

The Acculturation Experiences of first wave Kosovan women migrants living in the United Kingdom: An Interpretative phenomenological analysis

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Abstract

Acculturation processes are a key part of settling down in the new country although there are huge variations in responses and the pace at which people acculturate. In this chapter we use the example of Kosovan women after migration to the UK to explore the experiences of acculturation and its perceived impact on their psychological well-being was conducted. Six participants were interviewed, and transcripts were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Four major themes emerged: decisions influencing migration, early phase of UK life, the process of acculturating and implications of the acculturation experience for oneself. The psychological impact of acculturation and migration process was ascertained through their understanding of acculturation and their relationships with Kosovo and the UK. Acculturation was experienced as both an accomplishment and as an emotional challenge in response to conflicts and tensions related to their sense of ethnic identity and belonging. Not surprisingly these participants employed a number of strategies to cope with their migration difficulties and positioned themselves positively towards new cultures, revealing an appreciation of the UK's multiculturalism. Theoretical implications and relevance of the findings to the field of counselling psychology are described with suggestions for further exploration.

Keywords; Migrants, Kosova, United Kingdom, IPA, acculturation, psychological well-being, mental health, challenges, conflicts

Migration, Acculturation and Psychological well-being

As a result of global sociocultural changes, increases in migration as well as intercultural transitions, acculturation has received much attention in the field of psychology. Such sociocultural changes and movement mean there are continuous encounters between many different cultures (Schwartz, Montgomery & Briones, 2006). When this occurs individuals are considered to experience psychological and cultural changes (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga & Szapocznik, 2010). This has been understood in terms of the concept of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Acculturation can have a significant impact for all involved. This includes the migrating individual, the people they interact with, the society they migrate to and settle in, policy makers, politicians and mental health clinicians. Due to continuous change, there is a need to further understand individual's acculturative experiences which often accompanies migration. Changes as a result of acculturation are said to be on-going and occur over a long period of time and thus has been discussed in reference to adaptation. In short, psychological adaption concerns the emotional well-being factors important in the acculturation process, whereas social cultural adaptation concerns the achievement of culturally fitting behaviour which may be necessary to conform to a specific social environment (Ward & Kennedy, 1994). As this transition often invites changes to original ways of living, migrants often face difficult

challenges as they negotiate these changes in a new social and cultural environment (Berry, 2006). Practitioners and researchers alike have emphasised the need to consider how this process impacts on several individual behaviours, including psychological difficulties (Berry, 2003). The acculturation process has been associated with several difficulties during the life span; these include but are not limited to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, increased misuse of substances and perceived discrimination (Aroian & Norris, 2002; Pernice, Trlin, Henderson & North, 2000; Miller, & Chandler, 2002; Vega & Alegria, 2001; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). This is particularly relevant for the work of all mental health professionals.

Definitions of Acculturation

There exist a number of definitions of acculturation; the most frequently used has its origins in the early conceptualisation presented by anthropologists Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, (1936) who stated the following:

“Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149).

Modern day definitions such as that of Sam & Berry, (2010) define acculturation as: “the process of cultural and psychological change that results following meeting between cultures” (pg. 472), characterising it as both an individual and group phenomena. Sam & Berry’s, (2010) conceptualisation represents the most widely recognised definition. It is wide-ranging and embraces the foci of this study on the subjective experiences of acculturation. Moreover this definition emphasises three key elements integral in the experience of acculturation as highlighted by Sam, (2006). That is, it entails intercultural contact, both groups can influence

one another, and that change occurs as a result of the intercultural interaction. More significantly, it allows for individual differences in how individuals acculturate.

However this definition fails to acknowledge that in an increasingly globalised society such as the UK, there exist numerous cultures that interact with one another. Tribe & Lane, (2014) in their research exploring the refugee experience highlighted the importance of accounting for the meaning-making experience that individuals undergo with respect to the cultural, socio-political and familial contexts they are situated in. Thus exploration of the ways in which individuals experience intercultural contact within such contexts, in addition to the resulting changes is vital in order to understand the process of acculturation.

Conceptualising Acculturation

Initially acculturation was considered a linear process, referred as the ‘unidimensional’ model. This approach suggests that over time, behaviours originating from an individual’s heritage culture become replaced by behaviours from the host culture. Furthermore one’s existing ethnic identity is shed through the process of acquiring a new one. Acculturation by this definition is largely an outcome rather than a process that is on-going. In contrast, the ‘bidimensional’ model of acculturation (Berry, 1997, 2006) posits a person can identify with multiple cultures in varying degrees. Furthermore this model suggests that behaviours attained from the host culture do not mean a total rejection of those of one’s heritage culture.

