

The Migrant seen as a Philosophical Wanderer: Real Perceptions, Ideals and Fantasies on Foreignness

- *Philosophical Counselling for Migrants*

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Abstract: The nomad spirit has shaped the authenticity of our humanity since the dawn of time. In this process, the cultural self undergoes a transformation or a conversion. Migrants are those who are seeking to pacify some initial anxieties or inner delusions and to do so they are availing of the element of foreignness by settling in or travelling to a distant place. This research asserts that there is a physical abode that grants us a sense of familiarity and security. Individuals anchor their identity in the broadness of these three pillars that give the predisposition of a being-at-home feeling; the childhood home, any place on our emotional axis that is associated with our family or friends and the made up places found in modern, popular stories that blend in with our idealism of what home should mean. Second, the paper will argue, as found in the case study, that the majority of us are psychologically unequipped when we proceed to meeting with the inclemency of a new political, economic, social and cultural setting of a different country. There is much reflectiveness, aloneness and responsibility in migrants' decision to engage in the dialogue of interculturality. Hence, the migrant begins to resemble a philosophical figure by means of contemplation, self-transformation, dispelling the impurities of the mind and the soul by carrying out a personal project of outlandishness. Within the presence of the dialogue, we not only perceive what is different from our behavior, but we also take the first step into discovering other life styles and all habits adjacent to them;

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we participate in the “mutual belonging” of interculturalism. The study will bridge the cultural, social, psychological implications from migration literature to philosophical theories. It represents a humble attempt at connecting philosophical counselling approaches and techniques with existing multicultural guidance services which are present in every country.

Key-words: cultural self; interdependence; otherness; damnation; participatory thought; the dialogue of interculturality;

Introduction

In this research paper it is argued that there might be a dormant philosophical figure residing in those who willfully migrate alone. This theoretical reflection along with the qualitative research will look at the experience of exploring cultures and multicultural interconnections. To refer to Foucault (2005), the cultural, social, psychological implications of the migration literature will be bridged to the philosophical practice of *epimeleia heautou* which is meant to cure the impurities of the soul, to dispel false opinions, in this case, by having the experience of travelling abroad. In other words, this paper seeks to observe how migrants undergo a transformation or conversion of the self. The wanderer’s life dynamic in foreign lands unfolds as a prolonged existential challenge and this correlates the solid contribution of guidance and counselling to the philosophical introspections of the wanderer.

The term migrant will be used according to the definition provided by IOM. The term migrant is: “an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons”. So, it is sufficient to leave our homes everyday whether it’s for work, for visiting or for travelling so that we become companions, workers or explorers.

The renunciation of our fixed abode is either meant to appease an unsettling feeling which is bound to the unknown or to invoke this differentiation invoked by Levinas (2007, p.112). According to him, interiority is the presence at home with oneself and the exteriority is expressed by our inhabitation which is entertained and supported by what we do in the world. The motive for leaving one's home seems to be the affirmation of the enjoyment of life, where life happens as "love of life" (p.112). With this in mind, I would follow on Levinas assertion that we are alibis of an invisible world. The philosophical mind becomes active with making one movement away from a world of familiarities, or as Levinas asserts, with the "desire for the invisible" (2007, p.33). Following Levinas's (2007) interpretation of habitation, while an individual is present in his homeland, the perception over what a home represents is manifesting as a finality in which human life maintains itself (p.152).

The aloneness is first recognized at this relational level. Precisely, there is an existential trigger that supports the welcoming of new perceptions which are different from one's own culture, history and language. The perception is purged by an existential crisis, an anxiety of some sort or purely by a sense of dissatisfaction. To know how the element of foreignness is impregnated in each culture one can assess whether residents of a country ask enough questions about themselves and about the world. Do people challenge their perceptions of otherness and do they try to demystify why foreignness is so appealing?

In today's multiculturalism it is important to articulate such questions that address the phenomena of estrangement from the native community. In this regard, Krieger (2004) refers to push-pull factors and distinguishes among five reasons why people immigrate. Cited in Launikari & Puukari (2005), he observes that there are two directions for this, as marked by The International Organization for Migration. The first one is based on various micro-economic and the second, on micro-sociological concepts of migration. The pull factors are: better living conditions and income, other people's – such as family members' – experience with migration, good employment prospects and more individual freedom. The push factors are ethnic problems (war, conflict) and economic conditions (famine, natural disaster) in the country of origin. Furthermore, adults who migrate are undoubtedly in search of an inner tranquility, of course, there might be many other various reasons ranging

from “better employment possibilities to persecution” (Hagen-Zanker, 2008) and this has been happening since the dawn of time.

The investigation of the nomadic instinct calls for an interdisciplinary approach consisting of the aforementioned economic pull-push factors, the psychology of interrelatedness, cultural identity, intersubjectivity and emotional psychology. These are only among the few parameters that bring their contribution both to the individual level and at forging the structural community strata.

The conceptual framework of this study addresses a variety of useful imaginative markers operating in the mind of the wanderer. Furthermore, it will seek to delineate between the autonomy of cognitive awareness and the predisposition to fantasizing in wanderers.

