

In a globalised world where migration is increasing, the question arises how best to support transnationals in their loss and search for identity. With particular focus on a sense of belonging, this research discusses the importance of a holistic view of identity that includes social identity and explores the concept of identity being fluid. Insights are offered for counsellors and people helpers on several aspects of identity - personal, relational and social – offering the rhizome as an alternative narrative metaphor when working with migrants. “You are no longer foreigners or aliens, but fellow-citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household. And best of all, you are connected to the head cornerstone, the anointed one, Jesus Christ himself” (Eph 2:19 & 21)

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSNATIONAL SOUTH AFRICAN MIGRANTS TO AUSTRALIA: INFORMED IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLORS

BY ANNEMARIE KLINGENBERG, DR JOHANNES M. LUETZ AND DR ANN CRAWFORD



Introduction

Bruno Catalano, a sculptor of southern France, has created fascinating bronze statues which depict travellers who set out on their journey with suitcase in one hand, but with the centre of their bodies missing from the sculpture (Starr, 2013). The sculptures visually depict the vacuum created not only for travellers, but also for migrants who for any reason leave their land, their life and their people ("The Travelers by Frances Bruno Catalano", 2017). In today's age of globalisation, humanity is faced with the reality of vast numbers of people migrating across continents (Friedman, 2005; UNDP 2009), which raises questions that are pertinent to counsellors: What can be done to assist migrants in replenishing the personal losses so vividly represented in this sculpture? How can hollow spaces be filled, and what with? What are key migrant felt needs and desired solutions that may make migration experiences more positive in terms of both processes and outcomes? And importantly, how can counselling professionals assist, both practically and ideationally?

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 in a thesis entitled "Finding Belonging within Migration: A Study of the South African Migrant into Australia". The methodology for the 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 six research participants were either citizens or permanent residents of Australia who had been in Australia between two and twenty years. They therefore had a degree of permanency in Australia. Data was collected and analysed from

their responses to two questionnaires which aimed to explore their sense of belonging, and factors affecting such belonging. Some of the key findings are presented here in order to broaden the understanding of the unique issues faced by migrants whilst providing considerations for counsellors and people helpers working with migrants.

Social Identity

Identity consists of three aspects, namely person-identity, relational identity, and social identity (Hogg, 2006, p. 116). Social identity is defined as the way people recognise themselves as part of broader groups (Eschle, 2011, p. 366). Individuals view the attributes of certain groups and then categorise themselves within those groups where they share values and meaning. They then develop emotional attachments to the chosen group (Shani, 2011, p. 381). The final result is an individual who is no longer viewed exclusively or predominantly through a personal lens, but rather through a perception that comprises the particular attributes of that specific group. This gives the individual a sense of uniformity, trust, liking and solidarity (Hogg, 2006, pp. 116-119; Eschle, 2011, p. 366), as well as a sense of security, self-worth and self-definition as the group creates boundaries, roles and positions (Shani, 2011, p. 381 & Stets, 2006, pp. 89-90). Psychologically, the resulting sense of significance helps the individual with emotional and behavioural regulation (Bukhori Muslim, 2015, pp. 30-32; Shani, 2011, p. 381).

When working with migrants, an understanding of social identity is especially important, because it is precisely the previous social connections and social identity that are severely disrupted by migration (Hartley, 1995). When migrants struggle to find new connections, or their experiences with new connections are predominantly negative, the effects can include personal, relational and social effects such as loneliness, anxiety, family dysfunction, confused identity, isolation and marginalisation (Khatib,

2014). It is vital to recognise these effects (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008, p. 40), and to comprehend that, to effectively help the migrant, people helping professionals need to work beyond the common emphasis on an individualistic approach, to a more holistic understanding of identity. Hence human identity is constructed both by psychological, environmental and social forces (Bukhori, 2015, p. 23; Elliot, 2011; Hogg, 2006; Shani, 2011; Koser, 2005; Hsu, 2011) and is made up of personal, relational and social components. As individuals, we are born to be relational and interdependent (Gergen, 2009, pp. 89-90).