The ‘four-fold paradigm’ model of acculturation was established by Berry (1994, 1997) which aimed to explore how both individuals and groups pursue acculturation. This model posits that how individuals acculturate is dependent on the ways in which they deal with two different aspects, that is ‘cultural maintenance’ and ‘contact participation’. These two aspects are

thought to meet and lead to four strategies of acculturation. In brief these are assimilation, which posits that one adopts the host culture and rejects their own; integration, which refers to the retention of both cultures; separation, which is the retention of only the heritage culture and finally marginalisation, which refers to the rejection of both cultures. There are a number of guiding factors which according to Berry, (2003) influence the individual's choice and use of strategies. These include the willingness of the dominant culture to be open to the influences of the other culture's values; within this is the consideration of dominant culture's ideology (Sam, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006).

Berry, (2005) amongst others has studied the factors that are involved in positive and negative psychological adjustment to a new society. He established a model in an attempt to demonstrate that in order for 'integration' to occur, a mutual accommodation of both groups accepting the rights of all is required to take place, whereby all groups can live as culturally different in the same society. This involves the minority group adopting basic values of the majority group, whom likewise must accommodate the needs of all individuals living in that society. Berry noted the integration strategy had the most positive psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Berry et al, 2006). However this model has been criticised for lacking consideration of important individual differences and contextual variances (Bhatia & Ram 2001).

Theoretical approaches towards acculturation research

Much of the literature on acculturation places emphasis on the changes that occur when an individual is experiencing this process. Three key theoretical approaches towards research on acculturation process have been identified; these consider affect, behaviour and cognition. (Ward, et al., 2001). The affective aspect considers the emotional changes during the

acculturation process and focuses on the challenges this brings. The acculturative stress model was proposed (Berry 2006; Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987) to explain this. The model posits that acculturative stress is likely to occur when individuals appraise the challenges of their acculturation experience as being 'problematic'. This takes into consideration the complex factors that are part of the lived experience of individuals.

Behavioural aspects to acculturation refers to cultural specific skills deemed essential in order to adapt to the environment. A cultural learning approach was proposed, viewing acculturation as a learning process (Chen & Isa, 2003). This focuses on individuals' perceptions of themselves and others during cultural contact, including how people process information about their own and other groups. The cognitive aspects of acculturation have been influenced by research on identity and social cognition. The significance of exposure to a different cultural environment with different social rules means that a migrant's identity is likely to be affected in some way (Ward et al., 2001). Accordingly the relationship between acculturation and identity has been dominant in research exploring acculturation (Ward et al., 2001). Tajfel and Turner's, (1979) social identity theory highlights the significant impact one's group membership has on one's construction of identity. Various models have been put forward to address how migrants integrate their heritage and host culture identities. The 'alternation' model of biculturalism for example suggests migrants can identify with two different cultures by altering their behaviour in different cultural contexts depending on different cultural cues. The 'blended' model of biculturalism however suggests migrants can maintain a positive heritage cultural identity whilst also developing a positive identity through membership in the majority culture (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997).

Breakwell, (1986) established the identity process theory (IPT) in an attempt to form an understanding of identity formation across the life-span, with a focus on the psychological and social processes involved in this process. These are considered to be important when identity

is thought to be challenged such as when individuals experience a significant life transition, which questions their self-concept. Migration is one such social transition. IPT proposes that identity is a social product which is constructed through several dynamic interactions comprising memory and consciousness, biology and social experiences. The construction of identity is thought to be organised by two different dimensions named the 'content' and 'value' dimensions. The 'content' dimension includes phenomena which influence one's individuality, such as values and attitudes, including aspects of one's social identity such as group membership. It is considered to be an evolving process which dynamically reacts to experiences from the social world. It is thought to shape identity by processes of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation. Assimilation and accommodation adjusts the different elements of identity into the identity structure whereas evaluation is thought to allocate value and meaning into the identity elements. Both of these processes interact and influence one another in an attempt to manage the structure of identity.

IPT puts forward four specific principles that guide the preferred identity structure. These are continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Breakwell, (2010) acknowledges the cultural specificity of these principles, although recognises these are more fitting to Western cultures. One's social context is also considered to play a significant role in the formation of identity and as such any change to this is thought to entail some form of adjustment within the identity structure. A threat to identity is thought to emerge when the process of assimilation-accommodation are unable to meet the guiding principles. When such threats occur, some form of action will be required. Attempts at these are referred to as coping strategies. And as such the study of coping has been a large focus of acculturation research which explores how migrants respond to stress.

The role of coping in acculturation

Berry et al., (2006) advocate that ability to cope is essential in order for individuals to deal with psychological difficulties during the acculturation process as it supports adaptation in the new cultural environment. There are large individual differences in the ways in which migrants respond to challenges during the acculturation process; moreover individual's psychological responses are closely related to the coping strategies that they adopt (Bhugra, 2004). Three common coping strategies have been identified, these are appraisal, problem and emotion focused strategies. Other coping strategies refer to avoidance and isolation and the use of substances as a means of coping which are considered to intensify difficulties.

