The Therapist’s Experience in a ‘foreign country’: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Effect of Mobility for Counsellors and Psychotherapists

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2010

Fevronia Christodoulidi

School of Education
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Appendices</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration &amp; Copyright Statement</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Author</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter One (1) : Introduction</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The Research Context and Research Focus</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 On the use of Language and Terminology</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 The Structure of the Thesis</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Two (2) Meeting the Researcher</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 My inward and outward gaze</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 My family and cultural background</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 My educational – professional training background</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Myself as a foreign therapist</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Myself as a foreign client</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Myself as a foreign researcher/writer</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Postscript reflections on my ‘exposure’ and expressing ‘voice’</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Three (3): Methodology</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 First Steps of the Research</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Beyond Research Question(s)?</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Methodological Choices</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Epistemology and Ontology</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Heuristic Inquiry</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Auto-ethnography</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Researcher Reflexivity</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 The Research Participants</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 The Experience of Research Interviewing</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Summary of Data and Approach to Data Analysis</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 Conclusion</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Four (4): A (Re-)view of the Literature</strong></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Introduction</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Rationale for the Study: Identifying the Literature and Research gap</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Delimiting the Topic: on seeking the ‘borders’ of the ‘research’</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>territory’</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Reflecting on literature from Migration</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Relevant Concepts from Cross-Cultural</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology &amp; Anthropology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. On Culture Shock</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. On Transitions</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. On Acculturation</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 The effects of Migration on Identity:</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and/or Racial Identity Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Literature on Professionals with non-</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>native cultural background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 International students in Counselling</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Psychotherapy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 Therapists as Foreigners: writings on</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bilingual and bicultural perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10 Accounts from migrant therapists-writers</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11 Summary and final thoughts</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter Five (5): Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Introduction</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Exemplary Portraits</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. The Migrant Therapist</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The Returnee Therapist</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. The Commuter Therapist</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Main Themes</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Setting the Scene: Reasons for moving</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abroad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Training as a therapist abroad</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Practising as a therapist abroad</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The role of second language</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The fantasy or experience of repatriation</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Support Systems and Supervision</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Broader perspectives</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Further layers in Heuristics</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. On Liminality</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. On Transition</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. On Dynamics of Power</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. On Sameness and Difference</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. On Splitting and Attachment</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. On Resilience and Transcendence</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter Six (6): Discussion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Introduction</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Discussion of Main Themes</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The experience of training as a therapist</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abroad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The experience of practising as a therapist</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abroad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The use of second language and relationship</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with mother tongue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To return or not to return?</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Identity, Home and Belonging</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Seven (7): Conclusion

7.1 Introduction 227
7.2 Summary 227
7.3 Implications for Training, Supervision and Practice 231
7.4 What is more relevant to the UK context? 237
7.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research 239
7.6 Creative Synthesis 241
7.7 Final Words 255

Bibliography 257

Appendices 295

Word Count: 81,908
**GLOSSARY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BACP</td>
<td>British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (formerly BAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPS</td>
<td>British Psychological Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>European Association for Counselling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>General Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAC</td>
<td>Hellenic Association for Counselling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>National Health Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKCP</td>
<td>United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Six Phases to Heuristic Research 58

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1: Traveller’s Itinerary 26
Fig 2: Salvador Dali: Girl in the Window 31
Fig 3: Reflexive screens and researcher’s responsibilities 61
Fig. 4: Salvador Dali: Venus de Milo with drawers 63
Fig 5: Cyclical Process 80
Fig 6: Schlossberg’s Model for analysing Human Adaptation to Transition 88
Fig 7: The U-Curve Hypothesis 90
Fig 8: Sussman: Subtractive and additive identity shifts 95
Fig 9: Flying bird metaphor 122
Fig 10: Cycladic idol metaphor 127
Fig 11: Globe – Jigsaw puzzle metaphor 132
Fig 12: The ‘foreign therapist’ in the broader context 163
Fig. 13: The ‘path of surrender’ 220
Fig. 14: The Rorschach Ovarium 225
Fig. 15: The Athenian theatre of Dionysus 250
Fig 16: Odyssey: Creative Synthesis Collage 254
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF APPENDICES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Life/Thesis Script</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Research Interview Schedule</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ‘Dr. Who’</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Research Participants Table</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My collaboration with a ‘transcriber’</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ethics Statement</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Participant Consent Form</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Participant Background Info Form</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The PhD Student – Supervisor Relationship and the PhD Group</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

The University of Manchester – Degree Title: PhD

Candidate’s full name: Fevronia Christodoulidi

Thesis Title: The therapist’s experience in a ‘foreign country’: A qualitative inquiry into the effect of mobility for counsellors and psychotherapists

Date: May 2010

Professionals living and working in a foreign country are a widespread phenomenon today. This research into the therapist’s experience in a foreign country and culture, investigates complex and subtle intra-psychic and inter-personal processes at a personal and a professional level. The qualitative inquiry was primarily heuristic, drawing on the researcher’s experience as a therapist living and practising in her host UK culture. It was informed by the accounts of 23 foreign practitioners in different countries, some of whom have returned to their country of origin, after some years of practising abroad. Heuristic analysis emphasising the researcher’s reflexivity was employed in the meaning-making process of the ‘data’ that included the researcher’s reflexive journal, interview transcripts and expressive material that emerged during the research process. The role of the researcher’s resistance resulting from a highly personal involvement with the topic as well as the opportunities for advanced insight, resilience and transformation is discussed.

This research highlights that the lived experience of foreign therapists, in all its complexity and richness, often remains invisible and/or unaddressed in educational, professional and research circles and settings. Themes that appeared as significant in this experience include: the challenging and enriching effect of undertaking therapy training in a different country; the impact upon the therapeutic relationship dynamics in practice; the role of the therapist’s use of a second language during training and therapeutic practice and the links to the relationship with the mother tongue; the fantasies or actual processes occurring upon repatriation, where relevant; the therapist’s perception of their cultural identity as affected by this experience; issues related to support systems and supervision; and emerging insights in relation to the ‘culture’ of therapy in the context of the broader global culture. All were underpinned by the potential contrast of cultural norms and sense of home and belonging resulting from a possible contrast of values and mannerism when a practitioner lives and works abroad.

The study appears to support the idea that the impact of mobility upon a therapist’s life and work presents a number of losses and discomforts but also offers opportunities for growth; such a therapist appears to become a liminal and resilient figure with several qualities, resulting from the experience, that go beyond cross-cultural practice. The implications of the research in terms of counselling and psychotherapy training, supervision and practice are discussed. Identified limitations and suggestions for further research are noted. Some of the insights appear to have relevance to the experiences of other professionals that choose to move and work abroad.
DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am taking this opportunity to thank all those who participated in this research in several ways. My hope is that I have honoured their contribution in my writing in an authentic and accurate manner.

I hold gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr. William West, for his undivided support, trust, encouragement and insight offered wholeheartedly during those years of study. He has acted as research supervisor, spiritual midwife and passionate ‘fellow traveller’; without his belief in me, it would have been difficult to sustain the energy required for completing this piece of work. My thanks go also to my additional supervisor, Dr. Clare Lennie for offering her guidance at turning points of this study. I also thank the University of Manchester for offering me the financial means for undertaking this study through a School Studentship.

I wish to give special thanks to the following people: Jeni Boyd and her family who has hosted me several times at their farm, providing a warm ‘family home’ in the British countryside; Dori Yusef who is a sister from the ‘other side’; Chris Jenkins for his prayers and blessings; Wayne Richards for validating my courage in trusting the heuristic process; Steph Adam for our fruitful collaboration during the PhD years as fellow doctoral students; Gisela Herabadi for our collaboration; Prof. Renos Papadopoulos for his interest in my study; Prof. Maria Malikiosi – Loizos for our collaboration and mutually fuelling our vision for the development of counselling in our home country and, Colin Lago who has been an inspiring role model as person, practitioner, supervisor, colleague, researcher and writer for several years.

My eternal gratitude is for my spiritual brothers and sisters at the Server’s Society in Athens; Gabriella and Themistocles in particular. Also, I thank my family and friends around the world; each, in their own way, have led me to realise that home is to be found ‘inside’.
This Thesis is dedicated to philosopher and poet,
*Dimitris Kakalidis* and his wife *Ioanna*,
founders of the Server’s Society in Athens, Greece.
His teachings remain forever present in my life and guide me through
the one and only journey: that of discovering and expressing my spiritual nature
by serving the Self in ‘others’
THE AUTHOR

The author of this thesis is a qualified counsellor, supervisor and counselling educator, accredited member of the BACP, the HAC and the EAC. She has professional experience as a practitioner in a variety of settings in the UK, including Further and Higher Education Counselling Services, the National Health Service, private counselling agencies and in the voluntary sector. At the time of submitting this thesis, she is an Associate Lecturer and Supervisor at a Diploma and MSc in Counselling at the University of Salford, UK.

Qualifications:

BA (‘Ptychion’, 4 year degree) at the School of Philosophy – National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

MA in Counselling Studies, School of Education – University of Durham, UK

Postgraduate Certificate in Counselling Supervision – University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

MSc in Educational Research, School of Education – University of Manchester, UK

Conference Presentations:


**Publications:**

**Book Chapters**


**Papers**


(Also published in Greek)

**Poems**


**Book Reviews:** Over 15 book reviews I have written are published in counselling and psychotherapy journals such as *Therapy Today, Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, Thresholds, The British Journal of Guidance and Counselling.*
Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction
1.2 The Research Context and Research Focus
1.3 On the use of Language and Terminology
1.4 The Structure of the Thesis
Ithaca

By Constantinos Kavafis

As you set out for Ithaca
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don’t be afraid of them:
you’ll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
wild Poseidon—you won’t encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope the voyage is a long one.
May there be many a summer morning when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you come into harbours seen for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind—
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to gather stores of knowledge from their scholars.

Keep Ithaca always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you are destined for.
But do not hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.

Ithaca gave you the marvellous journey.
Without her you would not have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca won’t have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you will have understood by then what these Ithacas mean.

