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Motivational and Adaptation Experiences of Returnees and Migrants to Cyprus: A Grounded Theory Study With Counselling Psychology Application and Practice Implications in Europe

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Abstract

This grounded theory study explored the existential lived experience of migrants and second-generation Greek-Cypriot returnees to Cyprus and implications for counselling psychology. It looked at their motivation to return/migrate, their encounter with the new world and desires to belong. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with four migrants and four returnees, recruited within the Cyprus Euroguidance employment service in three cities, Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca in Cyprus, E.U. All participants were in the process of seeking employment. Migrants and returnees faced intense dilemmas following relocation. Returnees' motivations to return were influenced by childhood memories of visiting the country, desires for an improved economic and familial lifestyle, and the need to find a true sense of belonging. Migrants' motivations included being married to a Cypriot, hoping for better economic prospects and living in a sunny environment. People experienced a cultural transition after choosing to put their ethnic identity in a different ethnic environment to the one where it was formed and in their attempts to find work, develop friendships, be accepted and find a home they experienced an unsettling reality. In Counselling psychology terms, the findings support other literature (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) highlighting that migrants go through phases of adjustment, with cultural contact and acceptance by the host society, as well as financial independence being key factors. They described their experience as an outsider in a system dominated by nepotism and in a society new to them, that appeared to be suspicious of them. This transition lived by them was psychologically de-stabilising, characterised by stress, frustration, depression and isolation. Their commitment to find a way to belong was shown through their resilience. These findings are discussed with the application and practice of Counselling Psychology in mind.

Keywords: migrant, returnee, counselling psychology, grounded theory, Cyprus, motivations, adaptation, resilience, culture

Introduction

Culture is a concept that appears to be as a contemporary one for the last century of the western world. In fact it was even discussed in the 19th century of English and German *romanticism,* with Bastian describing culture as "the psychic unity of mankind" (1860, as cited in "Today in Science History," 2009, p. 342) depicting what Matthew Arnold (1869/n.d.) later described as being a "pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world". Culture, following the paths of this notion, became a contemporary concept in Europe after the establishment of the Treaty of Maastricht on the 1st November 1993, when 27 member states, mainly located in the European continent committed to regional integration forming the European Union that got its most recent form after the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. This form of European Union enabled populations to move to a different country (state) and live, work, engage and practice professionally and politically (with limitations) with the same rights as the native population.

"The meeting of cultures and the resulting changes are what collectively has come to be known as *acculturation*" (Sam & Berry, 2006, p. 1). More and more people appear to be moving within the European Union using this right according to regulation No 1612/68 (The European Parliament, 2004) and recent data suggest that there is a population change within the European Union with net migration being equal to all changes in total population that cannot be attributed to births and deaths (European Commission eurostat, 2009). This move puts culture on the map, as its connection with the use of ethnic diversity and mechanisms of ethnic integration through constituted identities such as professional identity is evident in recent literature (Filippopoulos, 2009).

Axelson (1993) argued that all groups of people who identify themselves or have connections to each other based on some shared aims, needs, or the similarity of background, belong to the same culture. UNESCO (1982) in a recent world conference provided a description of the concept:

> "In its widest sense culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, in-tellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of human beings, value systems, traditions and be-liefs."

Characteristics of culture can include ideas that culture is learned, shared and integrated. At the same time it can easily be confused with ethnicity and ethnic groups. Ethnic origin refers to memberships of a group of people that are defined on grounds of common history, traditions, culture or cultural background, language, geographical origin and so forth and ethnic group that is any group of people who set themselves apart and are set apart from other groups with whom they interact or coexist in terms of some distinctive criterion or criteria which may be lin-guistic, racial or cultural. Culture appears as a subcategory of ethnicity but this minimalistic characteristic creates a vicious circle of philosophical enquiry equal to the causality dilemma of the chicken or the egg (that funnily enough is evident in many different ethnic groups, cultural groups or languages). In other words culture is a pro-portion of notion with variance described in different variables like language, ethnicity, history etc and at the same time each of these variables constitutes notions of equally big variance defined by variables that are larger pro-portion of notions. Culture and ethnicity are indivisible parts of the whole, therefore it would be difficult to ascertain where the individualistic culture starts and where the collective culture ends and vice versa.

The present study explored the lived experience of people who are subject to a cultural transition, exposing what appeared to be their individualistic and collective agreement of cultures (living in a society for many years and being fully integrated with it) to a new society with a different ethnic identity such as Cyprus. The study is relevant to counselling psychology "because population shifts throughout the world will continue to bring new groups of people into contact, the study of acculturation will be important for psychologists for the foreseeable future" (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006, p. xxi). Culture-sensitive psychological help has been studied by social psychiatry (Loewenthal & Rogers, 2004) and counselling (Atkinson, Thompson, & Grant, 1993) as well as psychotherapy (van Deurzen-Smith, 1988), but not much has been done by counselling psychology. Owen (1992) explored by the use of cultural theory an analysis of therapy. Helms (1995) argued that the racial identity model can be useful for understanding how the relationship and counselling psychology process might be affected by the different racial identities taking part, opening a possibility that similar ways could be explored for other variables of culture.

A review of the literature on second generation Greek Cypriot "returnees" to Cyprus highlights that relatively little is known on their motivation to return to their "storied" homelands (King, Christou, & Teerling, 2011). Even less is known of the psychological impact of encountering the *Self* through the attitudes and reactions of the host society.

In a similar way, literature on migrants' lived experience in Cyprus is scarce, perhaps due to the fact that Cyprus is new to migration. In this paper we aim to explore the second-generation returnees' and migrants' encounter with new realities in a climate of employment uncertainty, racism and prejudice, as well as their attempts for inter-cultural contact. According to King et al. (2011), the second generation does not "return" to a place from which it never came. However, the affective ties connecting second-generation returnees to the homeland, has ontological meaning, therefore they are referred to as returnees in this paper.

The word "migrant" is used in this paper to describe a group of people who are not nationals of the nation-state where they live. Migrants are people who, for various reasons leave their country of birth to live abroad. They carry with them their cultural and ethnic identities and values from their homeland, which they maintain whilst living abroad. Those who decide to return back to their country of origin after a period of living abroad are described as returnees. The children of migrants who decide to relocate to their parents' country of origin can be described as second-generation returnees, even though they share similar characteristics with migrants. Migration and return are distinguished from mobility, which constitutes movement from one region to another involving spatial movement with a simultaneous change of residence (Tassinopoulos & Werner, 1999). Many migrants never feel at home in the host countries and returnees are often disappointed in discovering a reality, not quite as they had expected. Although both are often subject to discrimination and social exclusion, migrants are more likely to experience racism and isolation, whereas returnees may receive moral support and guidance from the extended family, factors contributing to a different sense of belonging (Christou, 2009).