It is important to note that Breakwell, (1986) in IPT refers to the use of cognitive and emotion focused strategies which acknowledge active, passive and avoidant strategies as actions towards identity threats. In reference to Berry's work the acculturation strategies are considered as coping responses to the new culture. More specifically these strategies relate to Breakwell's conceptualisation of potential actions towards identity threats such as avoidance, which relates to Berry's separation and marginalisation strategy. Moreover an individual may decide to integrate certain aspects of the social context into their identity structure, relating to the assimilation and integration strategy.

Kosova, Kosovan migration and mental health

A review of the literature indicates a lack of reliable statistics on Kosovan migration and absence of research on the mental health of Kosovan migrants. Kosova is a self-declared independent country situated in the South East region of Europe, in the centre of the Balkans. Historically Kosova was considered as an 'Autonomous Province' of the Serbian Republic

within the Yugoslavian state by the former Yugoslavia. At the time, its constitutional status was determined by the then Serbian parliament. Kosovan-Albanians at the time were treated as a minority who had limited rights to their own republic state. The Serbian state posed various controls within educational, cultural and health institutions in Kosova (Judah, 2008). Years of ethnic discrimination instigated much tension between these two populations and led to conflict which broke out in 1998 (Cardozo, Vergara, Agani & Gotway, 2011). Ten years later, the state of Kosova was proclaimed independent and became the seventh sovereign state to emerge from the collapse of the former Yugoslavia.

Kosova has one of the highest migration rates in Eastern Europe. It was recorded that one of every three to four households in Kosova has one member of the family who is living out of the country, (World Bank Migration Report, 2015). During the years 1998-1999, there was a large wave of migration following the war conflict (Haxhikadrija, 2009). Following the end of this, Kosova experienced a rapid arrival of its displaced population (Kosova Remittance Report, 2013). The available statistics from this report show the 1990's was characterised as the highest rate of migration from Kosova. There has been a decline in Kosova's migration due to the many limitations that restrict movement out of Kosova such as the lack of visa liberalisation with the European Union which is currently on-going.

Kosova's cultural background is linked to the many different empires that held power over the centuries. Kosova, although has undergone many societal changes, historically embodies many of the societal values that are considered representative of "Eastern" cultures. However, this has been increasingly changing due to the influence of "Western" values. There are many Kosovan communities evident in the UK; but particularly concentrated in London.

Kosovan acculturation experiences and rationale for study

Much of the psychological acculturation literature has been dominated by quantitative methodology in a positivist paradigm (Waldram, 2004); specifically using cross-sectional and correlational methods (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). Such research has been statistically orientated and argued as rather incongruent with the nature of the acculturation process. The strong tendency to pathologize such a complex process may in part lay in the history of acculturation in the field of psychiatry (Berry, 2005). Limited studies which have attended to finding meaning in how individuals experience acculturation and psychological well-being, have been carried out.

Despite growing attention of acculturation in the psychological literature of varying migrant groups, existing research shows that study of acculturation is heavily dominated on migrant populations in America and Asia (Chun, Balls-Organista, & Marin, 2003). However there are large differences in how people seek to engage in the process of acculturation (Ozer, 2013). The health of migrants in the UK is also of considerable policy interest and studies which are designed to develop a better understanding of these experiences are particularly necessary to enhance culture sensitive mental health practices. Limited acculturation studies on the Balkan populations exist. Despite the worldwide Kosovan diaspora relatively little is known about their acculturation and migration experiences. Research exploring the experiences of the acculturation process of Kosovan migrants cannot be located in the literature. Only one study looking at acculturation attitudes of adolescent Kosovans and Somalians living in Norway can be found (Bohn, 2008). The available literature has focused on studying post-traumatic stress disorder caused by pre-migration trauma (e.g Kashdan, Morina & Priebe, 2009), since these individuals are more likely to present for psychological services. The Kosovan migrant population has not been represented in psychological acculturation research and requires

exploration and understanding through qualitative enquiry. Conducting research exploring the experiences of underrepresented populations, such as this, is viewed as one of the primary ways in which mental health professionals participate in social justice focused actions (Vera & Speight, 2003).

Methodology

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the acculturation experiences of female Kosovan migrants in the UK. That is their lived experiences, focusing on first wave female migrants who moved to the UK prior to the outbreak of the conflict in Kosova. This was in the early 1990's. This research aims to explore the processes of acculturation and is concerned with the perceived psychological impact of this process for this group of migrants. It also aims to shed insight into how challenges were experienced and the factors which influenced their experience of life in the UK. Greater awareness of individual's lived experiences can enrich our understanding of this process. Acknowledgment of the psychological difficulties experienced by other migrant groups, as well as an absence of research into the understanding of Kosovan migrants' experiences of acculturation and psychological well-being, provides a strong rationale for exploring these experiences.