1 Constantinos Kavafis (1863-1933, also known as Constantine P. Cavafy) is one of the greatest, modern Greek poets. He was born in Egypt of Greek immigrant parents; he was taken to Liverpool, UK at the age of 9, for 5 years and then spent all his life in Alexandria, Egypt where he worked as a journalist and published numerous poems. An immigrant/traveller himself, he wrote the poem Ithaca, in 1911, inspired by the Homeric Odyssey.
1.1 Introduction

The Homeric Odyssey is a symbol of the journey of life. The return to Ithaca, the homeland of Greek Odysseus, may be interpreted as the return to self, the authentic way of being through re-discovery and transformation. Ithaca, for the Homeric hero, has been the point of both departure and return. But, for each traveller, it may have its unique significance. Rather than proceeding in any explanation, I invite the reader to embark on a journey, which will reveal its own personal meanings.

The theme of ‘journey’ is central to this research, both literally - as related to mobility and immigration of therapists - and metaphorically, in terms of the inner journeying of self and the research journey. Similarly, by ‘foreign country’, I refer to both an unfamiliar location on a geographical map as well as the foreign or different set of values, worldviews or ways of being that a therapist encounters through mobility or change. Given the transformative power of one’s training and ‘becoming’ a therapist, the journey metaphor is also widely used by authors in the field, to express this process (Wilkins, 1997; Feltham, 1999). My decision to become a therapist involved embarking on a personal Odyssey across both inner and outer worlds; it has been a rich wandering with multifaceted and complex challenges. Homer observes that: “For mortals, nothing is worse than wandering” (Odyssey, 15,343). A wanderer faces questions around belonging, linguistic expression, sense of identity, establishing relationships and so on. However, alongside the difficulties, unexpected and fruitful possibilities for growth at both personal and professional level occur.

The mythical traveller, Ulysses or Odysseus, was away for 10 years till he returned to his kingdom. As I am writing this thesis, it is 9 years since I left Athens, my birth city in Greece, to live in the UK; any decision around a geographical return is not clear yet. Half way during the PhD years, during summer holidays, I visited Ithaca Island and swam in its waters. In that trip, I saw beyond idealised utopia, I consciously moved away from any imposed nostalgia of re-patriation as a paradoxical ‘ending point’. I rather engaged in the meanings involved in travelling in the unknown, where the persistent goal or desire is the re-discovery of the self, through the processes provoked by immersion in a country and culture, different than one’s original one. In this case, the
traveller has a specific lens: that of a therapist, who also engaged in dialogue with others who found themselves, living, receiving professional training and practising in different lands.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research focus and its context, provide the reader with some clarifications around the discourse adopted, and argue for the justification of conducting this study. I will then outline the structure of the thesis, as a suggested ‘itinerary’ for the reader to follow and witness the landmark moments of my process. My hope is to evoke his/her own journey of new discovery, on the way to a personal Ithaca.

1.2 The Research Context and Research Focus

Globalisation and constant mobility are dominant phenomena in contemporary society. Diverse individuals and groups move abroad, facing the challenge of adapting their lifestyles and transferring their skills, careers, families and multiple identities from native to host cultures, on occasions returning to their ‘homeland’ to sometimes experience it as a ‘foreign’ one (Storti, 2003). Contemporary global mobility patterns are characterised by diversification of migrants’ profiles: women, skilled workers, international students, missionaries, merchants and business professionals or undocumented workers who move to find a better future. Such ‘geographic’ moves of people, whether choosing or forced to migrate, bring considerable personal, cultural, linguistic, social and spiritual challenges to come to terms with (Weedon, 2004). A number of subtle personal processes may occur in relation to re-discovering a comfortable territory where a sense of ‘at-homeness’ can be built again and family as well as career paths can be maintained or pursued in a comfortable and meaningful way (Storti, 2001).

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights\(^2\) “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country”. Emigration (to leave one country) is recognised as a fundamental right but immigration (to enter another country) presents problematic restrictions. Additionally, mobility is a privilege that is

---

not equally distributed amongst people due to permit restrictions (Pecoud and De Guchteneire, 2007). In professional terms, one may move to obtain qualifications and work in a different country but it is not necessarily possible to return or move elsewhere and work in similar terms. For counselling and psychotherapy that struggle around a definition and an agreed ‘professionalism’ (Aldridge, 2006; Postle, 2007), mobility can present several additional challenges.

Counselling and psychotherapy are disciplines that are bound up with understandings of culture (West & McLeod, 2003); therefore, issues resulting from multiculturalism are inevitably of critical importance to contemporary workers in the helping professions. The expanding literature in cross-cultural counselling presents a heavy focus on the issues relevant to the culturally different or immigrant client and the dynamics that such clients' difference brings to the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship (Lago, 2006; Palmer, 2002; Moodley & Palmer, 2006). However, there is very limited research looking at therapists' experience of cross-cultural transitions - at a personal, educational and professional level - and the relevant impact upon their life career development and practice. This PhD study aims at filling this gap in the literature that has crucial implications for the well-being of such practitioners as well as for the practice of counselling and psychotherapy in the current global canvas.

The study of psychotherapies in the literature is overriding the study of psychotherapists themselves (Orlinsky and Ronnestad, 2005). This research has therapists instead of clients as ‘fields of study’ (Speedy, 2008); it is inspired by the author’s lived experience as practitioner and researcher in a host culture. Its protagonist is the therapist ‘on the move’, the counsellor or psychotherapist who is moving and practices abroad and encounters multiple challenges as well as opportunities occurring in performing a role ‘elsewhere’, whilst re-constructing and negotiating a sense of self and professional practice in different environments. How does migration affect a practitioner’s life and work? Does being confronted with the unfamiliar lead to questioning and discovering a more authentic self and relating?
Therapists of various cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds have increased over the last two decades (Lago, 2006) but they face numerous complex challenges once they qualify\(^3\). Such therapists of diverse backgrounds usually receive training in places such as the US or the UK in the European context, places where it is available in English as a universal language and the field is longer established. But, what happens for those therapists if they want to make a further move? Or for any therapist who wants to migrate, when counselling and psychotherapy as disciplines are not equally or clearly acknowledged in many countries? And, what happens when the attitudes and values systems of the context they choose to move to may differ from those of the culture where a therapist formed their professional identity in the first place?

Professionals who chose to migrate face an experience that provokes different reactions, even if under similar circumstances (Bruff, 2007). Several occupational groups have been studied in terms of their adjustment pattern in new cultures: international students, business executives, missionaries, volunteers, teachers, social workers, migrant workers (Zapf, 1991). Surprisingly, little attention is given to research that examines this perspective for mental health professionals whose psychological equilibrium is essential for their work, given that: “a therapist, unlike an accountant or engineer, does not have the choice to do this work disconnected from personal experience and deep emotions” (Cozolino, 2004: xvii). The particular complexities involved in the work of therapists as migrants is vividly highlighted in the account of a participant of this study who moved from India to the UK, as follows:

“I think that your research, exploring the impact of mobility for a therapist is very different to how it is for other professionals; this is because our work involves emotional involvement with the people in another culture and as such to the culture itself. Our self is very much the tool for therapy; we can’t ignore what happens inside and to our perception of the world as we practise in a different culture. I have cousins who moved from India to the USA to work as engineers and they too face several challenges but not to the deep level as we do; their job is not affected at such deep level anyway” (Vivian)

Counselling and psychotherapy practices are western constructs, bearing historical origins and professional development in Euro-American or Western cultures (Sue and Sue, 1999). With this in mind and the acknowledgement that such a discipline has a

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\(^3\) See, for example, the doctoral research by Watson (2004) on the experiences of black trainees in counselling and psychotherapy courses in the UK.
dominant ‘culture’ of its own, it seems that such a research project would bring the necessary challenges towards what often appears as a mono-cultural perspective of the helping professions, which may lead practitioners to attitudes of cultural insensitivity or bias against ‘difference’.

So far, I have used the words ‘travel’, ‘journey’ and ‘mobility’ to incorporate various manifestations of spatial movement but also the journeying in terms of inner process and change. As in therapy, the end point is unknown, if any. The therapeutic relationship, even when designed with specific goals, is a journey to the unknown with unpredictable outcomes. That applies to the methodological journey as well, a heuristic process (Moustakas, 1990) that is an odyssey with its own drive:

“I begin the heuristic journey with something that has called to me from my life experience, something to which I have associations and fleeting awareness but whose nature is largely unknown. In such an odyssey, I know one thing is certain, the mystery summons me and lures me “to let go and swim in an unknown current” (Moustakas 1990:11).

It is my personal, educational and professional experiences as a counsellor moving to study and work abroad that have fuelled my motivation and formed the rationale for this study. These have sensitised me to the pains and gains, the losses and opportunities for growth resulting from moving abroad, as well as the subtle dimensions arising in relation to one’s original culture, feelings of belonging and the possibilities or hindrances involved in establishing one’s life and career abroad. I have been immersed in a challenging process of self-discovery and re-defining my position in the world through exposure to another culture, in a second language and in a professional field, like that of counselling, which involves high level of inter- and intra-psychic processes with self, relationships and environment. The effects of my cultural influences have become visible through the move to and immersion in a different one. For the therapist, the issue of visibility and invisibility is crucial. As a colleague of mine who shared her experiences in this study has said:

“Being a foreign therapist in host culture has given me a sense of identity that I was not previously aware of. The exposure to another culture has made mine visible in my awareness – therefore when am working with clients here, who bring their own cultural influences in explicit or implicit ways, I am able to pick up such subtleties in a much more empathic way”
I will dedicate a whole chapter in presenting the various ways that I position myself as a person within the research and as a researcher. Before doing so, I wish to comment on the use of language, when wrestling with a topic that is multifaceted and multidimensional.

1.3 On the use of language and terminology

During the periods of immersion in the literature and writing this thesis, I became weary around the use of concepts that are relevant to the inquiry. I recognised a danger of becoming trapped by labels and definitions that not only do not mirror reality but also reinforce, even unintentionally, attitudes of stigma and stereotyping. Considering the term ‘culture’ as an example (and its derivatives such as ‘cross-cultural’, ‘multicultural’ and so on), one encounters Euro-centric and multicultural approaches that tend to discuss those in compartmentalised and fragmented ways (Constantine, 2002), failing as such to reflect the contemporary multiple identities (Kondo, 1990). As explained by Moodley and Palmer (2006), “…multiculturalism, as the term suggests, is a multiple articulation of a number of varied, contradictory and contested ideas and explanations for complex human behaviours, functions, rituals and ceremonies. Therefore, any attempt to homogenise it into a singularly defined concept can only create confusion and consequently reinforce the stereotypes that multiculturalism hopes to avoid in the first place” (p. 20).