With the European migratory system so well established, mobility from one country to another and return back to the country of origin, is a social phenomenon that requires understanding from the migrants' and returnees' own perspectives. Migration is not a new phenomenon. It is estimated that five-six million European nationals currently live outside their country of origin (Salt, Clarke, & Schmidt, 2001). A number of studies have examined the social morphology of migrants (Castles & Miller, 2003; Favell, 2003a) particularly where the skilled, middle class is concerned (Scott, 2004). Other studies conceptualise the concept of home (Tummala-Narra, 2009) and the idea of belonging (Akhtar, 2009) from a psychological perspective. In conceptualizing the idea of the migrant *self* from a counseling psychology perspective, Madison (2009) refers to "existential migration", a concept he adopts to describe a person's psychological need to leave home and explore the wider world. He postulates that personal identity, belonging, being-at-home and not being-at-home are intertwined and always in flux. He states that "the 'self' is this 'acting upon' and 'responding' to the world" (p. 135). Madison's existential migrant encapsulates the existential notion that human beings are free to exercise choice and leaving the homeland is imbued with freedom to choose where to live. Hence the act of migration and in choosing a new world is imbued with agency. Unlike refugees, migrants choose to relocate and encounter new worlds, an experience that impacts on their identity. Under this definition both migrants and returnees could be grouped as existential migrants, a description closely associated with isolation, meaninglessness, death and freedom. In the present study when discussing common factors we will be using this description.

Like Madison (2009), Christou (2009) who studied second generation Greek migrants to Greece, focused on migrants' sense of agency, belonging and identity in what she termed "nostalgic belongingness", arguing that migrant narratives are "situated subjectivities and acts of performance of the migrant-self" (p. 101). In a separate study, Christou (2006) found that Greek migrants encountered antagonism and exclusion, spaces that later became opportunities for negotiating changing "transcultural-selves". These perspectives of a fluid sense of self imbued

with agency are helpful in understanding the lived experience as an experience in context, where self and other are in dynamic relation, influencing identity and belonging.

The only study exploring Cypriot returnees was by Teerling (2011), which focused on the "return" of British born, second-generation Cypriots to Cyprus. The author found that the key motivation to "return" was "a desire for a better quality of life" (p. 124). Other studies (Dikomitis, 2004; Loizos & Constantinou, 2007; Zetter, 1991, 1994, 1999) looked at refugees' experience of return to the occupied part of Cyprus that used to be their home. Migrants who decide to relocate experience loss and a profound sense of distress (Madison, 2009) as some studies show. For example, Mavreas and Bebbington (1990) looking at acculturation and psychiatric disorder amongst Greek-Cypriot immigrants found that difficulties in the settling-in period were related to their current disorder.

Psychological adjustment to new environments is a stressful factor for any individual, even within the same culture. For migrants and returnees there are added factors that impede on psychological and social adjustment such as language, other culturally defined rules, perceptions of the host society, expectations before relocation etc (Ward et al., 2001). "Stress" is the contemporary concept describing "extreme negative experiences of culture travelers" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 7) and "stress and coping are mediated by characteristics of the individual and characteristics of the situation, and in turn, affect adjustive outcomes" (ibid., p. 71). Concepts such as "culture shock" (Ward et al., 2001) and "acculturative stress" (Berry, 2006) encapsulate the complex factors involved in the lived experience of migrants. In their extensive review of the literature the authors present various models and factors in successful or unsuccessful psychological adjustment to a new society. Key to these factors are the expectations of migrants before relocation and whether these are met or not. For example, where expectations had not been met, the psychological impact on migrants was found to be associated with severe stress and compromise to psychological well-being. Cultural transition demands resilience, capacity to adapt and make cultural contact, ability to process stress-related information, variables also influenced by societal attitudes such as prejudice and discrimination, as well as length of time. Therefore adjustment following relocation is a complex process both on individual and collective levels and one critically evaluated and appraised by Ward et al. (2001).

According to Tummala-Narra (2009) immigrants negotiate the concept of home through visits to the country of origin as well as fantasies of home, which influence identity transformation. To feel at home in a foreign country, migrants develop "homoethnic" friendships. However, for the purposes of integration and belonging, migrants seek "heteroethnic" friendships (Akhtar, 2009). The latter play a powerful role in the migrant's sense of feeling settled and more integrated, establishing as desired, a sense of belonging. So the notion of the lived self according to the studies mentioned above is fluid, encountering a new de-stabilising world and negotiating a new reality, which influences the re-construction of a new identity.

Research Design

The Study

The aim of our study was to explore migrants' and second generation Greek-Cypriot returnees' encounter of a new world, capturing their de-stabilising experience and sense of self in search of belonging. We looked at how participants perceived and encountered external and internal reality. We were not aiming to check, through objective measures this internal reality against social reality. By exploring participants' perceptions in their everydayness we hoped to increase awareness and a better psychological understanding of the inner life of existential migrants in their search of belonging and how they can inform the application and practice of Counselling Psychology.

Participants

The data informing our study was generated from semi-structured, qualitative interviews focusing on the subjective realities of four returnees and four migrants who relocated to Cyprus. Participants (for demographics see Table 1) received an information leaflet explaining the study and all signed a consent form agreeing to the use of material for publication. They were given the option of having their interviews in Greek or in English. Participation was entirely voluntary and participants were aware they could withdraw from the study at any time. Due to limited resources we excluded people who could not speak Greek or English. Unlike quantitative methods that rely on numbers, grounded theory and other qualitative methods acknowledge the value and meaning that a small number of interviews can produce. Therefore data of eight participants' experiences was sufficient to enhance our understanding on the lived world of existential migrants and identify implications for counselling psychology.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Code	Gender	Migrant/returnee	No of years in CY	Country of origin before migration/return
VN850009	Male	2nd generation returnee	19 months	United Kingdom
VN850005	Male	2nd generation returnee	14 months	United Kingdom
VN850007	Female	2nd generation returnee	18 years	United Kingdom
VN850006	Male	2nd generation returnee	10 years	South Africa
VN850004	Female	Migrant	3 years	Greece
VN850008	Female	Migrant	9 years	Russia
VN850010	Female	Migrant	4 years	Iraq
VN850002	Male	Migrant	2 years	Greece

Recruitment Criteria

• Greek Cypriot second-generation returnee to Cyprus

• Migrant to Cyprus

• In process of seeking employment through Euroguidance

• Speak Greek or English

• Consenting to participating and agreeing on all conditions illustrated in the consent form

Ethics

The study evolved out of a two year (2009-2011) Lifelong Learning European collaborative project involving six countries, who approved and supported it. The European Commission (Grundtvig) funded this project. The Cyprus Euroguidance office also gave permission and support to recruit migrants and returnees who used the employment service to help them find employment in Cyprus. For confidentiality purposes identifying details of participants are omitted. All participants consented to the use of material for publication.