The methodology

To validate the theoretical framework of the theme of the wanderer and to advocate for the research strategy which allows for a comprehensive and thorough exploration of this topic, I opted for the qualitative procedure. The qualitative methodology, in the form of a semi-structured interview fits best with the purpose statement because there is flexibility in presenting the understanding of what it means to be a wanderer at the individual level.

As the journey is not always physical, to transcend from one’s native mind frame to a common ground of consciousness that is preceding the significance of the other (Cohen 2004, p.328) does not always mean to go into isolation in a distant place. To continue, Amir (2018, p.168) introduces Kierkegaard’s separation from the empirical aggregates that help with the expansion of identity and consciousness and instead resorts to the authorship of the spiritual pilgrimage as a proposition to finding the ultimate unity in one’s life.

Instead of being totally individualized, all cultural evidence of one’s identity is in constant communication with the outside world. However, before setting off into the world, there is a sort of naiveté to the perception of the exteriority. It is only through the lived experience itself that it is possible to possess a truthful idea of how things present themselves correlated to how they present themselves to others. The communion of all self-evidence realizations could coincide with something close to a pure

objective knowledge of the world (Merleau-Ponty 2005, p. 46) aside from any fantasies and dreams. Experiencing foreignness guarantees the movement from the known realm of cultural memories to gauging the radically different cultural trends for readjusting the initial schemata. Taking the position of the wanderer it creates the favorable condition for a perpetual update of the cultural memories archive. Such an enhancement happens only through an active exchange, recorded in time, as exemplified by the nomads with their incessant trading commodities and ideas across communities worldwide (Sattin, 2022).

The qualitative research explores the philosophical mindset of the wanderer. Furthermore, this study aims to pay particular attention to the way wanderers perceive and make sense of their cultural identities amidst the challenges of interdependence versus independence, and how they reflect on their cultural identity. Equally, it will map the real perceptions of the wanderer through language, their dreams and fantasies on foreignness, it will explore the sense of wandering while acknowledging self-transformation. The inquiry of this research is also seeking factual examples of participants' lived experiences abroad.

The researcher believes, the satisfies the phenomenological criteria of knowing about things directly without any interpretation of what has happened to the individual. I will follow Uwe Flick's (2018, p.32) first research perspective on collecting and analyzing data that summons the dominance of "semi-structured or narrative interviews and procedures of coding and content analysis." He further writes that biographical research, in the form of semi-structured interviews in this case, is part of the research design for the qualitative approach. Additionally, this approach has the implication of contrasting the testimonials at the stage of sampling which in this paper have been structured in separate units of meaning. What is more, in a narrative or biographical study, Flick (2018, p.65) writes that the researcher "takes a retrospective perspective looking back on a development or process". With this in mind, my objective will be to note the shift in perspective which happened to the migrants over the years regarding their outlook on life in foreign lands. Thus, I recorded some attempts of changing predispositions, patterns of thinking as a result of cultural enmeshment. These aspects dissolved the fragmentary thinking of separateness from others and of themselves.

Rather, what the wanderers fostered was a sense of implicit, participatory thought in relation to their life decision making and to the whole culture and society.

The strategy of inquiry from which the narrative stories will be obtained is the case study. The data will be collected from six participants using a variety of procedures. This approach is adopted to engage participants philosophically as they would have to go through a rigorous self-examination over a period of time while engaging in the case study. The questions will address socio-psychological behavior, it will be consistent with a philosophical framework and it will seek to delve deeply into the experiences of a select group of migrants. The case study method will allow for a detailed examination of individual cases within their socio-cultural contexts, providing rich and grounded insights in a natural context. The chosen case study participants will consist of individuals who have embarked on journeys of self-discovery and cultural exploration, such as migrants, travelers, and individuals living in diaspora communities or who have relocated abroad.

An overview of the migrant's narrative

The six interviews revealed that there is a sense of wandering related to the participants' capacity to explore. In their narratives, the six participants used interchangeably different terms for the wanderer. They employed terms such as: tourist, guest, student, traveler, a rooted out person, soldier. Extracted from the migrants' answers, the semi-structured interview presents some key variables leading to self-transformation and to the reflection of personal identity. The list stretches over: privacy/engaging with outer community, being free and being cared for, involvement versus detachment, passive understanding through perception only as opposed to thinking-it-through for an experiential understanding and so on.

Specifically, each of the contrasting points describe what it means to leave behind one's fantasies and dreams until the closest to a truthful perception of the self is being achieved. For example participant M1 has stated the following: "I was just gradually learning how to be independent and think for myself and interact with people who were strangers. I did have some eureka moments when I understood certain things but they

were multiple such moments and they had to do with my own personal development more than anything”, whereas to M4: “the reality from [host city] was totally different from the idealism I had projected in my mind”. Lastly, participant M4 said that: “I tried (...) to be like the people from the place I was in (...) I was negating my originality, my spontaneity. (...) I found my strength in the moment when I came back to who I truly was”.

Moreover, all the stories speak to a greater or a lesser degree of the implications a certain foreign community had in the lives of the participants. They describe its capacities, its role in reshaping a new found identity and lastly - the need to either arrive at a new understanding of the self via totally immersing in the new community or by dropping all false beliefs around it altogether.