Ratner (2000) also discusses how elusive and lacking in substantial value definitions of culture can be in the sense of creating distortion of its meaning and manifestations. So, what appears most important in relation to culture in the context of counselling and psychotherapy is more to understand its power and pervasiveness and to learn to ‘think culturally’ (Christopher & Smith, 2006). Furthermore, in the context of this study, the term ‘culture’ may refer also to the culture of the profession, that of therapeutic modalities, an organisational culture and so on. In this light, I decided to avoid providing such false definitions for various related terms; however, I will discuss some of my use of language, with the aim to avoid incurring this danger.

Throughout this thesis I use the terms ‘culture’ and ‘country’ in an interchangeable manner, implying reference to moving in or out of the ‘majority culture’ of a given country. I am doing so, acknowledging Sussman’s (2000) position that “Whereas many
countries are culturally heterogeneous (e.g., the United States, the People's Republic of China, India), a majority culture often exists that influences public behavior, discourse, and language choice. Thus, when I speak of entering a new country or a new culture, I refer to the majority culture of that country” (p. 355). I may be referring to the term ‘society’ also along similar lines. At times, I have used the word 'culture' to encompass ethnicity, cultural behaviour or attitudes and ‘race’, as it has been used by research participants. I have paid attention to the issue of visibility vs. invisibility of culture through acknowledging that:

‘…culture remains broadly invisible without being in contrast to another and cultural identity becomes visible through the experience of immigration and the process of cross-cultural transition’ (Grabosky, 2005)

Throughout the thesis, I use terms like ‘Greek’ participant or ‘British’ participant and so on, for ease of expression without ignoring the fact that some may identify themselves beyond such categories. In all cases, such terms associate with country of origin. Some participants drew significant attention in making the distinction between understandings of ethnicity and nationality versus dimensions of ‘cultural identity’. An interesting example is that by participant Denis:

“We can’t define one’s cultural background by their passport or the citizenship one holds. It may or may not say much about what one’s cultural identity is. I have a Canadian passport but I have at least three nationalities living inside me, not to mention my being gay that is a different ‘culture’ too in the world we live in...this is a term that cannot be defined accurately, in my view, it would compromise the reality and what sits as true in our understandings of ourselves and the contexts we inhabit”

Generalisations in any cultural study may be evidence of a desire to show understandings of groups but is unfair to individual experience. For example, one encounters the binary of East and West to distinguish a set of dominant values and beliefs. I will use these terms without ignoring the political nuances they raise. Similarly, no culture is exclusively individualist or collectivist4, although there is often a dominance of the one dimension over the other. The terms ‘white’ and ‘black’ referring

4 The terms collectivist (-ism) and individualist (-ism) are words that are charged in different contexts with political overtones (Storti, 1999). This is not my intention in this context, I use them as it is a formulation widely used in the intercultural field and no artificial substitute would offer lighter meaning.
to peoples or individuals, will also be used with their broader highly contested political meaning (Watson, 2004) and not just or only related to skin colour. Additionally, attention shall be paid in acknowledging the presence of sub-cultures, especially related to localities when a therapist moves abroad. A vivid example is that offered by a Dutch therapist who moved to Scotland:

Working in a foreign country brings to awareness the various sub-cultures more vividly. My current work in Scotland is affected by attitudes, values and dynamics that may differ if I was working in London or in the Midlands. It is not just about how diverse my clients would be in terms of cultural background in a certain place, it is also what would be their attitudes towards me as a non-native counsellor in a certain area (Melissa).

The nouns migrant, emigrant, and immigrant are similarly distinctive: a migrant moves from one place to another, an emigrant leaves an old place, and an immigrant arrives at a new place. Definitions and typologies depend on state of departure and arrival, on duration of stay and so on. The general use of the term ‘migration’ is increasingly problematic, given that it is a phenomenon which is constantly changing characteristics and context; therefore it is difficult to offer a fully conceptual or predominantly shared explanation of it. As highlighted by Salt (2001: 87), when referring to recent forms of migration theories:

“When we use the term ‘migration’, it is not immediately clear what is meant. Traditionally, it has been associated with some notion of permanent settlement, or at least long term sojourn. In reality, it is a sub-category of a more general concept of ‘movement’, embracing a wide variety of types and forms of human mobility, each capable of metamorphosing into something else through a set of processes which are increasingly institutionally driven. What we then define as migration is an arbitrary choice, and may be time-specific”.

The terms counsellor, psychotherapist, therapist, analyst, client, patient are over-debated and they reflect the context in which one trains and works (Feltham, 1997; Clarkson, 2000, 2003). There are dynamics of internal professional power that define the “discipline” of which a profession is becoming an embodiment and establish the subgroups of practitioners which then form the “history” of a profession (Madoo Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998). Many authors (e.g. Thorne, 1999, Nelson-Jones, 2000, Totton, 2003) in the field use the terms ‘counselling’ and ‘psychotherapy’ interchangeably given that there is no reliable evidence indicating a clear difference between the two practices (Dunnett et al., 2007); also some use the generic term
‘therapy’ for similar reasons (Cooper, 2009). I use more frequently the generic terms therapist and client. I also acknowledge that I may use other terms, either to represent some participants’ own words or to highlight that they are politically laden, when necessary.

It is evident that conceptual and socio-political complexity is attributed to various concepts and terms used throughout this thesis; many of the above terms are not fixed but ‘situationally defined’ (Dalal, 1993). Schipper (2005) discusses the dominance and centrality of the West in most research that flourished towards the end of the 20th century. This emphasises the differences amongst people, with discourses that emerged mainly from mutual influence and migration and being invented by scholars located in the West, debating about “travellers from the West going to other parts of the world and travellers from other parts of the world going to the West” (p. 115). As a researcher/writer of this thesis, I am aware of my being perceived as ‘exotic’ in the culture I have migrated to, whereas I almost feel a linguistic and domestic ‘exile’ in relation to my own culture, when I visit, due to the changes that occurred within through living abroad. Having been born and raised in Greece, between East and West, puts me in a position of in-betweenness that feels fairer, however it is not easy to adopt, if one seeks the safety of a single positioning. I acknowledge the necessity of allowing for multiple meanings in the use of language and terms on my behalf; this is to hold the tension between the dichotomies and pluralities of realities and some universal drives. In my writing and relationship with text, I acknowledge the multiple voices, pluralism, multiple reality and ambiguity (Alvesson & Scoldberg, 2000) that go beyond a monolithic logic but include the ironies and paradoxes, inconsistencies, fragmentations, all of which are compatible with postmodern discourses. Having drawn attention to the use of language in the thesis, I will now comment on its structure.

1.4 The Structure of the Thesis

“…scaffolding is a liminal structure between the outside and the inside”
(Rowland, 2005: 20).

Therapists tend to work towards understanding the inside of the human psyche and interpersonal relationships whilst establishing and interpreting the links with the outside, the world that humans inhabit. When one moves abroad the differences in the outside
world influence the inside meanings and vice versa; the tension between the states of *movement* and *anchoring* becomes persistent. Although this research is about mobility and journeying, the grounding metaphor of scaffolding appears to run as a parallel concept, in an attempt to navigate the reader in how the thesis will be structured. I am presenting the ‘scaffolding’ of the thesis, as a ‘liminal structure’ which offers a guide or itinerary for the reader to enter and exit different parts of the research journey.

Following this introductory chapter, **Chapter 2** is an auto-ethnographic account of the relevant life experiences that both triggered and coloured the undertaking and meaning-making process of the research. It is my personal story of migrating, receiving training and building professional experience as a therapist in a host culture and engaging in processes with culture and my sense of self, interpersonal relationships and my being-in-the-world in multiple, multifaceted ways. **Chapter 3** discusses the theoretical and practical considerations in relation to the methodological choices made, the procedures related to engaging in dialogue with participants, my ethical stance, and matters that informed my reflexivity as researcher. **Chapter 4** is an attempt to present critically certain key writings in the literature that contextualise and inform the study; the reasons why a traditional review was not possible are explained whilst the perspective of reflecting on the literature as a point of departure for personal meaning-making is recommended.

In **Chapter 5**, I aim to bring the participants’ experiences into life. This is through presenting three accounts as examples of whole people, organising the overall material in central themes and presenting them with vivid verbatim quotes whilst reflecting on my own relationship with the process. In **Chapter 6** I discuss the dominant themes that emerged as significant in the research, in the light of insights gained through the heuristic process and relevant literature. I also reflect on the methodological underpinnings of the project, having conducted this piece of work. Finally, the concluding **Chapter 7** includes a discussion of the implications of the research for counselling and psychotherapy training, practice and supervision, the limitations and suggestions for further research and issues related to broader perspectives than this research can extend to. A few reflections on the relevance of the research within the UK context are offered before presenting a Heuristic Creative Synthesis, in the forms that intuitively emerged at different stages of living the phenomenon and research process during the PhD years.
Graphically speaking that is:

Each chapter offers routes and harbours in the voyage; ‘Laistrygonians and Cyclops’ may appear as well as ‘harbours seen for the first time’, only to remind us that ‘Ithaca gave you the marvellous journey. Without her you would not have set out’. As I became the ‘other’ in a foreign country, I engaged in therapeutic relationships with people who also felt seen as ‘other’, only to discover there is no such being as the ‘other’. As humans, however different, we mirror and see mirrored in each other, aspects of ourselves. What follows is an auto-ethnographic piece of writing about my life experience, ultimately triggering the following calling:

“Auto-ethnographic writing that explicitly draws on the ‘unsmoothed’ and ‘unsorted’ life experiences of professional therapists and therapy researchers goes some way towards troubling these constructions of clients as ‘other’” (Speedy, 2008: 158).
Chapter Two: Meeting the Researcher

2.1 Introduction
2.2 Notes on my inward and outward gaze
2.3 My family and cultural background
2.4 My educational – professional training background
2.5 Myself as a foreign therapist
2.6 Myself as a foreign client
2.7 Myself as a foreign researcher/writer
2.8 Postscript reflections on my ‘exposure’ and expressing ‘voice’
2.1 Introduction

“*I am an instrument of my inquiry: and the inquiry is inseparable from who I am*” (Louis, 1991: 365)

I bring my own life experience to this research, from the very beginning. In Heuristic and auto-ethnographic research projects, the researcher has experienced the focus of the inquiry (or a comparable/equivalent experience) in her own life. This is fundamentally true in my case and in that sense I openly acknowledge that “the initial data is within me” (Moustakas, 1990: 13). Thus, it seems essential that I disclose the multiple ways in which I am personally involved with the processes permeating the research topic. In autobiographical accounts of qualitative research, the issues of authenticity, authorial exposure and reflexivity are central (Humphreys, 2005). This section aims at conveying and supporting those ‘qualities’ in conjunction with recognising that “emphasis in the investigator’s internal frame of reference, self-searching, intuition, and indwelling lies at the heart of heuristic inquiry” (Moustakas, 1990: 12). I place it before the Methodology Chapter to assist the reader in understanding how the researcher’s background and experiences affect and interact with ongoing decision-making in the research. In my self-reflexive narrative, as auto-ethnographer and heuristic researcher, I see the potential to “move from the inside of the author to outward expression while working to take readers inside themselves and ultimately out again” (Jones, 2002, p.53).