Rationale for a qualitative approach using IPA

This research is concerned with exploring individuals' experiences of acculturation, which entails change and adaptation, it will aim to reach this objective through getting as close as possible to the essence of the individuals' lived experiences. This requires a methodology that is focused on exploring the experiential and an approach which recognises the importance of

social and cultural contexts in shaping such experiences. Although many qualitative approaches share this aim; IPA is seen to give this primacy (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Method

Participants, Data collection and Analysis

IPA encourages small sample sizes in order to achieve data that has depth rather than breadth (Smith, 2008). Six female participants were recruited. Table 1. provides basic demographic information for the participant group. Data was collected via individual face to face semi structure interviews. Interviews were carried out in accordance with University ethical guidelines and consideration was given to the ethical guidelines set out by the Code of Ethics and Conduct (British Psychological Society, 2009). IPA is considered more as an approach rather than a prescriptive method of analysing data (Smith et al., 2009). The analysis of interviews followed the procedural stages recommended by Smith & Osborn, (2003) and Willig (2013). Analysis was achieved through an inductive and iterative process, whereby an interchange occurs with the data as the analysis develops, moving from the descriptive to the interpretative.

Table 1. Participant group demographic (pseudonyms are used)

Participant	Age	Employment status	Relationship Status	Date of arrival to UK
1. Linda	42	Employed	Married	1992
2. Ariana	43	Voluntary Work	Co-habiting	1991
3. Blerina	45	Employed	Married	1991

4. Eliza	45	Employed	Married	1992
5. Laura	43	Employed	Married	1992
6. Suzanna	45	Employed	Married	1992

Findings

Analysis of the interviews led to the development of four master themes and eleven subordinate themes.

Table 2. Master Themes and Subordinate Themes

Master Themes	Subordinate Themes
1. Decisions Influencing Migration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dissatisfaction with a restricted Kosova 2. Relating to the UK 3. Naive idealisation of the UK
2. Early Phase of UK life	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unmet Expectations 2. New found liberation and opportunity 3. Ways of coping with a new reality
3. The Process of Acculturating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Valuing Openness and Individual differences 2. Conflicts, Pressures and Losses 3. Attitudes towards the acculturating experience
4. Implications of the Acculturation Experience to Oneself	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ones sense of belonging and identity 2. Acculturation: A personal Accomplishment and a Challenge

Decisions Influencing Migration

Many participants described their experiences of life before migration, providing a rationale behind their decisions to migrate. These appear to have had an impact on participant's experiences of acculturating in the UK.

Subordinate theme 1. 1 Dissatisfaction with a restricted Kosova.

The theme of constraint due to political conflict and repressive regimes is inclusive of a number of different perspectives and experiences. These appear to have led to a disenchanted youth who no longer wanted to tolerate the restrictive changes to their country, specifically to their education and future life aspirations during what was a pivotal stage of their lives. This was seen as inhibiting of their individual growth and their cultural autonomy.

Participants expressed dissatisfaction as originating from the repressive regimes in Kosova which were seen to as have damaging effects to young adulthood due to the limits this imposed upon that generation;

“...It’s just because I was so disappointed as I said you know for four years we were in secondary school we couldn’t live our young youth, age was so limited...we couldn’t er do as much as we wanted to do because of the situation...maybe I was just disappointed with the whole thing there...” [Ariana, lines 452-457].

Participants expressed feelings of discontent with the limited opportunities experienced in Kosova which significantly influenced experiences of acculturating in the UK;

“I always had this in my mind, this, I wanted to go to England maybe but then the way the situation developed in the country, in a way I just thought well why not cuz what’s here for me and so erm the only option for me to, to, to erm do something for my life er then was to go to London, actually England” [Blerina, lines 52-57].

The impact of the repressive Serbian regimes in Kosova at the time has been well documented elsewhere (O’Neill, 2002) however, has not been addressed within psychological literature. The literature on motivation and psychological well-being is important when reflecting on participants’ experiences and the motivations they felt to change what they perceived as an increasingly restricted life in Kosova. Core within humanistic roots, Maslow’s (1943) theory of human motivation is significant given participants’ experiences, specifically drawing attention on the importance of an individual’s search of self-esteem.

The identity process theory, (Breakwell, 1986) is also important in providing an understanding of participants' motivations to migrate as a means of developing self-esteem.

When taking into account participants perceptions of Kosova as limiting and an increasingly restricting place to live, thus an important factor in their migration, it is evident this threatened one's sense of self-efficacy and esteem. Therefore, it seems identity threat stems from the old culture, rather than the new host culture.

Subordinate theme 1.2 Relating to the UK

There was a strong sense of the participants relating to the UK by having a pre-established connection with England which was identified as both a contributing and motivating factor in their decision to migrate to the UK.

These connections were the English Language, or having established networks through family or friends:

'I didn't think about it, I'm moving there and because my English was ok... we learned in school the English language since we are well seven-eight years old..... I went to English course and my mum she's an English teacher... you know English, I wasn't really...scared [Ariana, lines 74-82].