The above observation gives valuable understanding that to explain the forms of assimilation one can investigate the concept of naturalization, cultural negotiation, the “mutual belonging” of interculturalism (Hannay & Marino, 2006, p.207). To explain this I will make a reference to the categorization introduced by Habermas cited in Gutmann (1994, p.138) on forms of assimilation: “Philosophically, we can distinguish (...) assimilation to the way in which the autonomy of the citizens is institutionalized in the recipient society and the way “the public use of reason” is practiced there”, and “the further level of a willingness to become acculturated”, where the practices and customs of the local culture offer the provision of naturalization. To exemplify, M5 confesses that “I try to blend in and not draw too much attention to myself. I am not a rebel.” The statement stands for adhering to assimilation into the new culture, his idea related to the emerging of a new identity presupposes the reconfiguration of a new state of mind with the help of which marginalization could be avoided.

At this point, this clearly shows that the counselling process can serve as a pillar for people living in a multicultural society and what is more important is to offer them the possibility to interconnect in an intercultural and transcultural context as presented by Launikari and Puukari’s study from 2005 on multicultural guidance and counselling. By identifying the philosophical introspections of the migrant, philosophical counselling might bring a contribution in the form of a more transparent presentation of the mental and emotional predispositions of those who carried out personal projects of outlandishness.

In real terms, based on the study initiated by Launikari & Puukari (2005), I would firmly point out that the above overview problematizes how much of the general counselling services present in every country have or haven't added in the needs of the multicultural clientele in their daily agenda, especially when we refer to such broader areas like educational, social welfare or public service domain.

Conclusions

The research sought to formulate some answers to the aforementioned questions proposed here. The findings were added together to ascertain the psychological meaning as a result of transformation of the self. The problematization of this research is reflected in the experience of the experiencer which creates the context; the real perceptions of the wanderers stand a common ground yet there remains a certain disproportionality when it comes to allocating personal resources for learning a new language, availability of reflections, initiation of social contact in a foreign setting etc.

Naturally, the dreams and fantasies on how to build a life in foreign lands are reflected in the pursuits denoted by the push-pull factors. In any cultural framework there is the dimension of competency as expressed by the professional skill. However, the pull-factor has the capacity to activate a certain displacement in the wanderer. This is the moment Bohm's (2004) "participatory consciousness" may fail on the individual. It was a turning point in the life of the participants in the study when they became aware of their status in the host country. The concept of damnation played out once the inner battle had set in. It was only with the recognition of their desires and then acting upon them that a turning point was initiated in their lives. Mainly, they began to establish a particular intention or attitude related to Levinas' point of view presented in this paper that we are consciously inhibiting our exteriority into the world by doing various things aligned to our wishes; we also differ by our interiority, how much we feel at home with ourselves is reflected in the disillusionment of not being identical with the others in wishes and expectations.

Whether for academic purpose, financial security or simply for getting to experience how it is to play the curious tourist's card, orienting oneself in the direction of what is foreign to our intrinsic vision, classifies

as a humble invitation to self-transformation. Thus we are being accountable to ourselves, but the paradox is that with this pending affirmation of the 'other' that our subjectivity is somehow, at least temporarily, suppressed.

The need to constantly externalize ourselves in the form of a dialogue is to keep the concern for the other perpetually active. Following up on the narratives of the migrants, it becomes visible how the concern takes on this characteristic of reciprocity; its being is constantly maintained by trying out personal meanings and redefining one's own feelings. Specifically, it becomes the concern of myself for myself too, once put in conjunction with the possibility of alterity. Around this concept of home, an immediate, subsidiary connection gains momentum: the representation of the wanderer's family. Its encompassing community is not about the unknown, harsh or exotic 'other', here, still in the proximity of the home, we can clearly collect that peace of mind, lack of anxieties, safety and comfort.

These are assets featuring flexibility in the journey to self-discovery. With the availability of the intercultural dialogue the migrant is stepping out of the individualization and the specificity of one's immediacy. The vastness of the world is put in motion by activating the thinking mind to anticipate, evaluate and reconfigure new beliefs about the self and the world. Acting on migrant's reflectiveness is a primordial step in the philosophical cycle of regaining responsibility over ourselves. In this sense, the foreign setting is impactful, unexpected yet able to map how much we belong to ourselves and to others.

This apparent discomfort in meeting the other, establishing contact with the other, following rules of a foreign society so remote to our own, presents only a false sense of insecurity. On the contrary, on the axis of self-development, the personal trajectory is very much in need of such emotional turbulence. As it can be concluded from the qualitative study, reasoning happens as a collective process. It is about having the capacity to put our persistence and awareness of the surroundings to a test. Experiencing foreignness could be regarded as an experimentation over the will of an individual to exercise power over one's mind and body. Even if some of the participants returned to their home country after having spent some time abroad it was simply because that foreign community served its purpose. In this way nothing truly is strange to us, only our

continuously changing perception makes it so. But it is down to our perseverance to crack the foreign parameters which will make us return to who we truly are.

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