the ideational application of transnationalism.

This research revealed the significance of social identity by establishing that South African migrants felt a need for a sense of belonging in Australia, but at the same time seemed to encourage other migrants to appreciate and maintain their sense of belonging in South Africa. They self-reported on their willingness to participate and engage in groups and activities to find belonging somewhere, and their appreciation and sense of well-being on finding such groups and building relationships in such groups. They encouraged future migrants to take part in their new society to find a sense of belonging. Finding such belonging in groups with similar values, views or circumstances, or finding economic activity with acceptance and a lack of discrimination, shows the importance of identity verification and emotional attachments; this is supported by literature as important in enhancing self-esteem, health, meaning, solidarity, agency, survival and emotional attachment (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008, p. 40; Hsu, 2011, pp. 131-133; Stets, 2006, pp. 89-91). Finding belonging also helped to find a place in Australia for the migrant's heart and mind, thereby contributing to inner peace. In addition, the connection between heart and mind provides resilience, self-worth, increased motivation, learning, capacity and responsibility (Brooks, 2000).

This research also indicated that where identity verification was lacking, relationships became fractured and migrants struggled to find a sense of belonging. The result could be a variety of coping strategies such as reverting to a prior identity to gain acceptance, or selectively paying attention to only supportive cues, or choosing to see cues as supportive even if they were not. Alternatively, such migrants might blame, criticise or sanction those who did not verify their identity, or totally withdraw from interactions (Stets, 2006, p. 91). This study showed two such coping strategies. One participant who had not yet found a sense of belonging in Australia, developed the coping strategy of criticising Australia, saying that the more they came to know of Australia, the less they felt at peace, and the more they felt worried, disappointed and even disillusioned at what the country appeared to be offering. Another participant totally withdrew from family and friends in South Africa who did not verify their newly constructed identity in Australia.

Participants in this research also underscored the significance of dual belonging. They encouraged other migrants to keep a sense of belonging in South Africa with comments such as: "Because I was born in South Africa, it will always be my home" and "Don't forget where you come from". The literature around transnationalism supports dual belonging and indicates numerous benefits. Literature also indicates that dual belonging does not impede integration. For example, Vertovec (2009) found that migrants who were able to maintain a "strong sense of connection and orientation to the people, places and senses of belonging associated with the place of origin" could experience enhanced positive integration into their host country (p. 82). This research further showed that most participants' integration into Australia did not seem to be adversely affected by their sense of belonging in South Africa. Rather it provided them with some added support, especially

those who still had strong connections in South Africa. Notwithstanding, this research also seemed to indicate that for many participants the sense of belonging to South Africa weakened over time as they made friendships and found belonging in Australia.

This research highlighted the migrant's felt need for a sense of belonging in order to nurture and develop their social identity, indicating the benefits and repercussions of finding belonging or lacking belonging. This research also indicated an established dual belonging for migrants in both host country and country of origin, enhancing their integration into their host country but also showing weakened belonging over time to their country of origin.

Research Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

This research is subject to limitations beginning with the fact that the principal investigator is herself a migrant from South Africa. There is therefore some risk of bias. In addition, it is recognised by the authors that identity itself consists of multiple facets but that this research primarily looked at one facet of social identity, namely "a sense of belonging". There are also several variables relevant for individuals before, during and after migration, which may affect their acculturation and transnationalism; however, this research only looked at a few factors that emerged during data collection. There is therefore room for further research to expand on the factors relevant for migrants in establishing their sense of belonging. In addition, there is room for further research into other facets of the migrant's identity, for example, their relational and personal identity and how they navigate these parts of their identity. Further research into policies which might assist those institutions tasked with migration management and support, is also considered a fertile research opportunity. For example, longitudinal studies could better identify patterns over an extended period of time and support policy analysis and inform policymaker recommendations. This would provide more concise results (OccupyTheory, 2015). Finally, it is acknowledged that this research only used a limited number of participants from one selected group. Hence conclusions reached are limited and not necessarily representative of the South African migrant population overall. Thus findings derived from this comparatively small sample size should be confirmed through other independent research, which represents a further research opportunity.

Applications for Counsellors

For those in the people helping industry working with migrants, this research has not only highlighted the importance of a sense of belonging for a healthy social identity but also identified some of the knowledge gaps in the present understanding of the dynamics of migration for the migrant. In an effort to synthesise discoveries for counsellor application, the following four strategies are highlighted for consideration.