Research reveals that individuals who had previous experience of the culture and language of the new host environment adjusted more easily (Parker & McEvoy, 1993). Research has shown that language ability is a significant positive factor in the psychological adjustment of new cultures (Berry, 1992). These were instrumental in participants' acculturation processes, since this provided social and financial support. Familiarity with the UK served as an important facilitator in participants' processes of settlement. These can be understood as part of a socialising process, which has been shown to enable adjustment to the new environment (Ward et al. 2001). Research by Bhugra (2004) has specified the likely impact of communication

difficulties on acculturative stress and difficulties with adjustment in the host culture. In addition, when considering IPT, deficiencies in language ability and thus problems with communication are considered to be potentially detrimental to a migrants' self-esteem and self-efficacy. These in turn may act as potential threats toward their identity.

Subordinate theme 1.3 Naïve idealisation of the UK

An idealisation of the UK pre migration was strongly emphasised by participants. The role of movies appeared to be a platform where certain projections of life in the UK could be made, which seemingly offered a glimpse into the image they created of life in the UK;

‘‘It was between the English movies and New York City, because every time you see movies and you see, the big building, nice, everything nice shiny, you know like you think oh my god now when I land in London I will think I’m now in, same place as New York you know like with the big buildings and everything’’ [Laura, lines 230-235].

In other examples, participants reflected romanticized projections formed of the UK;

‘‘I choose England because of reading about Shakespeare and reading about, you know queen [R: Uhu] cuz every girls dream to see (laughs), to see a palace and all that...’’ [Eliza, lines 75-78].

A sense of naivety and impulsivity was also central across participants, which can be seen to be a factor in their idealisation of the UK. All participants made reference to their age when talking about their expectations of the UK. Linda offers a description of naivety in her judgments, describing herself at the time as *‘‘young and foolish...’’* [Linda, line 627].

Many of the idealisations that participants formed can be seen to be heightened in response to the feelings of restriction with Kosova they felt and corresponded with the feelings of hopelessness and limiting of opportunities in Kosova. Research has suggested that migrants'

perceptions of the country of origin can be beneficial during their acculturation process. Tseng, (2001) associated the feelings that migrants had of their country of origin, particularly feelings of escape with an increased likelihood of a more successful acculturation process in the new culture of the host country. Acculturation was revealed to be associated with freedom, optimism and determination for an improved life. Thus participants' feelings of hope and motivation were understood to enhance their chances of acculturating successfully.

Master theme 2- Early phase of UK life

This master theme encapsulates participant's experiences during the initial settlement period the UK, highlighting how they initially related to the UK. Their descriptions fall into both positive and negative categories of which three sub themes were identified.

Sub Theme 2.1 Unmet expectations

A strong theme to emerge was a disappointment in the reality of life in the UK. Participant's descriptions were understood as a response to unmet expectations of life in the UK. Many did not acknowledge the potential difficulties they may encounter when they migrated to the UK, which perhaps could have served as a preventative to disappointment and conceivably enabled better preparation for possible challenges. Following on from initial feelings of elation, dealing with the reality of the life they had imagined was identified as something participants did not foresee and experienced as stressful. Participants highlighted the paradox between their actual experiences of the UK against their idealised image of the UK pre-migration;

"...that was a dream come true for me before I came to London and then it wasn't anything like what I expected, ... you know when somebody says how amazing one thing is and you expect something amazing and it was nothing amazing about it, ... erm it was terrible..." [Linda, lines 19-24].

"...but then when I came here it was a different story (laughs)" [Ariana, lines 97-98].

Such responses to an unexpected reality also brought about emotional changes for participants;

“whenever I tell them this they are very surprised cuz they didn’t think that we had such a good life back home... I remember waking up at four O’ clock ... and just crying, because I had to sleep in my clothes because it was so cold” [Linda, lines 54-59].

This has important clinical implications for the work of mental health practitioners. It illustrates the importance of being curious about the relationship between pre and post-migratory views and experiences in order to attain an understanding of the impact of this on the individual as well as their ability to adapt. This is considered to be an internal factor which along with personality, is of significant importance in gaining an understanding of how individuals psychologically respond to acculturation (Bhugra & Ayonrinde, 2004).

Subordinate Theme 2.2 - **New found liberation and opportunity**

Following initial disappointment with the UK participants shared that there was a strong sense of freedom they felt. A dominant component of this appears to be connected with the constraining events that participants experienced pre-migration in Kosova. There was a sense of the UK being a provider of opportunity and stability without the political constraints experienced in their home towns;

“... it was a very good feeling to, to be able to walk around the streets and not see a Serb, a Serbian police with their guns and just thinking are they going to stop me now, are they going to question me now so” [Linda, lines 210-213].

Furthermore opportunity is referred to by participants when describing their appreciation of diversity in London. All participants reported valuing the UK’s cosmopolitan identity and shared the idea of London as the ‘*world in one city*’. Whereas other participants highlighted

their increased need for cultural awareness. The UK represented an opportunity to meet the whole world;

“... in the beginning was, it was overwhelming but I was so happy...because it was my dream to travel the world and I could meet the world in one place in London so I made sure I meet people from all over the world as much as I could cuz I thought I’m going to stay six months, that’s why and it’s been 23 years now” [Eliza, lines 713-719].