The Researchers

We are researchers involved in investigating social and psychological phenomena and their relevance to therapy practice using qualitative and quantitative methods. One researcher is of Greek-Cypriot origin, was born in Cyprus and emigrated to the UK as an adolescent. She therefore has some knowledge of the Cypriot culture through visits, albeit limited due to migration being a recent phenomenon on the island. The second researcher is originally

from Athens in Greece and has lived in the UK for a number of years. He has visited Cyprus a number of times, and he also has some knowledge of the culture. As existential migrants ourselves (we chose to leave our home-lands) we share an appreciation of migrant lived experience in a new country, which sensitised us to empathise and appreciate the internal world of the participants. Unlike the migrants of this study, we relocated to a country with a long history of migration and the associated benefits of established equal opportunities policies and histor-ical efforts to help immigrants integrate. Like the migrants of this study, we too felt the tensions and stress of relo-cation to a new environment, not belonging and missing families back home. We found that negotiating a realistic adjustment with realistic expectations for a new life enabled us to belong and cope with migration related stress. Thus, it is inevitable that as migrants studying other migrants, our lived experience and psychological understandings will have influenced the views we express in this paper and analysis of the data. Like other researchers who seek out research methods that resonate with their epistemological inclinations, but also provide relevant tools for their studies, we chose a type of grounded theory that permits fluidity and considers the value of inter-subjectivity (Charmaz, 2006).

Our epistemological stance rests on inter-subjective, phenomenological principles, emphasizing the value of the embodied researcher exercising agency in the construction of knowledge. Therefore knowledge and readings acquired prior to conducting this research could not be postponed as Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocated. Em-bracing researcher and participant subjectivity, exercising human agency (Patton, 2002), as well as the belief that these enrich and provide a meaningful and embodied understanding of human phenomena, informed this research.

Method

Postmodern qualitative research has undergone various developments that led to standards of good practice. These include "trustworthiness of observations" (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999) found in researcher transparency and reflexivity and "trustworthiness of researcher" (McLeod, 1995) where researchers create a secure base and participants perceive them as trustworthy. Researcher transparency is a principle connected with researcher agency and subjectivity being made available to the reader through relevant disclosure. Reflexivity refers to both researcher "ownership of perspective" (Elliott et al., 1999) and to "self-awareness and agency within that awareness" (Rennie, 2004). Morrow (2005) acknowledges that the analytic processes in which researchers engage are rooted in subjectivity. The issue becomes how we manage our subjectivity rather than divorcing ourselves from the research process. McLeod (1997) added that "the quality of the relationship between researcher and informant will determine how honest and forthcoming the informants are with their stories" (pp. 310–311). As researchers we aimed to show warmth and transparency and engage openly, enabling our participants to trust our intentions, hence share their worlds freely.

We chose Charmaz's (2006) constructivist version of grounded theory (GT) and integrated ontological hermeneutics, to manage methodological tensions. GT goes beyond description as it deals with evidence based conceptualisation through naming patterns of behaviour and comparing them, known as the constant comparative method of ana-lysis. Our epistemological position is associated with "a way of understanding that views people as existing within multiple horizons of meaning, as striving to make sense of their experience, as constituted by their cultural and historical context, as engaged in dialogue" (McLeod, 2001, p. 28) and as unique. Therefore grounded theory's idea of bracketing researcher agency posed epistemological dilemmas. The notion of "bracketing" in qualitative research is at the centre of controversy, not just in grounded theory but also in IPA: "As IPA acknowledges a role for interpretation, the concept of bracketing is somewhat controversial and in any event gives way to a more inter-pretative process as the analysis proceeds" (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p. 9). Our researcher position is to

acknowledge researcher interpretation in the analytic process, which adheres to the idea that bracketing of researcher agency is difficult to achieve without claiming that as agents in the process we are impacting on it as well as interpreting it.

Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory is congruent with the constructivist / interpretivist paradigm advocating that "human science involves understanding as interpretation" (Rennie, 1998, p. 134). Further, constructivist grounded theory actively repositions "the researcher as the author of a reconstruction of experience and meaning" (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006, p. 2). In line with this principle we employed Rennie's (2000) "double hermeneutic" to deal with issues of agency such as the way a researcher chooses to represent, disclose and interpret participant experience. The double hermeneutic advocates that "the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, as cited in Nuttall, 2006, p. 434). We consider this process as mediated by researcher impact on participants' attempts to share and understand their world.

We can deduce from these arguments that researchers cannot hold their subjectivity in abeyance, or bracket preconceptions and biases as Glaser and Strauss' (1967) traditional grounded theory advocated. A constructivist grounded theory is not looking to objectively unravel truths, but to reflectively and with engagement co-construct meaningful knowledge. Charmaz (2006) stated that:

> In the classic grounded theory works, Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as emerging from data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. (p. 10).

We considered a qualitative rather than a quantitative method as congruent with our epistemological assumptions that there are multiple truths, multiple realities and multiple interpretations of these especially when the concepts of collective and individualistic culture appear to be presenting a philosophical instability in their relationship. Qualitative research explores these dimensions and offers meaningful contributions to knowledge. The qualitative researcher is interested in illumination and understanding not in causal determination or prediction (Willig, 2007).

> "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts" (Albert Einstein, as cited in Calaprice, 1996, p. 316).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were carried out which generated a vast amount of data. The researcher style was phenomenological relational, engaging in dialogue (Finlay, 2008), being embodied (Etherington, 2004; Todres, 2007) and encouraging discussion. Through researcher disclosures that we are migrants ourselves in the UK, participants became more relaxed, achieved psychological resonance and talked freely. Extensive and meaningful data were produced from the interviews that captured the participants' lived experience.

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and texts were read several times. Axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) involving identifying meaningful chunks of data, organized under initial categories, which were then related to each other produced an overarching theory scheme. Informed by constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), researcher observations were also integrated into core categories to capture the inter-subjective research style (Luca, 2009, p. 200). "Epistemologically, constructivism emphasizes the subjective interrelationship between the researcher and participant, and the coconstruction of meaning (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). Researchers, in their 'humanness,'

are part of the research endeavor rather than objective observers, and their values must be acknowledged by themselves and by their readers as an inevitable part of the outcome". (Mills et al., 2006, p. 2). The analysis with emerging categories underwent a series of analytic stages, each influencing the next and not following a pre-determined procedure. Our approach utilized the analytic learning from each step and informed the analysis of subsequent steps. Hence "the analysis of the data involved a 'circling of consciousness' using immersion in the data, engagement, constant abstraction and reflexivity" (Luca, 2009, p. 200). A research group discussed and agreed the final categories capturing the meaning of texts.