Through telling my story, I am reinventing myself in linking past, present and future. A lot of the material I wish to explore that relates to cultural dimensions of human experiencing, seems to be at an unconscious level (Speicher, 2000); however, this study has put me in a “self-conscious engagement with the world” (Ball, 1990: 159), the inner and outer one and their intertwined relationship, as revealed through my experience of moving, living, training and practising as a therapist in another culture and engaging in dialogue with others with similar, yet unique, experiences. I feel a level of anxiety related to the reality that “researchers who share their own experiences expose themselves in no small way” (Vickers, 2002: 609). I find the courage to do so, given that I consider this as ‘data’ that has inevitably interacted with all other components of this research journey and the meaning making of what the phenomenon entails.
I have ‘lived’ the phenomenon I am exploring, through different roles. I am inviting the reader (you) to participate in my ‘life drama’ by reflexively witnessing my sharing. I find reassurance and also support for my choice in gaining the readers’ trust in my attempt to engage them, though sharing my own ‘portrait’, in the argument by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1977: 96) that:

“…the portraitist’s reference to her own life story does not reduce the reader’s trust, it enhances it. It does not distort the responsibility of the researcher and the authenticity of the work, it gives them clarity”

Having stated the intentions that have driven the decision around writing this section and with the above hope, I now invite the reader to the central landmark themes that are the undercurrent of my presence in the study.

2.2 My inward and outward gaze: where do I ‘sit’ and where do I ‘look at’ to introduce you to my ‘story’?

I come to this research with a personal biography, determined by my gender, class, education, racial, cultural and ethnic community perspectives. Those affect my view of the world in the ideas I hold (ontology) that generate my focus (epistemology) that I then chose to examine in certain ways (methodology). I am therefore culturally and socially situated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), located in a history, even if not strictly defined by it but embedded in a set of values that influence my meaning making and interpretation process. When moving to another culture and undertaking a role, like that of counsellor, which is deeply connected to meaning making, I found myself negotiating a wider variety of values and understandings: those related to the different culture I have been living in and that brought into the counselling room by my diverse clients. Additionally, I have been exploring the ‘culture of therapy’ itself, as introduced to me and practised in the UK, as my host culture.

My move abroad is linked to an academic and professional interest to train and work as a therapist as well as an existential and spiritual quest of discovering who I am and what my place in the world is, sought through crossing borders and existing in liminal spaces. In that, various symbols, archetypes and stories of my own heritage became apparent. In order to be able to write this chapter, in the here-and-now of my writing phase, I
struggled with where to position myself in terms of time, space and content. What I am researching is related to what has been happening to me since I moved abroad, if not earlier on an existential level; also to what is happening to me now and to some of what I fantasise to be happening in the future. So, _where do I stand to write my story?_ In my country of birth? In my host culture? At my bedroom’s desk? At the University’s cluster room? Do I need an enclosed place to gather my history? Do I need to be looking at the woods or the sea? Here is an extract from my research journal, as I began writing this section:

“I am feeling restless. In attempting to write, I have re-arranged furniture, changed position or the décor of the space. I sometimes curled up to be able to find some of the paragraphs inside me, other times I needed to take a walk or meditate. I shifted between moments of stillness and mobility, exactly like it has been in my experience of moving between cultures and seeking anchoring spots as well as new departure points; parallel to what often happens in the counselling process with clients. And now, I am seeking a screen or a window to see my story in front of me in order to start narrating it with my own voice, as if I need to open some curtain inside, without being concerned about the ‘flood’ that may come from within” (Research journal, 3 December 2009).

The need of being embedded or grounded in a particular place has become crucial at the stage of writing this thesis. There have been times that I thought that this topic invites me to start my life from day one, to make sense of my existence in the world with the insight I have today. Writing in that way would lead to details of one’s life story and significant others involved in it that may be inappropriate to disclose. What I share is the relevant angles that open up the window for the ‘broader picture’. There is the lens of the insider who wants to speak and the part of me that wants to discover the ‘language in between’ (Bird, 2000) which implies my ‘relationship’ with what is difficult to articulate. Starting from the inside, my attention is also drawn to looking at the outer world, through the lens of the traveller or the wanderer who is interacting with new environments.

This image of the female by the window by the Spanish painter, Salvador Dali, is touching this relevant chord:
My wish is that through maintaining passion, rigour and commitment, I become immersed in the depths of my self and my experience and attempt to articulate the tacit knowledge I have been carrying in the ‘guts’; my hope is that through rooting out the meanings, the essence of the experience may be revealed, as collaborative endeavour.

As stated in Douglass and Moustakas (1985):

“Through rigour and disciplined commitment, one follows the subjective past ordinary levels of awareness, living the question in sources of being and nonbeing, recording hunches, ideas and essences as they emerge, and, ultimately, consulting with others regarding the phenomenon or experience”

(p.40)

Despite a level of discomfort around self-disclosure, I trust that this process is “guided by a conception that knowledge grows out of human experience and can be discovered and explicated initially though self-inquiry” (Moustakas, 1994a, p. 17). In the following
paragraphs, I begin by offering some information about my family and cultural background and how I view the dynamics of the relationship with my home and original culture. I will then provide an overview of my education and training, in the context of both my original and host culture. What will follow are reflections on myself as an immigrant/foreign therapist, client and researcher/writer of this thesis before going on to reflect on the writing of this section.

2.3 My family and cultural background: mother and mother-land, father-land and home-land

I was born and grew up in Athens/Greece of a Greek mother and a Greek-Cypriot father. Both my parents are architects, so is my elder brother. I grew up in an environment where there were always discussions around ‘home’, reinforced also by the effect of unstable political affairs in both motherland Greece and fatherland Cyprus\(^5\) at the time. When only a few months old, my mother lost her mother to sudden death; this event has affected my relationship with her in terms of attachment style (Bowlby, 1982; 2005). During therapy, I discovered that unresolved mourning and ambivalence that was held in me in relation to relationships in my family and my original culture have coloured the processes I have been experiencing as an immigrant in another culture.

Alongside facts that relate to my family background, there are elements that are more of a collective nature and have trans-generational echoes in what I carry as a Greek national. Greece\(^6\) is a country with a vast cultural heritage and many threads of spirituality woven through the nation’s striving for defence and survival against external, ‘foreign’ forces of invasion throughout history. It is a country with a strategic place on the geographical map, standing amongst three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa as a gateway or threshold position. It is a culture that has many influences, contributing to its ‘mosaic-like nature’ (Fay, 2004: 182). Its unique position on the map combined with a longstanding history of wanderings (Montiglio, 2005) and intersections of cultures is something that is strongly influencing the contemporary mentalities of Greeks at an intellectual level, often full of paradoxes and contradictions. Having such elements

\(^5\) A couple of years before my birth, mainland Greece was under the Military Regime of Colonels (called Junta) and Cyprus had suffered the Turkish invasion of 1974.

\(^6\) At this point I am tempted to refer to Greece as Hellas, which is the name by which modern Greeks refer to their geopolitical entity. It became independent from four centuries long Turkish occupation in the early 1830s and renamed a state in the 1970s.
‘dancing’ within my awareness, I have written the following poem which reflects my quest around finding a voice that represents fairly the personal and the collective and even transcends it:

**Whose is this voice?**

“I speak and stutter
I cry and scream
I lie down in silence
I breathe
I am breathless
Who is trying to speak through me?
Is it Socrates and Aristotle?
Is it the mother who lost her sons in my torn island?
Is it my enemy’s own wife who was widowed?
When will the real stories be allowed?
Stories of attack, Stories of defence
Human stories
Of you and me
May God help us…
I will pray for you,
And me”

(Manchester, 21 March 2008)

My relationship with my Greek ‘homeland’ and British ‘hostland’ as an immigrant as well as a potential ‘homecomer’ is a conflicted one. Where home is has been a question that started at an existential, but not very conscious, level before I made myself a ‘foreigner’. I then found some sense of ‘feeling at home’ in a foreign country amongst many others who have been *out of place*, due to sharing that common characteristic. I
discovered that I had to find home inside which influenced my journey at some point and decision to change direction in my professional career and train as a counsellor, about which I will talk in the following section.

2.4 My educational – professional training background

In this section, I will offer an overview of my inter-disciplinary education and the process that led me to move abroad and undertake counselling training, drawing attention to influences that formed my identity as a therapist; I will also use myself as an example to describe some of the challenges that one encounters when moving between cultures, in terms of professional development, credentials recognition, membership of professional groups, employability and so on.

My school and university education, up to undergraduate level took place in Athens/Greece. The Greek public educational system in my time was not flexible in permitting students wishing to enter University to make a choice of subject; they would rather sit an exam which would allocate a place at a University department which was matching to their grades, subject to competition results. At the time, I was not clear about what I wanted my future career to be; once I had achieved having a place at a certain discipline through undertaking a very ruthless and highly demanding national exam procedure, the system would not allow me to explore different modules or change direction. Therefore, I found myself taking a place at the School of Philosophy of the University of Athens, studying a 4-year degree in History and Archaeology; a subject that I was interested in but I was aware that I would not want to follow as career path in the future. This led me to an ‘identity crisis’ as a young adult which led to depression for which I sought psychological help. As a way of healing, I participated in voluntary projects related to assisting people in need. Through that the idea of wanting to follow a helping profession became crystallised inside but I was not sure what route I could follow to achieve that, given the restrictions of the Greek educational system.