Subordinate Theme 2.3 – **Ways of coping with a new reality**

Analysis revealed participants developed several methods of coping during the early phase of settlement to the UK. These were seen to be facilitating their process of acculturation and reduced the stressful aspects of their experience. Several participants referred the use the Kosovan-Albanian community as an instrumental source of social support;

‘...it was quite a tough time but er, we had people around from our community so they helped us and they show, what to do, where to go...’ [Suzana, lines 66-70].

Work and study were behavioural strategies participants voiced helped them to cope with settling into the new environment. This provided participants with confidence that they were adjusting well to the different cultural environment;

“I got a job everyone was doing the same things so I just adapted...because the majority of my friends they were working, ok I have to work too, you know so I just went with the flow...” [Ariana, lines 137-141].

Participants voiced cognitive strategies which included conscious and rational methods of coping in an attempt to alleviate emotional difficulties they were experiencing. Amongst these were self-persuasion and encouragement, focusing on priorities, normalising, and minimising, rationalising and visualisation and writing. These can all be understood as promoting a psychological robustness;

“... I’m writing and I’m doing something for, for myself, it was my friend, that pen and paper they were my friend that’s how it was, because I had nobody else...”[Laura, lines 157-160].

Master theme 3 The Process of Acculturating

This theme encapsulates participant’s experiences of attempting to adapt to life in the UK. Participants described varying experiences of which three sub themes were identified.

Sub theme 3.1 Valuing openness and individual differences

All participants described valuing what they perceived as a sense of multicultural openness in the UK and the individual differences of other cultures. Participants voiced these to be important qualities in their process of acculturating in the UK as it fostered an attitude that promoted a sense of inclusiveness. The ways in which host countries respond to migrants has been extensively researched, and highlighted this to be an important factor which influences the acculturation process and psychological well-being of migrants (Berry, 2003).

Participants’ accounts reflected their attitude towards other cultures and the ways in which they approached integrating in the UK, revealing of their acculturation processes. Participants expressed valuing individual differences and makes direct links between being open with the ability to adapt;

“I just think that every, every race, every nationality every it’s just you know, there is erm, it’s individuality that counts...and you find things that are actually are so different that you think you know, I’d like to adapt that to myself because it’s so helpful in life”
[Blerina, lines 257-366].

Other participants described how experiences acted as a form of learning, resulting in an increased understanding and acceptance of different cultures, leading to the development

enriching experiences. One participant described the concept of an ‘*anthropologer*’ to illustrate her experience gained during her acculturation process;

‘It’s better because you experience more, more things...your knowledge will be more wide... like you are any anthropologer’ [Suzana, lines 327-330].

Sub theme 3.2 **Conflicts, pressures and losses**

Internal conflicts, pressures and losses were voiced as important experiences which reflected participants’ descriptions of challenges faced during the acculturation process. These encompassed many dilemmas, questions and decisions they encountered, which they perceived as interfering in the process of acculturating. Descriptions of feeling torn between living in the UK and a yearning to return to Kosova were voiced. For example;

‘...it’s been twenty three years I’ve been living here...the only thing I feel every now and again that wish to have to go and live in your country...being in between two countries...that’s the only thing’ [Linda, lines 259-267].

Participants’ accounts revealed that although physically they resided in the UK, they remained emotionally and psychologically connected with Kosova;

‘ It’s just maybe actually I erm I kind of pushed myself in a way because it was so difficult living here, being here and not being here because we have to adapt otherwise er it’s just so difficult. I remember all those years... it was very conflicting because you live here and you think about there all the time... ’ [Blerina, lines 196-202].

The above accounts reveals acculturating was a choice one had to make, requiring self-agency rather than a process which simply takes place over time. A loss of connection Kosova through the years was also voiced by participants; this appeared to be heightened during visits to Kosova.

‘I think when at least when I go there I kind of expect erm things or people to be the way they were and probably you realise that actually yes I have changed but they have

changed too so actually nothing is the same erm so I just came to realise that gradually you lose the connection'' [Blerina, lines 249-252].

Participant's accounts powerfully reveal the loss incurred during the acculturation process, with their heritage no longer *'exists anymore'*, which several continued to experience;

'...but when I go back those things don't exist anymore so it's just a part of me, my young hood that is in me that still is searching'' [Eliza, lines 311-324].

Sub theme 3.3 **Attitudes towards the acculturating experience**

Analysis revealed participants cognitive processes' during their attempts at integrating in the UK, offering their evaluations of this process and the impact on their psychological well-being. Participants perceived their sense of acculturation as positive experiences, a process which required active engagement, evolving over the years;

'Erm I think it's been good to adapt erm...maybe more , you adapt more as the years go by and you try and integrate...I don't, I don't remember going to a pub until...fifteen years coming to England, t'' [Linda, lines 675-684].