Findings/Results

Data produced various themes representing the meaningful accounts of participants we identified which emerged from the perceptions and lived experience of migrants and returnees. The four core categories derived from the analysis of data are presented in Figure 1 below and analysed in Figures 2, 3, 4 & 5. Existential Migrants' reasons for migrating are captured under motivational factors to migration, followed by the experience of de-stabilisation, exercising agency to make migration work and adaptation needs.
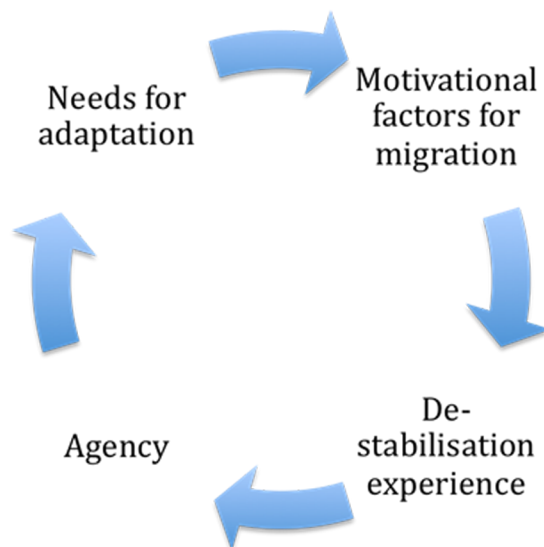
Figure 1. Grounded theory: The existential migrant lived experience.

Each category and its codes (text) are presented in separate diagrams to show how data were interpreted, followed by the final analysis. Core categories are capitalised at the top of each diagram, sub-categories are on the left hand side of the diagrams and initial codes are italicised in the right hand side of diagrams.

Motivation to Return

The motivation for second-generation returnees to migrate to the "storied" land of their parents was mostly based on a perceived and expected improved standard of living and aspirations of belonging with a sense of feeling rooted. Returnees assumed that the economic situation on the country would provide the conditions for an improved standard of living and better life for their families in the "land of paradise" as one migrant put it. At the same time these Cypriot returnees expected this sense of belonging through building relationships with extended family.
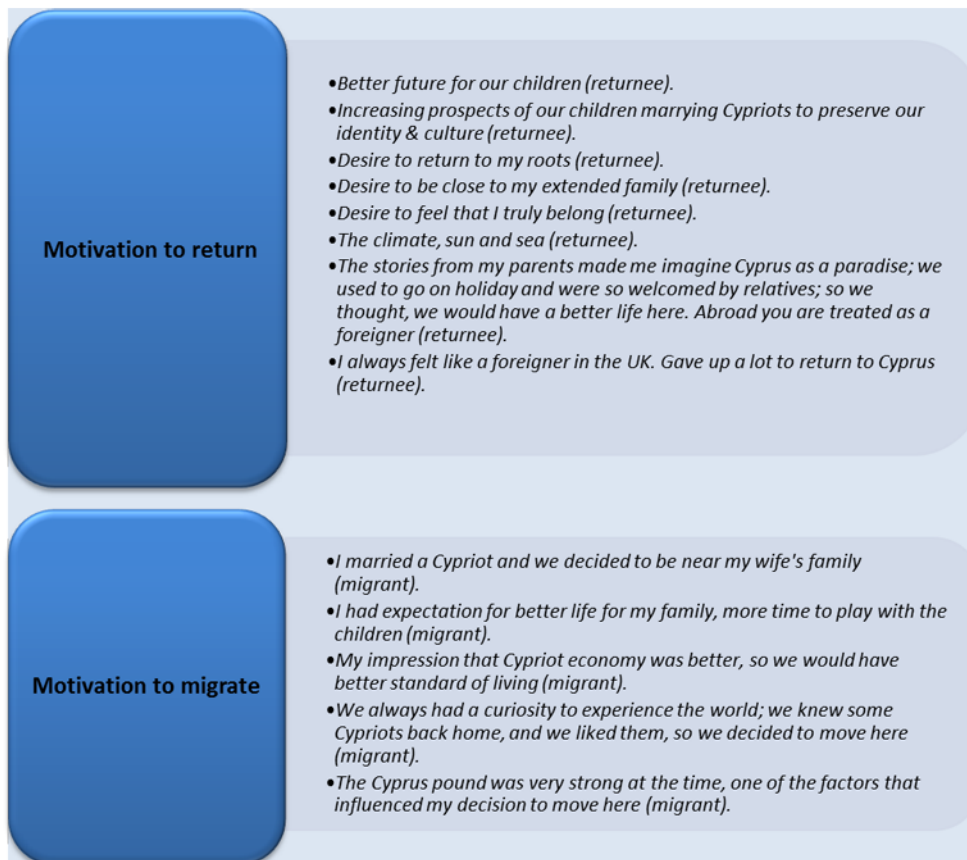
Figure 2. Category 1: Motivational factors for existential migration.

Some returnees had aspirations for their children to establish Greek-Cypriot identities, by marrying Cypriots, whilst others were motivated by the desire to be close to relatives, whilst enjoying the climate.

Motivation to Migrate

Migrants' motivations to migrate were influenced by perceptions of a better economy than their home country and an expectation for a better future with more quality time with their family. One migrant married to a Greek-Cypriot woman decided that Cyprus offered better economic and social prospects for them and their children than living in Greece. Another migrant expressed the nostalgic sense of self to travel and experience new worlds. A Russian migrant married a Cypriot, but had also heard positive comments from other Russians about the island, which encouraged her to migrate.

Regrets

Regret over migrating was implicit in the migrants' financial struggle, especially the difficulty in finding work, missing families back home and experiencing isolation, stress and depression mostly the result of not being accepted by Cypriots. This was a stage most migrants and returnees in this study experienced at the early stage of migration, negatively impacting on their sense of self-respect and sense of belonging. Migrants spoke of their resolve to make the migration experience work out for them. Despite the stress they experienced they nurtured optimism in eventually belonging. However, psychologically they experienced "homelessness", a factor that caused regrets. Some returnees experienced similar feelings and expressed discovering a reality different to the one they had

Regrets

- *We struggled back home, we struggle here, but it was a decision we made (migrant).*
- *When I think about my family back home I get upset. I miss them but financially I am not able to visit. I wake up sometimes and wish I was back home; it's a dream I know, but it's hard being here like a homeless child . If we had Cypriot friends we would feel more 'at home'. But Cypriots are cautious towards migrants (migrant).*
- *I can't make it here. I'm going back to England soon. It was a big mistake thinking I'd be treated as a Cypriot but they treat us like foreigners. I felt more of a foreigner in Cyprus than in the UK (returnee).*
- *It causes me the biggest stress, being unable to work and feed my child (migrant).*
- *I have 2 grandchildren and I'm not near them to be part of their lives (migrant).*