During the years of studying history and archaeology, I immersed myself in the study of discourses that proved useful for the development of my thinking later on. I read about different cultures and anthropology and was exposed to many cultural scriptures in different languages. I remember being fascinated by the process of discovering the
history of humankind but became more interested in engaging with human creatures themselves in the present rather than their remnants and symbols only. In the middle of attending my first degree at the University of Athens, I discovered a 2-year training programme in Counselling delivered by a private institution in Athens that I completed parallel to finishing my degree, receiving personal therapy, offering voluntary work and starting my first counselling hours practice. At first glance the disciplines of archaeology and the therapy world that I chose at a later stage seem incompatible. However, I can see that the philosophy and practice of archaeology relates to processes that take place in the therapeutic relationship. There is the journeying into the unknown, the connection of past-present-future, the act of assembling scattered fragments of meaning; such concepts are, at least symbolically speaking, linking to the act of therapy as well.

Due to the high level of “hamosity” (Fay, 2004: 188), related to chaos in both Greek educational system and what has been characterised as “a way of life” (Broome, 1994: 114) for the Greeks, in foreign eyes, many Greeks seek to study abroad (Psacharopoulos and Papakonstantinou, 2005). This combined with the fact that Counselling is a developing field in my country made me aware that I had to travel abroad to seek professional training. There were also other motives that led me to decide to move abroad, such as an existential curiosity and a desire to leave my family and original culture and discover myself in a new, unfamiliar context.

It was in September 2001 that I moved to the UK to attend an MA in Counselling Studies at the University of Durham. My training was intrinsically humanistic and person-centred as its base, introducing several other approaches and therapeutic modalities. On completion, I worked as a counsellor in a variety of settings and achieved accreditation with the BACP as a Counsellor/Psychotherapist practitioner. Later on I trained as a counselling supervisor (University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne) and was employed as counsellor educator in Further and Higher Education. Most of my professional experience was through working cross-culturally mainly with international students at Student Counselling Services and in the NHS. I also worked for a project providing counselling support to refugees and asylum seekers. Those work experiences with culturally diverse clients and trainees have heightened my sensitivity in cross-cultural communication and issues around cultural identity. In September 2005 I moved
to Manchester, having received a School Studentship for attending an MSc in Educational Research, later extended for a PhD. During the PhD years, I presented at a number of conferences, in Greece, in the UK and internationally; I also got employed as a Skills tutor and Supervisor at a Diploma and MSc in Counselling at the University of Salford, UK.

I have reached the level of competence formed by all components required by professionals in my position, i.e. training, practice and research. I am currently an accredited practitioner; however, this does not mean that I can easily move to a country other than the UK, and be permitted to practise as a therapist without facing numerous obstacles. This was also reported by most research participants, especially those who trained in counselling and/or psychotherapy without holding a first degree in Psychology. This is a paradoxical and complicated matter that is difficult to trace amongst countries but does present threats to the professional identity of ‘mobile’ practitioners, hence I recognise its significance. The issue of regulation, recognition and the award of professional qualifications as well as the procedure of licensure for practice varies from country to country in relation to many professions; it is usually either in the hands of a national authority or in that of a professional body or association, without sharing international standards (Evetts, 1995). This issue is further problematic for therapists due to the ‘identity crisis’ in terms of agreeing upon the points of convergence and divergence, professional boundaries and meeting points or areas of collaboration in the professions of counsellors, psychotherapists, psychologists and their divisions (Gale and Austin, 2003; Feltham, 2006; Orlands and Van Scoyoc, 2009).

My education also involved the study of foreign languages and I wish to make reference to that as English is the medium through which I have conducted this research and am writing this thesis; this links to my bilingual and bicultural sense of self and experience as a therapist. My Greek mother tongue is a language that is not widely spoken (Clogg, 1999); therefore, it is not uncommon for Greeks to be studying foreign languages. I started learning English at the age of 7 and at the age of 16, I was awarded the Certificate of Proficiency in English by the University of Cambridge. I have also studied French for 6 years and Italian for three years. So, somebody could say that I was a polyglot before my move to the UK at the age of 25 but this did not involve, until then, any emotional involvement with the English language; this was developed quite
soon after my move and especially through my counselling work where the use of a second language, with particular emphasis on emotions had greatly affected that kind of deep immersion in both the second language and host culture. There is a recognised overlap between bilingualism and biculturalism (Burck, 1997) including powerful connections with how we construct meaning and negotiate our identities. As stated by Lijtmaer (2006) “both language and culture provide a lens for human experience and how we perceive the world”. I will now share some of my insights and perceived discourse around my experience as a counsellor in a host culture.

2.5 Myself as a foreign therapist

Most of my professional experience was gained in the UK host culture, in my capacity as a counselling practitioner, supervisor and trainer. During these years of practice, I worked in various settings – including the NHS, Further and Higher Education, primary schools and young people’s centres, a refugees and asylum seekers counselling service, and in the voluntary sector. This variety has provided me with the opportunity to work within different institutional cultures, next to a range of colleagues with diverse professional and cultural backgrounds, with diverse client groups and a wide diversity of presenting issues. My theoretical orientation is humanistic at its basis, with a strong foundation in the relational theory of the person-centred approach, incorporating influences from other approaches, especially aspects of transpersonal psychology that acknowledge the spiritual dimension⁷. In my philosophy and values, I strongly associate myself with the idea that:

“The point of therapy is not only that the person should be able to be more fully himself or herself, but that the energy released and the sense of purpose achieved should be grounded by action, positive action, in the world” (Hardy, 1996, p.63)

My decision to train as a therapist was more of an existential and spiritual calling rather than a simply professional one, following a period of ‘spiritual emergency’ (Ankrah, 2000) that made me attentive towards my sense of purpose. Since 2001 when I moved to the UK and once I qualified and started working, I have been a counsellor who works

⁷ For a comprehensive account of my approach as a therapist, see relevant section in Christodoulidi, 2002
in a different culture and in a second language, being aware of my ‘foreignness’ and developing a sense of feeling accommodated in it when in such a role; being from a different culture and practising in a second language are the contexts in which I ‘grew up’ as a therapist. However, I have found it useful to reflect on ‘who I am’ in this role, in relation to cultural influences, how I am being perceived and how I am experiencing myself and the clients I work with. Once I am in the counselling room and I introduce myself to the client, it is obvious that I have a foreign name and an accent. Additionally, my physical appearance can be misleading in terms of indicating my cultural origin: I have a dark complexion with Mediterranean features that can easily be seen as Asian or South American, even of Islamic background. I can also recall an occasion when, amongst a group of colleagues, I was called ‘black’ by a person who seemed to perceive me as such, given that my skin is rather ‘brown’ or ‘tanned’ as opposed to brightly ‘white’.

Smith and Tang (2005) talk about three groupings of characteristics connected to identity and the role they play in the therapeutic relationship in terms of whether they are visible or disclosed or not: a. visible characteristics such as race and gender, b. less visible characteristics such as cultural heritage, social class and sexual orientation and c. adopted characteristics such as current religion, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, marital and parental status. In a multicultural society, like the UK, such characteristics often seem ‘blurred’ or non-questioned. Depending on the geographical area I am working in and the client group or setting, the role of the visibility of my cultural characteristics may be more or less relevant or interesting. For example, when working in Students Counselling Services, where most of my clients were from different cultures, I have noticed that my being a ‘foreigner’ created a sense of comfort or point of connection for them. Similarly, when working at a refugee service, my appearance and providing a service in a second language seemed to predispose clients positively towards showing trust in me. However, I can recall an occasion when working in the NHS, in an area inhabited by a middle-class and mainly British population when, although no client expressed overtly any disbelief towards me, there were certain reactions from colleagues. In an email exchange with my practice supervisor, I wrote to him:
“I had not had any problems in being employed as a counsellor in the UK; I actually found that my inter-disciplinary education, professional skills and competence in foreign languages have been an asset to my strong CV. However, I was bullied by a colleague on occasions for being a foreign counsellor, working in second language and being competent.”

This observation reveals certain elements around the stereotype of the therapist in a certain society. I am taking into account that my being non native and a non native speaker in the therapeutic dyad may be inviting certain dynamics in positive and challenging ways, important to be held in awareness. To use the psychoanalytic terms, those characteristics are bound to trigger certain transferential responses towards me on behalf of my clients. Similarly, as coined by Foster (1998) there is the therapist’s cultural counter-transference, when counselling clients whose culture, class or race differ from their own. In my philosophy as a therapist, I value genuineness and responsiveness as opposed to neutrality and axiomatic anonymity. This does not mean that I don’t approach these issues tentatively, evaluating whether a certain disclosure is relevant to the counselling process at a given time and helpful for the relationship or not.

I acknowledge that the role of values, professional boundaries, expression of emotion, touch, humour, stereotyping and so on are highlighted in my awareness in ways that may not be as visible or challenging for a therapist who works in their original cultural context. It often feels like being faced with the challenge to find ways of co-inhabiting two worlds and two languages. In terms of language, I have reached a level of second language acquisition that I do not need to ‘translate’ internally. The use of a second language has rather led to taking fewer things for granted and paying more attention to linguistic idioms as well as experiential subtleties and hidden areas of meaning. It is interesting that when, infrequently, I have worked with a Greek person, either as client or as supervisee, we have predominantly worked in English, with the occasional switch of language codes mid-sentence when expressing a single idea. This language switching in bilingual dyads has been interpreted as also being accompanied by changes in the transference-countertransference, as perceived from a psychoanalytic perspective (Lijtmaer, 2006).