For several participants, work was an avenue which exposed one to a variety of different cultural backgrounds and acted as a platform where the acculturation process was most pertinent. Participants offered an understanding of acculturation as requiring the ability to recognise, understand and appreciate differences and similarities between cultures. Ariana describes positively perceiving her sense of adaptation by making a comparison to other migrants who were not so successful in this process;

'Erm, personally I think I er I adapted very well I have friends that they went back home after six months because they couldn't bear it, home sick...personally I think I adapted well I think it's like I, I've er you know sometimes I feel like I've been here forever you know like er like I was born here...'' [Ariana, lines 359-369].

Some participants suggested acculturation involves an active attitude on the part of the individual, one that dynamically attempts to move towards '*fitting in*'. Suggesting an 'internal' process whereby it is crucial to consider one's motivation towards acculturation;

“... we here were you know free and actually put into the society and you know no one can actually erm, make you fit, you have to try for yourself so yeah yes...because I think if you, if you decide to live here you know you have to be a bit more adaptable”
[Blerina, lines 561-569].

Participants reflected that there was much resistance they observed in other Kosovans whom continue to identify themselves as 'foreign'. Participants reported that their attempts at challenging this attitude led to negative judgements which viewed them as disloyal towards their ethnic roots;

“I know some Albanian mums you know they just don't...it's still everything foreign here and I think that must be very difficult to live somewhere and you don't feel your home....even if you try to explain you are the one...that you don't care about your country anymore... it's like oh you have become English as they say not British, but English “[Blerina, lines 572-586].

Participants also voiced that the homogeneity of Kosova was also seen as a factor which did not prepare one for the acculturation process. One participant described a shift from her patriotic attitude which is viewed as limiting;

'I'm more open-minded now... I used to be more conservative how to say, patriotic, conservative, but now I don't think that way...I'm changing through the years “[Suzana, lines 338-442]

Such attitudes are a shared experience across many Kosovan-Albanian individuals. This is most likely owing to political threats made towards their national identity. This is perhaps especially so amongst Kosovan migrants who feel that such an attitude preserves one's ethnic identity which is likely heightened due to the threat migration can be seen to pose towards one's sense of belonging.

Master theme 4. Implications of the acculturation experience to oneself

Subordinate Theme 4.1 Ones sense of belonging and identity

Analysis revealed participants' acculturation processes challenged their sense of ethnic identity and belongingness and the way they culturally positioned themselves. One participant voiced that although she developed a strong attachment with the UK, this did not put an end to her relationship with Kosova, which continues to represent an important part of her identity;

“ I think I do feel British I don't think I er did feel like this for erm a long time...you know, I am Albanian and from Kosova and I like to keep that but I think it's very important ...to feel at least a little bit part of this country”[Blerina, lines 156-166].

This relates to Berry's (1980) acculturation model, which proposes that acquiring and taking in aspects of the host culture and retaining the heritage culture are independent dimensions within the acculturation process.

For many, the UK was conceptualised as their home base and experienced as an accepting environment. In terms of Maslow's theory of human motivation, one's need for acceptance can be viewed as a necessary condition for the achievement of a self-actualised state (Maslow, 1943), and thus particularly relevant participants in this study. Analysis s revealed that national frame of the UK as inclusive was crucial fostering opportunities for belonging within the existing multicultural society. This has important clinical and governmental implications, illustrating the significance of the attitudes and policies of the larger society towards migrants. This was seen to facilitate successful acculturation.

Other participants described experiences which challenged their sense of belonging in the UK, leading to feelings of exclusion and isolation which had a negative impact on her acculturation and psychological well-being;

'...you know it took me a time to understand you know it is, right a different culture erm now I got used to it but ... I can't fit in'' [Eliza, lines 225-229].

Participants voiced their strong belonging with their Kosovan-Albanian identity, one of whom initially concealed this in fear of discrimination. The detrimental impact of discrimination on the psychological well-being of migrants has been well documented within the psychological literature (Lee, 2005). Perceived discrimination was an experience which had a negative impact on participant's acculturation processes. Discrimination signifies a clear threat towards one's identity and self-esteem. In reference to IPT, moving away from such threats by concealing one's identity, can be conceptualised as a coping strategy.

Analysis also revealed participants' need to display loyalty to their ethnic roots. This appeared to be a challenging experience owing to a lack of Kosova's recognition. This seemingly had a negative impact on participants' psychological well-being, particularly in terms of a lack of ethnic validation they felt;

'it's just like nobody knew where Kosovo is... ok you don't know let me tell you about it, where we are and who we are and... you expect like if I know about England, Italy, Germany, France, America, Africa, India, why don't you know about my country?' [Ariana, lines 165-177].