Obstacles to integration

- *Language is a barrier; without Greek it's hard to be employable (returnee).*
- *Financial hardship with the high cost of living in Cyprus (returnee).*
- *There are no free swimming pools to take the children on Sundays like in the UK. I get stressed knowing we can't afford to take the children out (returnee).*
- *Isolation, no family close by makes me depressed (migrant).*
- *Stigma in not having a job undermines my confidence and pride; I don't want to depend on my in laws for money but have to (migrant).*
- *Nepotism in employment, jobs are for friends and relatives. An employer I spoke to after several attempts to get hold of him told me that he promised the position to his son's friend who was neither a graduate, nor experienced, because he felt obliged (migrant).*
- *Credentials don't always count; this makes me feel helpless (migrant).*
- *Bureaucracy in Cyprus is an obstacle to integration and belonging (returnee).*
- *Give me a job to do voluntarily and I would do it now; not working makes me feel a burden on the system (migrant).*
- *The rules on benefits make it difficult to integrate; jobs available pay less than the benefits we receive which just about help us live on the breadline (migrant).*
- *Jobs are a political issue here; you give a vote for a job (returnee).*
- *Employers employ illegal immigrants; if they get caught they get a small fine which is no detterent. So they prefer to employ illegal immigrants; they are cheaper (returnee).*
- *To be expected to play the piano non-stop for 8 hours is ridiculous. There is no understanding that my fingers cannot do this (migrant).*

Obstacles to belonging

- *Not having a job makes me feel insecure; I Feel I don't belong or have a right to be on this land (migrant).*
- *Cypriots are suspicious of migrants, so we feel isolated (migrant).*
- *Xenophobia makes Cypriots avoid mixing with us so it is like living in a 'bubble'. We want to have Cypriot friends to feel we belong (migrant).*
- *Host society resents us for being on benefits and having free access to services; but we feel shame in not having a job (migrant).*
- *Not having command of the Greek language makes it difficult to be part of this society (returnee).*
- *Cypriots do not like socialising with 'us'. It is a closed society; so we feel we don't belong; not accepted (migrant).*
- *It is stressful living in Cyprus without a job, no friends and no stimulation (migrant).*
- *I can't find work because my Greek language is poor and I am unskilled (returnee).*
- *It is ludicrous that employers request Russian, Bulgarian, Roumanian languages in a Greek speaking society (migrant).*
- *What works here is 'rousfeti' - who you know. Only way to find a job here (returnee).*
- *Racism gets me down; I overheard my employer and another woman talking negatively about us Russians (migrant).*

Figure 3. Category 2: De-stabilisation experience of the existential migrant.

expected before their decision to return. One returnee became so disillusioned he decided to return to the UK after failing to fully belong in Cyprus.

Obstacles to Integration

Participants experienced stress with some describing depression, as factors they linked to financial hardship, isolation and the stigma of unemployment. Some experienced Cypriot society as driven by nepotism, where employers offer jobs to friends and relatives irrespective of credentials. One returnee described this as "'Rousfetti' (who you know), is what gets you a job", a factor that caused a sense of helplessness. This was felt as a key
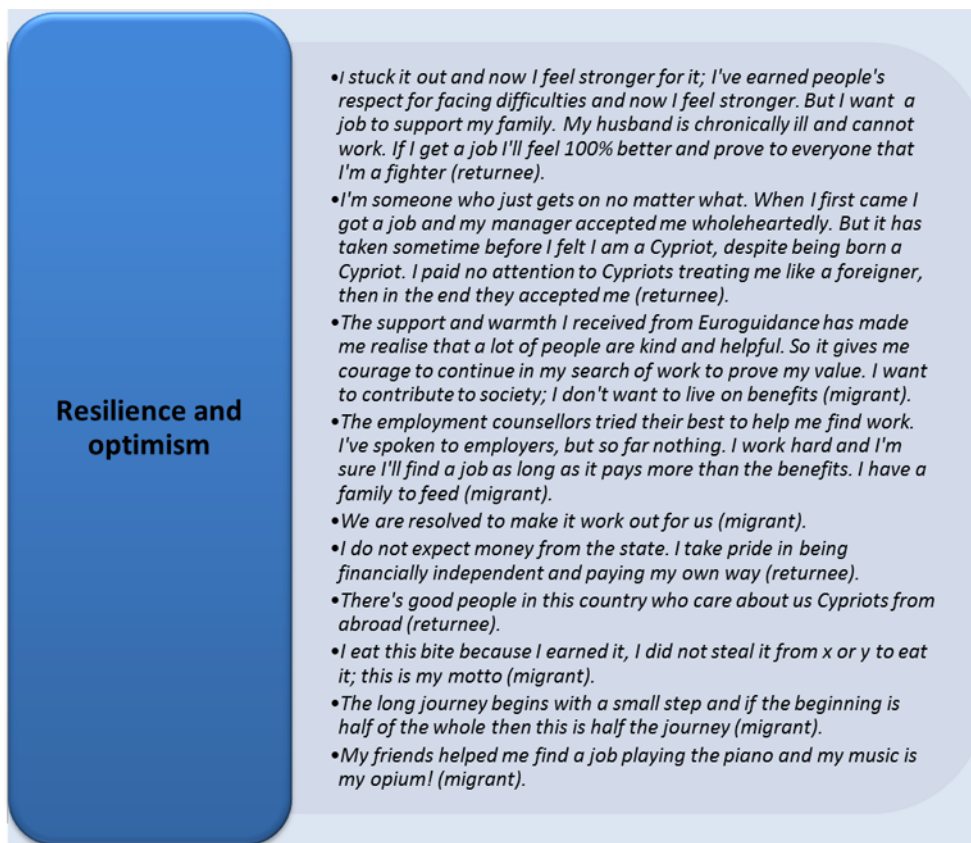
Figure 4. Category 3: Agency in the existential migrant.

obstacle to integration. Those on benefits experienced shame, as they felt they were perceived as "outsiders", which compromised their self-respect. Although Greek-Cypriot by blood ties, some second-generation returnees described not having a good command of the Greek language, another key obstacle to integration. All participants without exception described a complex bureaucratic system, impossible to understand and therefore difficult to access. One migrant spoke of the frustration in having to travel back and forth from one office to the next to try and obtain a health card. Participants were disappointed with some employer practices of employing illegal immigrants to cut company costs. They believed that stronger deterrents should be introduced to allow legal workers equal employment opportunities.