Strengthening an internal sense of self

Participants disclosed that finding an inner peace with their decision to emigrate sustained them even if there was little or no support from family and friends. The decision-making processes shared by the participants involved highly emotional

situations. For some there was guilt at leaving loved ones but, for others, there was the guilt and pain of having to withdraw from the family connections that hindered them in their search for belonging and emotional connections in their new country. By exploring the migrant's decision-making processes in the safety of the therapeutic relationship, new perspectives may be opened, guilt and shame released, and the process of finding peace could be facilitated. Further, as the migrant lets go of painful emotions, room may be made for new connections of heart and mind, thus paving the way for enhanced inner peace, resilience and belonging. The surprising "by-product" of finding inner peace for many of the participants was a genuine attitude of gratitude, accepting others, and celebrating differences.

Supporting a sense of belonging

By encouraging contact with family and friends in South Africa who are both supportive and towards which the migrant feels a sense of belonging, people helpers may make use of pre-existing positive attachments to undergird the migrant as they seek new attachments and a new sense of belonging. Realising that belonging is a deeply internal process, people helpers may also work with the migrant as they connect with the new country and its people. This might involve reading about the new country's history and heroes, studying its achievements and proud moments, and might also include encouragement and support towards the proactive making of new memories in the migrant's country of destination.

Constructing a social identity

Resources that are helpful for those who work with migrants could include information of local interest and sporting groups, churches and community activities. As the migrant seeks to reach out and connect with people it is those with whom they share interests, hobbies and activities that they will be drawn to. However, even more importantly, shared values and beliefs are the building blocks for constructing a sense of belonging. Counsellors can therefore help the migrant establish what their beliefs and interests are. Also of importance is the connection with objects, people, and places that connect the migrant back to that part of their identity that belongs to their country of origin. Social identity can also be enhanced by helping the migrant to be economically or educationally active in an environment of safety without prejudice or discrimination. This has the potential to enhance their self-esteem and self-worth, and might involve measures that educate the migrant about workplace safety, harassment and bullying.

Constructing or reconceptualising transnational identity

A metaphor that translates well into the concept of transnational identity is the metaphor of a rhizome. Narrative therapy often uses the metaphor of a tree (Dulwich Centre Publications Pty Ltd & Dulwich Centre Foundation Inc., n.d.). However, the tree has one set of roots in one place, which equates with the assimilation and acculturation models of migration mentioned previously (Vasta & Vuddamalay, 2006). In contrast, the rhizome has a network of roots, enabling it to survive and find sustenance in a variety of locations and

makes it strong, flexible, resilient and transplantable. The rhizome image may help the migrant to acknowledge and visualise the virtues of transnationalism. Further, in conjunction with the understanding of identity being fluid and ever-growing, the metaphor of the rhizome also emphasises “what can become” rather than merely “what is” (Kerr, 2013). Such a metaphor is therefore a truer and more accurate reflection of the transnational migrant’s lived reality and also highlights the strengths and competencies of the transnational migrant, thus offering hope.

A final and related point extrapolated from this research and pertinent to mental health professionals lies in an alternative understanding of transnationalism. Rather than focussing on loss, separation and discontinuity, transnationalism understands that the migrant can have their heart in two places (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008, pp. 35-37), which may create hope for inwardly-torn migrants. This understanding of transnationalism also validates the migrant’s variety of skills, strengths and flexibility, and encourages a more holistic migrant actuality that reassures migrants to identify as empowered global citizens in a world characterised by expansive diversity.

To conclude, the spirit of Australia was recently invoked by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull who said: “Everyone sitting in this chamber and every Australian is a beneficiary of the diversity that is at the heart of our nation” (Hunter, 2016). For every migrant, encouragement comes from Maraboli who wrote: “[t]o embark on the journey towards your goals and dreams requires bravery. To remain on that path requires courage. The bridge that merges the two is commitment” (2013, p. 18).

Acknowledgment

The authors wish to thank the migrants and research participants from South Africa for generously sharing their stories, struggles, experiences and perspectives. The lead author also wants to thank Christian Heritage College in Brisbane and especially her co-authors for their continued support and encouragement and their invaluable feedback and academic rigour to help make this research a reality.

Note

[1] A hardbound copy of the thesis is available to patrons through the CHC Library. A softcopy is publicly available online http://www.chc.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016S2_SO596_klingenberg_migration.pdf

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