Acculturation: A personal accomplishment and a challenge

Analysis demonstrated that participants interpreted their acculturation processes as both an accomplishment and challenge. These were described as leading to developments in self-efficacy, learning and maturity. Challenges were expressed in terms of the emotional difficulties the acculturation process triggered for participants. These were in relation to disturbances in one's mood, a loss of family attachments and loneliness, communication difficulties and discrimination.

Participants voiced an increased sense of independence and autonomy which they perceived as a personal accomplishment.

I think I became a much more stronger person, much more confident, much more wise, I knew what I am, er what I want to do, I knew what to go, I knew how to handle things, to this day I believe that this place has made me stronger ‘’[Laura, lines 447-458].

Whereas others used their experience of discrimination to improve her awareness of her own culture, positively impacting on her psychological well-being, providing her with cultural engagement and meaning;

‘‘I had this vision that I need to prove and show...people where I live that I am proud to be Kosovan and we have a culture and we have traditions...and there are so many good things in where I come from just allow me to show you’’[Eliza, lines 822-836].

Furthermore, analysis powerfully revealed the emotional challenges that their acculturation process involved, described in terms of feelings of depression and failure.

‘‘ ‘‘You felt like nobody understands you...it was very, very emotional...you know like you feel like lost, you regret why you came, you say I’m going back, and then you think of going back you are a failure, [Laura, lines 101- 117]

These revealed participants' resilience in overcoming such challenges which were conceptualised as a personal achievement, strengthening ones identity. This seemingly provided participants with greater coping resources, maturity, self-efficacy, independence and life philosophy. Such experiences are deemed important in fostering self-belief and self-determination (Owens, Stryker & Goodman, 2006). Such findings have been described as a type of 'acculturative resilience' (Geeraert & Demoulin, 2013), which follows initial acculturative stress, and thus particularly reflective of participants' experience of acculturation.

A study by Stopford, (2009) found the experiences of migration to be characterised by an 'in-betweenness', involving multiplicity, movement and negotiation. This was viewed as establishing a foundation for personal growth, which can lead to identity development (Papadopoulos, 2002), and thus foster authenticity and lead to a renewed sense of self. This is particularly reflective of participants' accounts, which indicated their acculturation experiences to be both a transitional and transformative learning process, resulting in increased personal development.

Conclusions and Implications

These findings demonstrated the richness and complexity of the participants' experiences. This study revealed several significant findings which are related to these migrant groups' experiences of acculturation and psychological well-being. Analyses revealed that participants largely achieved a positive acculturation process to UK culture with a strong maintenance of

their Kosovan heritage culture and identity. This supports the notion that both heritage identity and acculturation contribute to the psychological well-being of migrants.

Although participants' acculturation processes initially entailed several acculturative stressors, these were perceived as largely non-pathological. This process entailed a number of internal conflicts and dilemmas. These included tensions with one's sense of identity and belongingness, cultural pressures of parenthood, lack of acknowledgment and validation of one's ethnicity, loss of family ties and family closeness and weakening cultural connection of one's heritage culture. Furthermore, findings reveal that language ability and an established network in the host country may facilitate acculturation, acting as a type of preparatory experience. Additionally, analysis revealed that participants developed a number of coping strategies which helped them deal with acculturation challenges. This demonstrated a psychological equipment of sorts, revealing resilience and flexibility in adjustment (Ward et al, 2001). In terms of IPT (Breakwell, 1986), holding such traits are considered to contribute to the maintenance of one's self-esteem.

This study illustrates the importance of exploring the pre-migratory phase and the preparatory phase in issues addressing acculturation and the psychological well-being of migrants, particularly in terms of the types of pre-migratory expectations individuals hold of the host culture. Of equal significance, this study showed the importance of considering the availability of a social network in the new host culture, which can be seen to facilitate the acculturation process and act as a safeguard for potential challenges experienced during this process. Furthermore findings show that openness and individual differences are perceived characteristics of the UK's multicultural society that are particularly valued and a factor that facilitated their acculturation processes.

Additionally, a significant finding was the impact the social-political conflict in Kosova had on participant's motivation to migrate and in turn influence their acculturation experiences. This appeared to be important in how participants approached acculturating to the UK, particularly in terms of valuing the opportunity and sense of freedom they felt. This was seen, by contrast to the restrictions experienced in Kosova, as enabling personal development and autonomy. Despite their desire to leave what they perceived was becoming an increasingly inhibited country, participants remain strongly attached to Kosova. Participants' acculturation processes also entailed the development of an attachment with the UK, providing an additional sense of cultural belongingness. Such findings have important implications for clinicians, specifically in terms of being sensitively attuned to the ways in which socio-political forces affect migrants and shape their identities and in turn impact their acculturation experiences.

Participants voiced that despite several difficulties during the process of acculturation, their acculturation experiences led to the attachment of a new home, new cultural experiences, new relationships and sense of belonging, leading to positive personal developments. These included increased self-efficacy, cultural awareness and openness and maturation. This has important implications for policy makers and clinicians in terms of supporting a bicultural competence which appears significant in facilitating successful acculturation.

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