Being unemployed caused insecurity and compromised a sense of belonging. Both migrants and returnees alike described a xenophobic climate and spoke of disappointment in not being accepted by the host society, who were reluctant to develop friendships with them. The latter applied particularly to migrants. Returnees experienced less isolation due to extended family ties and family supportive relationships. This lived experience de-stabilized migrant and returnees' sense of self and was perceived as an obstacle to integrating in the Greek-Cypriot society.

Obstacles to Belonging

Not being able to work and contribute to society seemed to be of significance to migrants with a sense that their need to belong had been compromised. Our felt sense as researchers carrying out the interviews with migrants is that being unemployed gave rise to shame with the associated psychological impact of not feeling part of the society they lived in. Those with expectations for an improved standard of living who could not achieve them felt
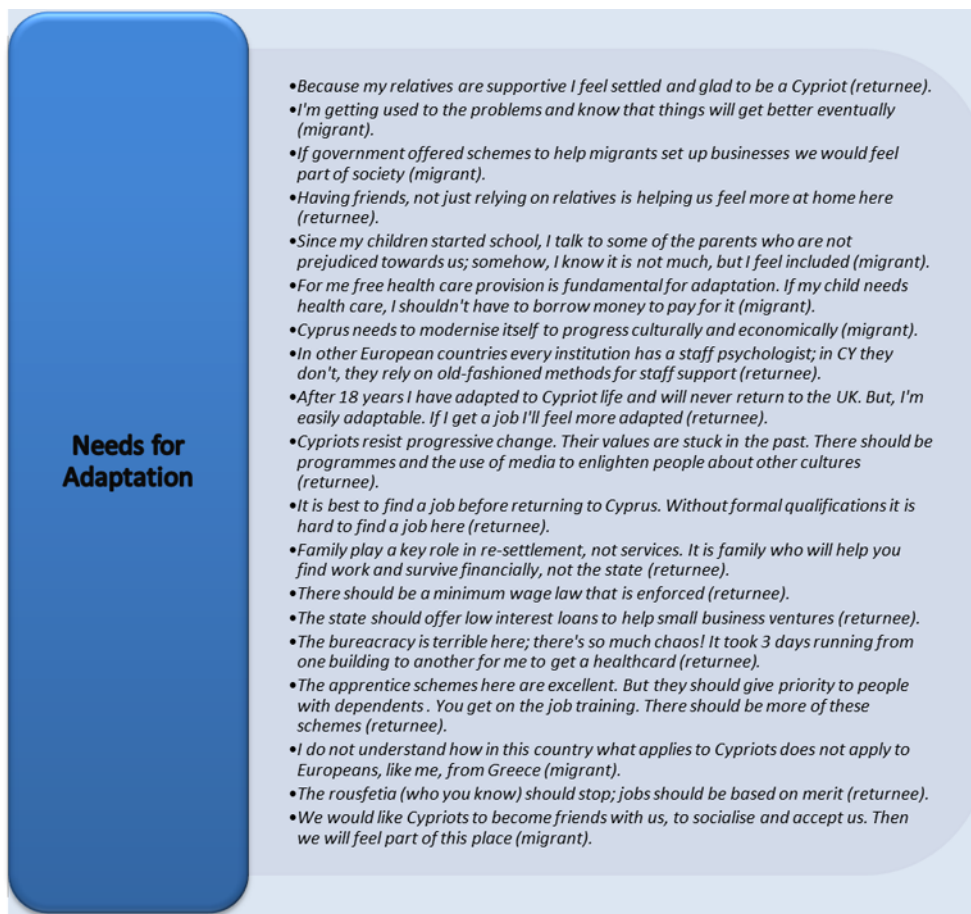
Figure 5. Category 5: Adaptation.

disappointed, with associated increased levels of stress. Coupled with the host society suspicion of foreigners, migrants found themselves in a psychological exclusion zone, feeling isolated and ashamed. The latter was more pertinent in those on state benefits. Participants in this study emphasized how important it was for them to have Cypriot friends, a factor which in their minds would create a sense of belonging. Whilst returnees found friendships among their relatives and relatives' circle of friends, migrants had more difficulty achieving this sense of belonging. Whilst returnees experienced some prejudice, they were better able to deal with it through their extended family ties than migrants. Some migrants described racism as openly expressed and directed at them through belittlement of their race or hostility towards those on benefits.

Resilience and Optimism

Despite the struggle to belong and integrate participants displayed a sense of agency. They recognized their choice, their struggle and frustration, but at the same time they were resolved to fight and make migration a positive experience. Some returnees and migrants were hopeful that they would eventually find work and be able to contribute to society. Psychologically the idea of contributing presented the promise of belonging and a legitimacy they felt they could not claim whilst on benefits. One returnee who had a positive experience of being accepted by Cypriots in a previous employment was convinced with a sense of resilience that she would succeed again in re-establishing the sense of belonging she had worked so hard to achieve. As she put it: "If I get a job I'll feel one hundred per cent better and prove to everyone that I'm a fighter; this would make me regain the feeling of belonging".

All migrants and returnees who used the Euroguidance services in Cyprus described a positive experience. Some said that speaking to an employment counsellor eased the isolation in the difficult process of trying to find work and made them more resilient to carry on. They felt the employment counsellors were friendly, warm and committed in helping them find work. Some described the counsellors as helpless themselves in the context of some employer practices, such as the perceived nepotism but having the counsellor by their side gave them a sense of belonging and therefore optimism as reported by participants. A Greek migrant put it poignantly using the metaphor of a journey: "The long journey begins with a small step and if the beginning is half of the whole then this is half the journey; I have reached this half, so the rest is before my very eyes".

Needs for Adaptation

Having supportive relatives helped second-generation returnees settle and proud to be Cypriot. Others, especially migrants who lived on the island longer than other participants were optimistic that the day will come when their situation would improve, mostly because they had time to adjust and make cultural contact. Having friends helped migrants and returnees feel more "at home", whilst others described themselves as naturally adaptable. The study of participants' views on what is needed to help them adapt included: more state employment apprenticeship schemes, a review of bureaucratic systems, modernization of social attitudes through media channels, state loans to help small businesses and abolition of nepotism. A returnee thought that introducing a minimum wage would deter employers from employing illegal immigrants and exploiting migrants desperate for work.

Discussion

As researchers we strived to handle the data with theoretical sensitivity and be attuned to the participants' language, feelings and demeanour to enable us to reconstruct meanings as close as possible to their experience. However, through our firm positioning in a constructivist epistemology our beliefs that as researchers we are reconstructing meanings as opposed to uncovering an objective reality, we recognise that our own preconceptions, biases and values have influenced the way we interpreted the data. It is within this context that we will discuss our findings.