A central theme in my research is the issue of ‘up-rootedness’ as a result of moving abroad. This is something I experience too, depending on which geographical area I am in; different feelings are triggered, around comfort or discomfort, belonging or non-
belonging. In an email exchange with my supervisor, reflecting on my professional choice of becoming a counsellor, I realised that this is also connected to the seeking of freedom in my sense of feeling ‘different’. Therapy is a field that somehow allows being ‘odd’ or at least ‘non main-stream’ due to the nature of the profession, expressed in my supervisor’s response:

“We are counsellors because we don’t belong; we live ‘on the edge’ and potentially can then empathise with people from other cultures who experience themselves similarly. That is the resource within us that could be tapped into for cross cultural work. The other resource is our child-like curiosity” (West, email communication)

When being interviewed by another therapist/PhD researcher for a project on cross-cultural counselling, I shared the following insights in relation to some subtle dynamics that relate to how my two cultures affect my counselling work:

“I find myself being very sensitive and empathic to issues of race and human rights in my practice. For example, when working in the UK, I have often felt very close to Black clients’ experiences, although I am not black myself. I do not suggest that a therapist shall share sameness or similar experiences to a client to be effective. However, when it comes to sense of self that is so much related to culture, there is a global dynamic that operates unconsciously that goes beyond the therapeutic dyad and requires some sensitive attention. I think that my sensitivity probably connects to the fact that as a Greek, I may be carry certain feelings of ‘victimhood’ due to my nation’s long-standing and repetitive invasions. When working with people that deal with such issues, those can bring challenging dynamics. That depends on who is the other party, what they carry in their own script in terms of exercise of power”.

Drawing from a relational theoretical viewpoint, I believe that those in the therapeutic dyad affect each other in multiple ways, each of them bringing their set of values, beliefs, personalities, experiences and perspectives. In this dialectical interplay there are multiple meanings and understandings for each other and the counselling process and dynamics. I agree with Litjmaer (2006) when she argues that the therapeutic space in inter and intra linguistic/cultural therapy becomes the microcosm of the broader world. In that sense, every dyad can be seen as cross-cultural in the sense that there is a meeting of two worlds with more or less common or different characteristics. In supervision, I have identified that my back and forth relationship with my two cultures, literally and metaphorically, connects to the process of change that happens in
counselling; this process inevitably involves some intra-psychic movement. So, I see two skills being crucial in cross-cultural work, amongst many others: the capacity to exist in liminal spaces, out of comfort zones and therefore empathise with this sense of disrupted ‘at home-ness’ with self or others and having a balanced curiosity. Rather than having fixed ideas or pre-conceived information about how I am being perceived by clients or how I perceive them, I strive towards allowing the space for discovery, a journey that takes place in the unknown, where I find the confidence to contain, due to experiencing cross-cultural transitions myself. The insights above are not exhaustive but just a flavour of certain aspects that relate to my sense of self as a therapist in a host culture. I will now share some reflections of my experience as a client.

2.6 Myself as a foreign client

Whilst in Britain, I have received ‘cross-cultural therapy’ myself as a client with British therapists, each of them working from a different therapeutic perspective. I can mention examples where this has been a positive experience, depending on the level of ‘chemistry’ or compatibility and the strength of therapeutic alliance reached with a given therapist. In the context of this study, I find it significant and interesting to reflect on the occasions where I experienced certain challenges in my experience as a ‘foreign’ client, when in therapy in the host UK culture.

One example is that referring to emotional expression. There have been a number of occasions that I felt as if I was particularly overwhelming for a British therapist in the way I demonstrated emotions. Here is an extract from my diary that communicates my experiencing of that more vividly:

“I am strongly sensing that I must be perceived as ‘too dramatic’ in the eyes of my therapist. I tended to cry a lot, from early on in our relationship and he seems puzzled by the intensity of my expression of emotions. He also comments on how much am using my hands when am talking, the mannerism I have and the vocabulary I use to express my feelings seems to be totally different to what he is used to. I sometimes feel as if am ‘rude’ – in contrast to the ‘intense’ English politeness - when am expressing my opinions…and I am not hiding that sometimes I am experiencing him as rather cold and reserved” (personal diary)
The above example is offering some description in relation to intensity and manifestation of emotions when in therapy with this particular practitioner. Another dimension where I felt misunderstood is related to different *values* and *role expectations* in a certain culture. I am recording another extract from my diary:

“In my session today, I was feeling a bit frustrated when talking about relationships in my family. It was as if my therapist was not open enough or I did not feel he understood the more collective spirit in my culture. The parental role in Greek culture is much more involving. I do not see that necessarily as a good thing but I feel that if it is not taken into account, then my therapist might not be able to really empathise with the pressures I am experiencing. These are not just related to my gender and daughter role, but also as somebody who has immigrated, with all the consequences that this entails to the family dynamics” (personal diary)

I have often reflected on my use of a second language in my personal therapy. I consider my emotional vocabulary in English to be rich enough that I can express the nuances and subtleties of my experience. However, I have often wondered around the idea of how my unconscious processes operate in a second language and whether the second language may be an obstacle at points of ‘regressing’ to early childhood experiences. There is literature especially drawing from the psychoanalytic tradition (for example see Lijtmaer, 2006), which suggests that there might be a comfort in the use of a second language which relates to a certain distancing that acts as defence against anxiety related feelings, that may have taken place in the native cultural and language context. Such concerns were less problematic when working with therapists that used expressive-arts media or body work and when in a group therapeutic setting, as I reflect upon below.

The most positive experiences in my therapy were in groups. One of the groups was run by two British female psycho-dramatists with a group of 8 women of diverse cultural backgrounds. In that group, the use of psychodrama (an approach using guided dramatic action) where group members were free to express themselves through ‘play’ which did not necessarily include language offered me a space where I did not experience myself as ‘different’; I saw myself and the other women in the group owning our individuality but also collaborating beyond our specific characteristics in the ‘group culture’ we were in, transcending our boundaries or differences and accessing areas of ourselves at a more collective, archetypal, universal level.
Another group I attended over several months was run by a female, mixed-raced counsellor of Afro-Caribbean background, again with women of diverse backgrounds in the local community. When attending this group run by a Black facilitator who was herself an immigrant, I found myself getting in touch with certain of my own characteristics of not belonging to a ‘dominant’ group. In my journal I wrote:

“I feel that the facilitator’s presence and the way she is challenging various attitudes is like a catalyst…and I do not think it is irrelevant to her being a Black lady. I feel inspired by her in many ways; I admire her resilience and her ability to voice so many things that are considered taboo, especially in that so-called multicultural English society. When with those women, our colour does not exist as an ‘issue’...and yet it is there...and actually celebrated or validated in overt or less overt ways” (personal diary)

In this section, I have used some examples to demonstrate some of my experiences of being a non-native client in the UK. In the next paragraphs, I will reflect on another amongst my multiple roles, that of a foreign researcher-writer.

2.7 Myself as a foreign researcher-writer

What does it mean for my research that I am from a different culture and that I am thinking and writing in a second language? What do I notice when observing my attitudes and ways of expression when amongst other fellow research students, natives and non-natives, in the environment of a prestigious British academic institution? What is the power of my voice and how does my cultural background and elements of my history affect my authorship, communication with the reader and any audience as well as my relationship to the thesis and the act of writing it?

On a number of occasions when attending a research seminar with peer researchers in counselling, I was told that I come across as confident in debating and expressing opinion. This reminds me of Koutsantoni’s (2005) research on Greek cultural characteristics and academic writing that draws attention to that as more general stance amongst Greek students, that is “a display of the Greeks’ love of freedom and their hard-fought-for right to speak one’s own mind” (p. 120). When reflecting on how I may be perceived by others, I have noticed that my ‘temporariness’ as a foreigner in a certain community might have contributed further to finding courage and freedom to ‘voice’.
As Reinharz (1997) puts it: “a ‘temporary’ person is someone the community knows in advance it will lose. Yet the temporary person has value as a stranger – a person who is exotic, can hear secrets and provide new perspective” (p. 13). It has often been the case that a fellow student has ‘confided’ in me something about their research or requested that I offer a different, maybe more ‘exotic’ to their eyes, perspective.

Writing a PhD thesis in a second language has not been problematic, in comparison to fellow non-native speaking students I have met. I would relate that to the fact that I have been immersed in the language at deeply nuanced levels in my counselling work and have had academic experiences in English prior to starting this PhD; however, what has sometimes felt upsetting has been the realisation that I would probably not feel ‘academically fluent’ enough if I was to write this thesis in my Greek mother tongue. There is discussion in the literature, as also noted earlier, around the relationship between language and identity (Heller, 1995). Li (2007) refers to those writers who have become bilingual as a result of crossing national borders as “the souls in exile” or “the global souls” and presents various aspects that contribute to this experience and state of being, which are both challenging and enriching. Feelings and identities alternate as one is switching languages; language seems to relate to power as it determines the linguistic resources, oral or written, available for use to express oneself in ways that go beyond fluency and extend to symbolic dimensions.

In discarding my native language in writing this thesis, I have sometimes felt a sense of committing a sort of ‘betrayal’ towards my own language and culture (Djebar, 2003), as if I have ‘forgotten’ my Greek mother tongue. I feel that the English language and culture ‘inhabit’ me and to some extent that feels uncomfortable, given that in my Greek cultural heritage there is such a long history of defending against numerous invasions, including linguistic ones. On the other hand, I have also felt a sense of freedom in researching and writing in a second language, as if I am ‘allowed’ to write in English in ways that better contain my emotional involvement in my topic due to my experiencing the English language as less emotional or ‘dramatic’ than Greek.

In the whole of this research, I have also come to realise that a lot of material associated with culture and cultural identity is unconscious or invisible (Weaver, 1998) and often wondered whether this may be difficult to access when operating bilingually. Ferre
(2003) argues that “in traversing linguistic borders, there is a real danger of finding yourself stranded in the connecting labyrinths of words, of losing contact with the spring of the unconscious from which ideas flow” (p. 138). When contemplating that view, I feel that as a therapist who was trained and has been practising in a second language, I am possibly more immersed in the semantics and symbolisms of language - hence, my regular dreaming in English when asleep - but have also allowed for other forms of expression in the research process (for example dreams, see methodology chapter). I have more or less ‘mastered the language’ (Lerner, 2002) I have ‘adopted’ but also remain open to being inevitably ‘corrected’. I would say that I experience some sort of cohabitation of the first and second language, the original and host culture, the person and the therapist, the practitioner and the researcher, in the hope that “the distress of being double and somewhat homeless is overshadowed by the glory of being hybrid and open” (Dorfman, 2003: 33). I am also conscious of striving towards a reconciliation of languages and reconstruction of my multiple identities in the process of my writing as a researcher (Li, 2007).