Identity as Fluid

As discussed above, it is the social identity of the migrant that is severely affected by migration, which can have social, psychological or relational effects. Hope lies in the concept of a fluid identity. When we recognise that identity is personal, relational and social, we simultaneously recognise that identity is continuously shaped and developed as it is moulded around existing and changing internal and external psychological and social forces (Hogg, 2006, p. 116). Traditionally however, identity has not been viewed as fluid but rather as static and determined, somehow "fundamentally rooted in a single place" (Levitt, 2001, p. 202). Historically this made sense coming from an era where people lived, worked and had connections in their local communities (Bessant & Watts, 2007, pp. 21-24). In such static communities, whether that was in their town, country, language, ancestry or tradition, people effortlessly comprehended their context and their resulting social self and identity, which was more fixed, stationary and determined (Wampole, 2016; Bauman, 1996, pp. 18-19; Hsu, 2011, pp. 139-140). This has resulted in acculturation models which often come with the assumption that migrants can only call one place home. These models place pressure on the migrant to assimilate and become like the members of the host country or community (Robins,

1996), and then, when the migrant fails, blame is typically placed squarely and exclusively on the migrant (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008).

In today's world however, globalisation has resulted in the increase of people's mobility precipitating large numbers of migrants for various reasons. Increasingly scholars see identity no longer as static, but more as fluid, reflexive and adaptable, continually growing over space and time. This is a perspective that holds especially true for migrants who naturally have multiple relations and connections over multiple countries or continents (Levitt, 2001, p. 202; Elliot, 2011, p. 17; Luetz 2013, 2017), often with a distinctive dual belonging. This conceptual reality harbours enormous strengths and benefits, does not hamper migrant integration in their host country, and may even enable and encourage it (Vertovec, 2009). This reality is described as transnationalism (Vertovec, 2009) – a "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). As such, transnationalism recognises that the identity formation of the individual migrant is experienced through change, adjustment, "creative flow" and the practical reality of navigating a multiplicity of relationships and sociocultural systems in different countries. Consequently, the transnational identity is marked by a practical competence that is flexible, analytical, emotionally intelligent, creative and behaviourally resilient. This enables the transnational migrant to have a "multitude of belonging" in multiple habitats, coupled with the ability to navigate and negotiate across multiple levels of their social life, economic pursuits and political activity (Vertovec, 2009, pp. 70 & 77; Levitt, 2001, p. 203; Pollock and Van Reken, 2002). Transnationalism also acknowledges the sense of belonging, loyalty, attachment and companionship a migrant may feel towards multiple countries, which offers psychological and emotional benefits for the migrant (Vertovec, 2009; Levitt, 2001, p. 8; McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008,

p. 35). The idea of identity being more fluid therefore supports the transnational reality, which is true for many migrants and transnational community members (Levitt, 2001, p. 203; Pollock and Van Reken, 2002).

Counselling Considerations

One very important application of this research was to provide counsellors and people helpers with research informed knowledge and insight that will assist them to better understand the issues transnational people grapple with. We therefore firstly offer the narrative metaphor of a rhizome for consideration, and secondly illustrate some aspects of the research with a composite case study.

The Rhizome Metaphor

Health professionals using a narrative counselling approach sometimes use the metaphor of the tree of life when working with vulnerable people such as migrants (Dulwich Centre Publications Pty Ltd & Dulwich Centre Foundation Inc., n.d.). This metaphor offers a useful tool for working with migrants, albeit with a little extension. Participants in this research have highlighted patience, acceptance, positivity and gratitude as character traits which served them well. Hence, transnational clients may find strength and comfort in the counsellor highlighting these strengths, using the metaphor of a rhizome instead of the tree. The metaphor of a tree incorporates one set of roots and corresponds with the understanding of migration during the days of colonisation where assimilation was the norm (Vasta & Vuddamalay, 2006) – requiring one tree with roots in one location. Transnational migrants though are often more like rhizomes who are not only strong, flexible and transplantable but also able to survive with resilience due to their ability to find sustenance and nurture in a variety of locations. With an increased understanding of identity being fluid, the metaphor of the rhizome emphasises "what can become" rather than "what

is" (Kerr, 2013).