The length of time as a migrant or returnee in Cyprus varied from 14 months to 18 years. Those who lived on the island above 4 years seemed to be less focussed on the need for friendships, were more informed and accepting of the values of the host culture and more frustrated in encountering discrimination in employment. For example, the returnee with 18 years on the island felt more integrated and more accepted by Cypriots. She believed that her own effort to understand the culture as well as her decision to live and behave like Cypriots helped her integrate. Her story nonetheless contained a hidden pain of the earlier years of migration and the struggle to belong. Adaptation and integration are evolving processes and time is, we believe a mediator to a migrant's sense of belonging. Acculturative stress was common among participants. However, those who used the common coping strategies reported by (Berry, 2006) appeared more resolute to staying. Low educational achievement appeared to increase stress, resulting in the return to the country of origin.

Migrants and returnees in this study were motivated mostly by aspirations to create a better life for themselves abroad. Returnees were influenced by childhood memories during holidays to Cyprus with their parents and the warmth of the extended family they had then experienced. Migrants were also guided by holiday experiences and positive perceptions of Cypriots as being welcoming and hospitable people, better economic prospects or being married to a Cypriot had been the incentives. Despite the positive imaginings experienced by the study group prior to migration, the reality itself with unemployment on the increase was identified as a key factor that comprom-

ised their sense of *Self*. According to participants, who were all in the process of seeking employment, not having a job caused stress and depression, increased their sense of isolation and carried the stigma of shame. Unemployment is a stress factor for the unemployed irrespective of whether they are migrants or not. What is crucial for migrants in this study, which sets them apart from native Cypriots, is their belief that being unemployed is not due to lack of skills or willingness to work, but due to feeling that employers were prejudiced towards them. In addition, most migrants in this study had aspirations for an improved standard of living. Being unemployed can potentially shutter aspirations, cause disappointment coupled with shame. From a psychological perspective, being unemployed as a migrant due mostly to employer prejudice or discrimination does not simply cause stress, it perpetuates the feeling of not belonging, with a negative impact on self-esteem. The host society perceptions of migrants, especially those on benefits are negative according to participants. As existing research shows (Berry, 2006), if the host society is hostile, this can lead to unacceptable levels of exclusion with coping strategies compromised. Cyprus had not known unemployment and state benefits as such until it joined the European Union on 1 May 2004. With unemployment on the increase in recent years, it is plausible that Cypriots feel a sense of threat and insecurity towards migrants, who are seen to be competing for the same jobs.

The psychological impact of not being accepted as part of the society where one lives causes stress and de-stabilizes the sense of identity. In a climate of economic instability and increased unemployment, migrants and returnees seem to be carrying the blame. The result is isolation and disillusionment, with some migrants and returnees regretting migrating and others determined to continue the fight for belonging and acceptance. Some felt that they are perceived as scroungers of state benefits, which perpetuate negative attitudes towards them.

For returnees with childhood memories of a welcoming *homeland*, discovering a reality different to the one imagined caused disillusionment. The paradox for these second-generation returnees in encountering this new reality could be located in their sense of not-fully-belonging in the country of their birth and searching belongingness in their parents' country of origin, felt as a second home. Returnees became aware of their difference through encountering the homeland and being able to identify their own values as different to those of the host society, factors causing stress and frustration and often channeled into becoming critical of Cypriot social systems not as well serving as those in their country of birth. This process of encountering the self was for returnees de-stabilising. Some mentioned that they were treated as foreigners even though they felt themselves to be Cypriots. In the midst of feeling de-stabilised returnees were also able to see the new land as one of opportunity for re-negotiating their spatial and psychological belongingness. Some managed to reach acceptance and a re-constructed sense of identity, showing tremendous amount of resilience in the face of unemployment, whilst others were on the verge of returning back to their birth country.

Migrants in this study, who relocated to Cyprus from less economically stable countries, did so with the view of improving their lives. Their encounter with reality often left them feeling isolated and on the *outside*, particularly due to their perceived xenophobia of Cypriot society. Like returnees, unemployment and being on state benefits caused shame, compromising their self-esteem and sense of belonging. Our study confirms Akhtar's (2009) findings that in order to belong, migrants sought heteroethnic friendships. However, they were disappointed that Cypriots were cautious of them, making friendships a distant desire. Having a job and contributing to society was considered to be fundamental to migrants and returnees alike, offering them a sense of self-respect and integration.

Inter-woven to the sense of de-stabilisation in migrants and returnees, was a sense of *agency*, a dynamic concept used here to capture a fluid sense of self. The dynamic role of migrant, place, identity and culture, is described

by Christou (2006) as "social spaces of action", given that as a space for action, the new world migrants encounter forces them to dynamically negotiate their experience whilst re-constructing their sense of identity and belonging. Participants in this study recognised their struggle as part of an existential choice to discover and to belong to a new world. They were determined to invest energy and optimism in their attempts to belong, believing at the same time that this desired state of being was not far from reach. Only one participant in the study, tired of being turned down for work due to being unskilled had given up hope of integration and belonging and decided to go back to his country of origin. This confirms previous findings that lower education is predictive of higher stress (Berry, 2006).

What relieved some of the isolation for the study participants in the process of finding employment was the Euroguidance employment support service. Counsellors in this service were perceived as warm and friendly, which helped participants tackle their own *helplessness*. However, participants also believed that the employment advisory service is itself limited in forging positive change to alleviate the intrinsic discriminatory practices in traditional recruitment. Some participants believed that the Cypriot system of recruitment still adheres to nepotism, which, in their perceptions renders them powerless.

In the process of searching for belonging migrants and returnees alike spoke of factors that would enable adaptation. The most significant factors described were to be able to work and make cultural contact with Cypriots through friendships. It has been advocated that one of the factors associated with psychological wellbeing among migrants is developing relationships with members of the society of settlement (Berry, 2006). All participants believed that work would promote integration and feeling at home. Being accepted by the host society and developing friendships with Cypriots was another pertinent factor in promoting integration, more so for migrants than returnees who could rely on relatives for friendships than migrants without family close by.

Conclusions and Implications for Counselling Psychology Practice

In this article we endeavoured to make a preliminary investigation of the lived experience of two different types of existential migrant, a second-generation Greek-Cypriot returnee and a migrant from a different racial and cultural background than Greek-Cypriots. Attention was drawn to motivational factors for migration, which identified migrants' regrets, and obstacles for integration and belonging. A dynamic sense of agency was transparent in their resilience to make migration work for them despite stress, isolation, depression, frustration and shame they had experienced. In the process of searching for employment and negotiating social acceptance, with belonging as the desired outcome of their relocation, migrants and returnees remained hopeful that a better future is in the horizon for them and their families. Returnees were able to draw on their family networks for support to help them adapt, whilst hoping for transformation in social attitudes towards them. Migrants without family networks were at more risk of isolation and hoped that through media and government initiatives, racism and prejudice could be tackled.