In the conduct of this research and the writing of this thesis, I have kept in mind that “to conduct qualitative research means to grapple with the problem of unconsciousness” (Walsh, 1996: 378). There is material that I may have not language for and this is why I also allow ‘metaphor’ to come into my way of experiencing and writing this piece and invite the reader to make their own associations. Also, in the process of writing this thesis, I have often experienced a resistance due to the impact of conducting a heuristic and highly autobiographical project, combined with any hidden dynamics of the phenomenon. I had to balance expressing what may be ‘beyond words’ and producing a wordy document as a PhD thesis. Such reflections reveal some of the challenges involved in heuristic studies. In writing this thesis and re-constructing my story, I found some ‘creative connections’ in relation to how significant processes of my ‘life script’ relate to the ‘thesis script’ and the heuristic research stages (see appendix A); those have provided me with a sense of continuity.
2.8 Postscript reflections on my ‘exposure’ and dimensions of expressing ‘voice’

In this section I reflected on various aspects of my family history and cultural background, as well as various educational, vocational, personal and social dynamics that contextualise my presence in this study and the research texts produced though my authorship. I have written this section as a backbone to the reflexive stance adopted rather than any indwelling into “self-absorption or narcissism” (Roberts, 2002: 13) and my wish is that my audience will welcome it as such. Although this section is not exhaustive in demonstrating my experience, it may be obvious to the reader that my sense of self as a person and how this operates in my professional counselling role has inevitably been influenced by my mobility and interaction with different cultures. I ‘confess’ that it has been my spiritual perspective towards life which has mostly assisted me in maintaining a self-centredness and relative balance, something that has anchored me at difficult times. Alongside that, I have encountered various challenges in my exposure to the ‘unknown’ and have witnessed many in a similar position to mine who chose to operate in ‘protean’ ways, in the sense that:

“Like the Greek God Proteus, one takes on whatever forms and qualities that a particular life situations demands. One juggles multiple roles, tries on different hats, different lives, forging selves whose unity is at best tentative and provisional, selves waiting to be dissolved into new combinations or even discarded for brand new editions when life changes and new challenges arise” (McAdams, 1997: 48)

As I am completing the writing of this chapter, I have a sense of relief and that another period of ‘stuckness’ has been overcome. In the writing process of my story, I started and stopped many times, due to the challenge of going ‘inwards’ to tap into this material and deciding what to include; I had to ‘stay with’ myself and my process, as I would have stayed with a client’s process. I was also privileged to have my supervisors’ ‘staying with’ me in similar ways. In their own words:

“If this stuckness can be held and seen as part of the process, as it is in a therapeutic relationship, the stuckness can be worked with, resulting in greater reflexivity and methodological adaptations or shifts. The strength of the counsellor in supervising research projects is apparent in staying with this stuckness as a process rather than seeing it as a failure and potential judgement on self or on the supervisee. From this point of view, such ‘stuckness’ can be welcomed in the same manner in which it is welcomed in the therapeutic process where is not seen as being incompetence but as
valuable information about the client or in this case the supervisee’s research process.” (Lennie & West, 2010: 85)

With that in mind, I now invite the reader to follow the part of the journey that relates to the methodological issues of this research project.
Chapter Three (3): Methodology

3.1 Introduction
3.2 First Steps of the Research
3.3 Beyond Research Question(s)?
3.4 Methodological Choices
   a. Epistemology and Ontology
   b. Heuristic Inquiry
   c. Auto-ethnography
3.5 Researcher Reflexivity
3.6 The Research Participants
3.7 The Experience of Research Interviewing
3.8 Summary of Data and Approach to Data Analysis
3.9 Ethical Considerations
3.10 Conclusion
3.1 Introduction

“Research is simultaneously an embodied, emotional, mindful and political activity” (Gray, 2008: 947)

Having shared with the reader the aspects of my personal background that influence my lens as researcher, I now intend to present and discuss the theoretical methodological underpinnings and the practical steps that shaped my study and my writing. The term ‘methodology’ derives from the Greek words method (met+hodos =‘way across’) and logos (= word, thought or speech). So in this section, I will talk about the ways across, the passages and steps of this research journey. I see those related to the following sections that I will discuss in turn:

- First Steps of the Research
- Beyond Research Question(s)?
- Methodological Choices
- Researcher Reflexivity
- The Research Participants
- The Experience of Research Interviewing
- Summary of Data and Approach to Data Analysis
- Ethical Considerations
- Conclusion

3.2 First steps of the Research

Grbich (2007) identifies four major areas for consideration at the beginning stages of qualitative research. Those are (p. 17):

- Frames and framing
- The position of power of the researcher
- The position of the reader
- Research design approaches

My understanding of those raised the following questions: what are the life experiences that frame my research choices and the lens through which I will interpret the data? What is my position in the research and which are the voices that will be brought in the
In the previous two chapters it is evident that the personal and academic interest in my topic started a long time before I registered as a PhD student. There has been an ongoing self-search for me as my move to the UK has been provoking ongoing changes. These related to my perception of my self, my personal and professional relationships, my sense of belonging and place in the world, my existential and spiritual quests, my counselling practice with diverse client groups, my worldview, mentality and my life as a whole. Before starting the PhD, I completed an MSc in Educational Research that informed and strengthened my research knowledge and skills, especially around integrating the researcher’s role in my counselling identity (Christodoulidi, 2006a). My MSc Dissertation was a heuristic study exploring practitioners’ perspectives of Spirituality and Culture in Counselling (Christodoulidi, 2006b). While undertaking this smaller scale research project, I experimented with applying the Heuristic paradigm developed by Moustakas (1990).

In the light of the findings of this research, based on data collected through the conduct of a focus group comprising participants with diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds, I realised that the concepts discussed were multidimensional, complex and subtle and I felt that a lot remained unsaid. In consulting my supervisor and peers I came to the conclusion that my heightened awareness around dynamics of culture stems from my experience of mobility and immersion in intercultural relationships. My research interest crystallised in attempting to explore the experience of therapists abroad and the effect of mobility upon their life and work. I decided that though I consider my personal experience as the main source of ‘data’, I would actively seek therapists that, like myself, have moved to train and/or found themselves living and practising in a host culture under certain criteria that I will present later on in this chapter.

### 3.3 Beyond Research Question(s)?

The aim of this study is to increase understanding of, honour and give voice to the experience of a therapist abroad, at both personal and professional level; to explore the possibility of finding ‘home’ and maintaining well being and competence when moving
between cultures and discovering ways that facilitate the possible process of integration and synthesis of cultural worlds within our multiple contemporary identities. It is obvious that “to start with, research questions inevitably arise from a personal position” (Dalos & Vetere, 2005: 19). I am somebody who embodies the experience I wish to explore further by reflecting on my own story and seeking others, with similar stories to illuminate further angles of a complex phenomenon. With such personal wonderings in mind, this study is intended to investigate the experiences of counsellors who undertake counselling training in a host culture and pursue a counselling career either by remaining in the host culture or choosing to return to their original one, encountering challenges as well as opportunities that such life career transitions in different cultural contexts entail. To maintain an exploratory perspective, I did not formulate a typical research question. A general question kept in mind was: what is the experience of a therapist in a ‘foreign country’? However, my point of departure has been finding the courage to trust that:

“Without the restraining leash of formal hypotheses, and free from external methodological structures that limit awareness or structure it, the one who searches heuristically may draw upon the perceptual powers afforded by…direct experience” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985: 44; Moustakas, 1990: 17)

My exploration would navigate across the challenges and opportunities faced by therapists who move, train and practise abroad; the potential interaction between a therapist’s working style, as formed through the experience of cross-cultural transition, and the given cultural attitudes to counselling; insights and implications for further development in counselling training, counsellors’ personal development and increased well-being, as well as effective supervision and support systems for this particular professional group. Such an exploratory focus could originate broader insights into the practice of counselling and psychotherapy given the challenge of the constant ‘geographical’ and ‘psychological’ mobility of our era. This stance was originally presented in my research proposal and approved by the Review Panel procedure at Manchester University. Based on that, I then designed the interview questions that I would use with participants (see Appendix B). In the following section, I will discuss how the nature of the topic and my own involvement are linked to the methodology drives of this research.
3.4 Methodological Choices

In journeying across both geographical and discursive boundaries and territories, I found myself wrestling with issues related to embarking on the lengthy and unknown journey of this research: *what are the maps I can study and take with me? Where shall I place my compass? - How can I have a sense of route or passage but also remain open to possible new territories and lands that may appear unexpectedly on the way?* In a research world of methodological pluralism underpinned by a wide range of different philosophical views, my hope has been to develop an open and flexible enquiring mind that engages with research with congruence, respect, ethical sensitivity and a spirit of collaboration in the exciting process of meaning-making and discovery. Parallel to my experience of crossing cultures and attempting to locate myself as a person/practitioner/researcher, my aim has been to “find a suitable methodological home to research from” (West, 1996). The imminent question has been: *how could I best approach the phenomenon in a way that is theoretically and pragmatically congruent to its nature?*

Numerous research studies have been undertaken in the field of counselling and psychotherapy, especially during the last 30 years, both quantitative and qualitative, or combination of the two (see, for example Lennie, 2004). Counselling and psychotherapy researchers appear to prefer qualitative approaches (McLeod, 1996b). Given the nature of this research project, quantitative methods would appear less facilitative of exploring complex and subtle dimensions in my topic (Mertova, 2007). In contrast, it is qualitative approaches that are suitable for approaching “individuals’ perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, views and feelings” (Hakim, 2000, p. 34). Various writers have presented various categorisations and explanations of qualitative research paradigms (for example, see Higgs, 2001); I understand qualitative research as dedicated to the study of the processes involved in human meaning making.

In the context of rapid changes in cultural and social compositions and dynamics in today’s societies, I see the ideas underlying a stance of objectivity are largely shattered. In this study, I could not draw from any approach that operates from objective positions that are associated with reliability, generalisability, quantifiability; such concepts imply
that something can be tested and give the same results at all times, under certain conditions. The experience I am exploring is subjective aiming at understanding the unique meanings of human experience. I will now briefly comment on my epistemological and ontological understandings as a researcher.

a. Epistemology and Ontology

“One thing only I know, and that is that I know nothing” – Socrates

The philosophical debate around the question of ‘What is Truth?’ goes back at least to the pre-Socratic Philosophers of Ancient Greece and has been occupying the thinkers, researchers, and different professional communities of all eras. There is an inter-connection between ontology, epistemology and methodology which, according to McLeod (2001: 55) is represented in terms of the following three questions:

- The ontological question: What are the assumptions that form the nature of reality?
- The epistemological question: What is the relationship between the knower and would-be-knower and that which is to be known?
- The methodological question: How can the inquirer discover or get to know what he/she believes can be known?