The rhizome metaphor also provides opportunity to reflect on what happens under the surface as the rhizome grows, strengthens and then sends up shoots to bathe in the sunshine and eventually bear fruit. Through this often dark and difficult time the rhizome endures and pushes forward. The psalmist is encouraging endurance when he writes that "even the darkness will not be dark to [our heavenly Father]", even as the human journey leads to new depths, or through valleys of shadows, the Father is present, because the Father sees in the darkness, He forms in the darkness (Ps 139: 12 & 8b; Ps 23:4).

Composite Case Study

Sandy, an Australian woman, met and married Pieter, a South African man, in Johannesburg, while she was working as a journalist in some areas of South Africa where violence was rampant. In 2010 Sandy was held at gunpoint in a carjacking attempt after which she gave up her job to concentrate on building a family. Sandy and Pieter had two boys, now aged 6 and 4. Concerned for their and their boys' safety as well as Sandy missing her family, they moved to Australia in 2013. This decision was mutually agreed by Pieter and Sandy but Pieter's family were very critical, calling him a 'callous chicken' and vowing to never visit him in his new country. On arrival in Australia, Sandy found employment at a local community newspaper. Pieter eventually also found employment in his field although his skills only received limited recognition and he had to accept a lower position than the positions he had previously held. Two years later, they came for marriage counselling. Sandy was struggling with anxiety, which suddenly started when she lost her employment when the newspaper was sold. She found herself totally withdrawn at times and at other times, panic and anxiety arose 'out of the blue'. Pieter was diagnosed with depression and started taking anti-depressant medication. He said he had never struggled with

depression before emigrating and missed home where he was familiar with the country, the language, the history and the humour and that Sandy did not 'get it' as she was 'home'. Although he loved Sandy's family and felt they embraced him, and although he loved rugby and barbecues, he missed the African wildlife, the African landscape and his family – especially on special days such as birthdays and Christmas. Sandy said she felt guilty that she 'took him away from his country and family'. Pieter felt guilty because, although his Australian friends accepted him, found him interesting and valued him, he was still not able to fully make Australia home. The couple's communication deteriorated and they believed their marriage to be in serious trouble.

From analysis of the composite case study above, and from the analysis of the research data and the theoretical understandings of identity, it became apparent that the three facets of identity, especially social identity and a sense of belonging, needed to be central to interventions employed by the counselling professional. Therefore, to holistically assist this migrant couple, three areas were identified where the counsellor could assist this couple.

The first area is at the person level, which comprises psychological and emotional aspects facing these migrant clients. In working with the counsellor, the migrants might identify grief and loss for what has been left behind, guilt or shame at leaving loved-one/s behind, or even trauma from the experiences of the past. Pieter clearly grieved the loss of his country, family and possibly his previous employment status, but Sandy might be grieving too. Both Sandy and Pieter had guilt to work through. Sandy struggled with the repercussion of the trauma she suffered. In identifying these themes of grief and loss, guilt or shame, and trauma, the migrant clients could confront and work through these issues. They indicated that they accepted that they were "part of two worlds" and decided to "embrace both" rather than choosing one world, which helped them enormously. The counsellor drew here on

the psychological understandings of the person while being conscious that loss, in and of itself, might not constitute the major theme (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008, pp. 35-37).

Further, drawing from the theoretical understanding of identity being fluid, the counselling professional reinforced an awareness in the migrants that they were endowed with numerous skills and strengths due to their accepted dual belonging, which provided a key success factor for their flexible dual citizenship. The couple reflected on their decision-making process in emigrating and practised acceptance. This enabled them to find peace in their decision, even though Pieter's family was unsupportive. Both are Christians and could also find peace in their faith that their paths were led by their obedience to what they sensed to be God's will for their future. The strengthening of the self and the healthy emotional regulation achieved by addressing these deeper issues equipped these migrants to confidently seek out further connections and community that are so much a part of being human.

Additional challenges, although not addressed with this couple, may arise from the experience of culture shock. Various authors such as Pederson (1995) and Winkleman (1994, p.121-126) have developed various stages of psychological and physical reactions to living in a new environment, which range from an original honeymoon tourist phase to an interdependence stage where the migrant has resolved their initial culture shock and has learned to adapt (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005, p.45). It would be beneficial for counsellors working with migrants to become familiar with these stages and their impact.