Migrants' and returnees' experiences in Cyprus were influenced by how they were perceived by the host society. Migrants in particular felt that the host society appeared to tolerate them, but deep down they were prejudiced towards them, a factor described as "culture shock" (Ward et al., 2001) and an obstacle to successful acculturation. Returnees were more inclined to seek moral and emotional support from extended family, which decreased their feelings of isolation and despair in comparison to migrants, even though they stated that they too were treated like foreigners. All participants alike expressed the desire for a more equal society where employment is judged

on merit and not nepotism. It was with a deep level of appreciation that all participants expressed satisfaction with the employment advisory service in Cyprus. The employment advisors' approach was perceived as supportive and based on a genuine desire to be of help.

To be a migrant is often a challenging experience associated with life changing aspirations. Unlike migrants who find employment before moving to a new country our study participants were in search of employment, and endured financial difficulties. In tandem, by returning to their roots, in what was until membership with the European union, a largely homogeneous society, Greek-Cypriot returnees, in their hope to re-establish family ties and feel at home with their racial identities and language, discovered instead rejection for acting too foreign, even though the extended family support helped them cope with this new reality. The implications of discovering a reality different to the one imagined was disconcerting and psychologically unsettling for both groups. In this transitional space existential migrants encountered themselves through the "social mirror" with the eyes of others defining them and creating a dynamic interaction that influenced the transitional sense of self.

The implications for counselling psychology application include the need for a better understanding of the psychological de-stabilisation experience of migrants with the associated stress, depression, and shame in being unemployed. More psychological services should be made available for migrants to help them deal with the psychological impact of being a stranger in a strange land. It was evident that participants found a sense of help within the employment agency and in their relationship with the employment counsellor that strengthened their sense of belonging. It seemed that they were using the service for obtaining psychological support as well as for assistance in seeking employment. Although the psychological help offered by the employment counsellors was very supportive and in no way would we want to undermine it, ethical considerations are raised, given that employment counsellors are not trained to be able to deliver this support. Moreover, the employment counsellors' role becomes confused. At the same time organisational considerations are raised as the need for a provision of a professionally qualified body offering psychological support is evident. By its very nature the application of Counselling Psychology would be of paramount importance to the existential migrant in the process of transition and psychological adjustment.

Social policy makers should enhance the involvement of migrants and returnees in policy-making. As supported by the participants discourses around their needs, specific educational programmes aimed at tackling racism and prejudice would benefit not only migrants and returnees, but also society at large to modernise itself within rapidly changing political, social, and cultural landscapes. Improved continuing educational provision for adults to provide opportunities for developing new skills, especially learning the language of the country would improve employment opportunities for migrants. Another important implication is for Cyprus to offer better incentives to employers to recruit migrants and returnees and institute more deterrents against the employment of illegal immigrants.

Counselling Psychology practice could be informed by the findings of this study. As a practitioner, the counselling psychologist should understand the impact on the existential migrant's sense of self through encountering a new culture and be aware of the characteristics and consequences of non- verbal communication and how this can be affected by cultural transition (HCPC, 2010, Standards of Proficiency). Participants of this study are people that presented an experience of transition in a society with different ethnicity to the one that they were used to and under this life story they talked about elements of dialogue between their individualistic and collective cultures. Differences between the new society's suggestions for integration in terms of both individual and collective culture brought in play concepts such as self, identity and belonging. The process of integration in this new environment of a constituted identity, such as the employment identity, highlighted an existential migrant process of stress,

frustration, depression and isolation. It is anticipated that these findings would inform the practitioner psychologist, raise awareness and assist in the analysis of existential migrant needs.

Limitations

This study was based on a small number of migrants. It is important to note that participants were all in the process of seeking employment and some were on state benefits at the time of the interviews. Therefore, findings are limited to this context. If the study included participants employed and no longer on state benefits a different picture might have emerged. We believe that the process of finding employment creates stress, anxiety and frustration for anyone unemployed. For participants in this study, stress from unemployment seemed to be associated more with employer discriminatory attitudes. This might have limited the findings in important ways: unemployment is one of the biggest stressors for people in the Western world (Fuchs & Hahn, 1992). Their self-esteem suffers and unable to contribute to society may experience depression and withdrawal. If the study included employed migrants and returnees, it would be interesting to observe if different views and perceptions were expressed. Similarly, in difficult economic climates, competition for employment increases and so does frustration and negativity. The findings in this study are therefore situated within a difficult economic climate, which determines that employment opportunities are limited. The study did not evaluate what actually exists in terms of recruitment or to what extend equal opportunities policies are applied in Cyprus. Therefore, the migrant and returnee perceptions may not be congruent with what services are actually available. Our findings are to be regarded as preliminary. A much larger group of participants to include employed migrants would be required to draw any definitive conclusions. The subjects of this study were all located in Cyprus and it would be very interesting to explore experiences of people in different EU countries (states).

Our study was not seeking to identify what actually exists in terms of services for migrants or evaluating to what extend employment opportunities are open equally to migrants and returnees as for the rest of the population. This would be an interesting study for the future. This study is limited in another important way: participants length of time on the island varied enormously. The study did not evaluate in depth how length of time impacted on adaptation and belonging. This merits attention for future studies.

Although the number of participants in this study is small, it is nonetheless important to consider the findings as meaningful. They provide psychological insights into the expectations and motivations of migrants, how they exercise agency and what they need to help them cope with stress. The findings provide a nexus within which further studies could be conducted with more participants. Future studies should consider recruiting migrants and returnees who are employed and account for differences in stages of cross cultural transition. This might provide a different lived experience than what has emerged from this study.

In terms of Counselling Psychology application this study was limited to the experience of the service users of the agency. It would be interesting to expand to include: i) people that are not using the employment service, in order to grasp the psychological needs of people that are not using the system by default for psychological support and ii) the experience of employment counsellors who provided psychological support.

In terms of Counselling Psychology practice in the transitional space of migration resilience appeared to be a central characteristic, a factor that a future study could investigate more fully.

The interpretation of the data carries within it our own conceptual and lived horizons as researchers. Our approach to qualitative analysis as discussed earlier acknowledges both the controversy and difficulty surrounding the notion of "bracketing" as something that can be achieved to ensure that meanings and interpretations are those of the research participants and not the researchers. We therefore adopted the modern grounded theory method advocating the value of researcher agency in the construction of meanings. However, our attempts and commitment to stay close to the participants' own lived experience, has been achieved through reflection and commitment to be as true to participants' own lived experience as possible.

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