The second area where the counsellor assisted this migrant couple, especially Pieter, was by helping him find a sense of belonging by building his capacity for relationship. He was encouraged to stay connected to those family members and friends who are supportive of him as they enhanced his social identity. Sandy's family, as well as fellow South

Africans, benefitted Pieter and provided opportunity for him to experience identity verification and relax in the sharing of familiar stories, humour and culture. He was also encouraged to build new Australian connections, as a way to "sprout new roots". These various relationships across borders were found to be supportive of both Sandy and Pieter's marriage in a variety of ways, and the couple found that belonging in two places ultimately aided their integration. They explored any misplaced guilt where relationships with family or friends were unsupportive or critical, such as with Pieter's family. The counsellor worked with the couple to enhance their communication and conflict resolution skills which further assisted them in strengthening their relational capacity.

Had it been possible, the counsellor could have also worked with the family members or friends of these migrants to increase this support network's understanding of their value to their migrant friend or family member during this time of continued connection and progressive integration. As migrants potentially struggle with finding a new identity in a new homeland (Eschle, 2011), there is a tendency for them to seek out the support of those who are emotionally and socially supportive to help them validate who they are and where they belong (Stets, 2006, p.98). If that support is weak or lacking, it may potentially affect the personal wellbeing of the migrant, which has the potential to adversely affect the relationship/s.

The third area that the counsellor needed to explore was the social aspect of belonging, including highlighting the psychological and social benefits. More specifically, the counsellor in this case assisted Pieter and Sandy to establish more clearly what their interests, hobbies, beliefs or activities were so as to promote encounters of likeminded people who shared similar interests or beliefs, thereby contributing to their longer-term belonging. Both were encouraged to value their economic or educational endeavours to further find belonging and to enhance their sense of self-esteem and self-worth.

They were also educated in workplace discrimination management, harassment and prejudice in order to minimise negative experiences in their search for belonging. In addition, Pieter especially was encouraged to connect with the history and heroes of Australia. As a family they increased their reading, family holidays and outings, thereby creating new family memories and new insights which enhanced their overall sense of belonging. The family ultimately concluded counselling, having achieved greater personal wellbeing, better relational patterns, communication and understanding, and healthier social connections, whilst slowly and steadily integrating more into the Australian culture and way of life.

Summary

Globalisation has resulted in vast numbers of people migrating across continents, leaving many migrants with a quest to fill the vacuum this migration has left, especially in the area of their social identity. For counsellors, a holistic understanding of identity combined with an appreciation of identity being fluid, provides opportunity to assist the migrant on a personal, relational and social level. Using the metaphor of the rhizome, counsellors can work alongside the Father in shedding light on those seemingly dark spaces by filling the vacuum with light and hope.

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Dr Ann Crawford has been involved in in both church-based and professional counselling agencies for 15 years. She now works at Christian Heritage College as the Coordinator of the CHC Counselling and Support Centre. She also lectures in undergraduate and post-graduate counselling subjects, has a small private counselling/supervision practice and presently holds the office of president of the Queensland branch of Christian Counsellors Association of Australia. In 2014 Ann completed her Ph.D. where she pursued an investigation into the therapeutic relationship. Other counselling interests for her are counselling training and the recent advances in Neuropsychotherapy.

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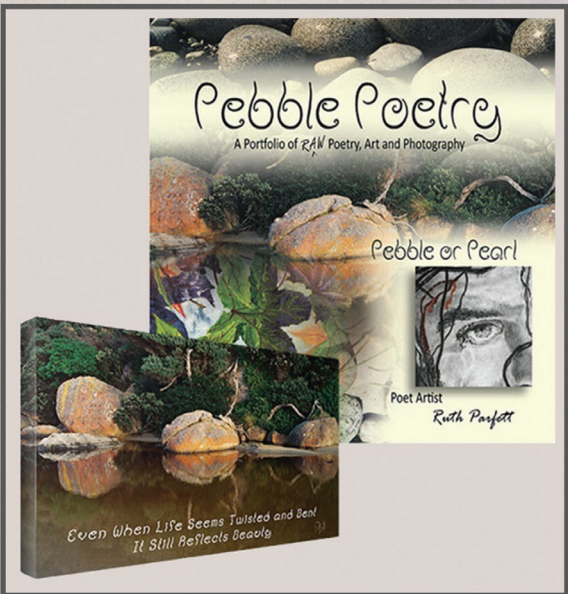
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