As a counsellor, I am listening to people’s stories that are ‘true’ for them and I see my role as a companion to their journey towards healing the aspects of self, life and relationships that are inhibiting them from living authentically. This perspective also underpins my stance as researcher; I agree with Reason’s (1981:10) assertion that “…the purpose of human inquiry is not so much the search for truth but to heal, and above all to heal the alienation, the split that characterizes modern experience” (p.10)

The positions of ‘insider’- ‘outsider’ or ‘native’ – ‘foreigner’ are at the core of the topic of this research, and here I find the links to my positionality in terms of methodological choices. Even if I have constantly felt that my position in-the-world is out of place, my position in relation to this research is in place, as within the inquiry. In a postmodern era
knowledge and practice are studied as local rather than developing theories that can be
generalised, and they are situationally embedded (Geertz, 1983). There has been a kind
of paradigm change (Kuhn, 1960) or a change of knowledge culture (Somers, 1996)
which has allowed for a more ‘subjective’ or ‘cultural’ turn in methodological
perspectives; personal and social voices with attributed meanings have gained greater
prominence (Ellis, 1999; Chamberlayne et al, 2000). In this research topic the concepts
of what is local or universal are questioned due to the mobility of the researcher and the
informants. What was previously invisible becomes more visible due to the effects of
cross-cultural transitions that may serve as bridge between self and culture (McLeod,
1997).

Flick (1998) summarises the various qualitative research approaches as oriented
towards three main positions:

- The tradition of symbolic interactionism (concerned with studying subjective
  meanings)
- Ethnomethodology (describing the how in the making of social reality)
- Structuralist or psychoanalytic positions (starting from processes of
  psychological or social unconsciousness)

Ontologically speaking, rather than getting lost in juxtapositions and methodological
rivalries, I will borrow the Aristotelian concept of mimesis\(^8\) to explain how I view
meaning making as a mimetic process where there is production of a symbolic world.
According to Gebauer and Wulf (1995):

“The individual ‘assimilates’ himself or herself to the world via mimetic processes.
Mimesis makes it possible for individuals to step out of themselves, to draw the
outer world into their inner world, and to lend expression to their interiority. It
produces a proximity to objects and is thus a necessary condition of understanding” (p.2-3)

In the context of the topic the ‘stepping out’ of familiar comfort zones and cultural
contexts is what makes the cultural norms take a more symbolic form; also the self that
is often ‘conditioned’ by those becomes inevitably more visible when looked at from

\(^8\) originally understood in Greek as ‘imitation of nature’
‘afar’. To express the mobile and mobilising function of the mimetic, meaning making process, Ricoeur (1981) clarifies that ‘mimesis, which seems to me less shut in, less locked up, and richer in polysemy, hence more mobile and mobilising for a sortie out of the representative illusion’ (p. 15)

The epistemological assumption I hold is that knowledge is not value-free but is affected by social and cultural perceptions of reality; the process of inviting it into awareness is what makes the inquirer discover their own voice. Therefore, my starting point, compass and place of retreat where I evaluate and make sense of what is discovered in my research is my ‘tacit knowing’9. I recognise the need to have the freedom to move beyond strict paradigm restrictions (Brew, 1998) but still have a methodological framework that would allow me to explore the ambiguity, fluidity, subtlety and complexity of my personal story, the participants’ experience and the blurred boundaries of a phenomenon that has mobility and transitions at its core. I trust that “it is surely the issue of letting the phenomenon guide the method of data collection and voicing the position of the researcher that can develop the validity and reliability in the results that we obtain” (Lennie & West, 2010).

In all the above, I pay attention to the fact that “being strongly religious about a favoured position gives limited space for reflexivity” (Alvesson & Scoldberg, 2000, p. 285). Therefore, I acknowledge that in reflexive contexts it is not possible to maintain a strict ontological and epistemological position. In the following paragraphs, I will argue for Heuristic Inquiry and Auto-ethnography as convergent methodological compasses and anchors for this type of research journey.

b. Heuristic Inquiry

“Through exhaustive self-search, dialogues with others and creative depictions of experience, a comprehensive knowledge is generated, beginning as a series of subjective musings.” Douglass & Moustakas (1985)

9 A term attributed to M. Polanyi (1974) who describes it as the hidden understanding that influences our actions without any pre-requisite ability to explicitly express what this knowledge exactly is.
Heuristic Research is a qualitative, post-modern paradigm, developed by Clark Moustakas (1990, 1994) suggesting an inquiry that is perspective-seeking rather than truth-seeking. Inspired by Polanyi’s (1969) tenets and unlike most qualitative approaches that seek to minimise the impact of the researcher on what is researched, Moustakas brings the researcher’s own experience into sharper focus and shifts the emphasis of the inquiry from the external to internal world. Through discerning involvement with the topic, the researcher becomes a reflexive participant, creator and conductor of reaching a point of understanding through synthesis. As rigorously discussed by West (1998, 2004) heuristics appears congruent with counselling and psychotherapy as disciplines who operate from positions of seeking to understand the self, human nature and relationships.

A key feature of heuristic research is the willingness of the researcher to become fully immersed in the inquiry, which aims at leading a depth of insight and understanding of the meaning inherent in the experience investigated. Given this kind of engagement, it bears close relationship with reflexive ethnography (Davies, 2008) and auto-ethnography (Coffey, 1999; Muncey, 2010). Heuristic inquiry is particularly pertinent in this study because “the involvement of the researcher in the process yields valuable data” (West, 2001, p.130). The ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ are not perceived in a dichotomy but rather connected with each other at a collective level, in the sense that:

“The heuristic process is autobiographical, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social – and perhaps universal – significance” (Moustakas, 1990: 15).

Moustakas (1990) discusses seven principles that are inherent in heuristic inquiry as follows:

1. Identify with the focus of the inquiry
2. Self-dialogue
3. Tacit knowing
4. Intuition
5. In-dwelling
6. Focusing
7. Internal Frame of Reference

I see my research process in terms of those principles as follows: the focus of my inquiry is my personal lived experience of being a counsellor who moved to live, train and practise abroad with all the challenges and opportunities that such an experience entails.
My mobility brought my identity in question and, together with my counselling training and practice encouraged my self-dialogue. I came in touch with my feelings resulting from the experience at an embodied level. It is this tacit knowing that is ‘bridged’ or ‘arched’ into conscious awareness through intuition (trusting any intuitive clues offered to me by paying attention to embodied felt sense, moments of inspiration and synchronous events), indwelling (my turning inwards though meditation, staying with attentive gaze at what appears difficult, interesting and persistent) and focusing (acquiring a relaxed and receptive state during which there is a process of de-cluttering of anything that gets in the way of seeing what really is). As a result, the medium or base where the emerging knowledge appears is in the internal frame of reference where there is an empathic understanding (Rogers, 1951) towards both personal and participants’ experience viewed from within.

As a starting point Moustakas (1990: 11) highlights that ‘my primary task is to recognise whatever exists in my consciousness as a fundamental awareness to receive and accept it, and then to dwell on its nature and possible meanings’. My questions around where my position in the world is, personally and professionally, find a ‘home’ in the heuristic paradigm, which allows fluidity not only to exist but also be a source of valuable knowledge. And in my finding the courage to engage in such a process, whilst recruiting others to share their own stories, my hope has been that those experiences would illuminate important insights for others. Heuristic methodology appears compatible with the topic in how it connects the personal with the social and the cultural, emphasising the significance of personal experience in an era where identity, belonging and inter- as well as intra- relationships appear to be in flux.

Moustakas (1990) outlines six basic phases in heuristic research; those are summarised below (Table adapted by author in Christodoulidi, 2006b: p. 34):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.</th>
<th>SIX PHASES TO HEURISTIC RESEARCH</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial Engagement</strong></td>
<td><em>The process of clarifying what it is to be researched by engaging in a self dialogue that allows the research question/s to emerge</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immersion</strong></td>
<td><em>The stage where the researcher actually ‘lives’ the question of inquiry in all interactions/events of everyday life</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incubation</strong></td>
<td><em>The stage where the researcher ‘retreats’ from the intense focus of the question to allow tacit, intuitive and often unconscious processing of the research</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illumination</strong></td>
<td><em>The stage where the researcher achieves new insight or the correction of insufficient understanding.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explication</strong></td>
<td><em>The stage where the researcher is fully examining what has emerged</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creative Synthesis</strong></td>
<td><em>The stage where the researcher brings together not only the data but also, crucially, the inner reality of his/her process. The synthesis may be expressed in narrative, in other creative forms or in a mixture of forms.</em></td>
</tr>
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</table>

I agree with West (2001) that although those stages may be suggestive of a linear passage from one to the next, this is not necessarily accurate. In undertaking this study, I became ‘mobile’ moving between those stages numerous times. As highlighted by Braud and Anderson (1998), in contrast to the positivist approach that *describes, explains, predicts* and *controls*, the heuristic approach *describes, understands, and appreciates* (p. 26, italics in original). It is this understanding and appreciation that I am aiming to reach as well as reaching out to the transpersonal dimension that, within a topic that is characterised by multiple binaries and contradictions, amongst else, *interconnects, awakens, transcends* and *transforms* (ibid: 26).

My *initial engagement* with the topic started before embarking this academic study, when I moved abroad in my ‘Odyssey’ to the unknown. The formal engaging in research allowed for full *immersion*, where everything in my personal, academic and professional life was linked to the research. I had numerous encounters with people, readings, activities, travels, and everyday ‘synchronicities’ that consumed my time, energy, thoughts and feelings. On occasions, intervals were taken to allow for *incubation*, during which the books, transcripts, dialogues were deliberately put aside to retreat from the intense focus. There were periods when I decided to physically remove myself from the context of the research and not only symbolically but also literally retreat myself through travelling abroad. However, it was inevitable that further processes were triggered through exposure to different cultures where the ‘researcher’s eye’ could not help noticing all that was relevant to my inquiring gaze. So, moments of new immersion, incubation and *illumination* took place simultaneously. Activities such
as meditation or dialogue or reading allowed for periods of explication which gradually led to creative synthesis, resulting in the process of writing this Thesis. The reality of my mobility made me also an ethnographer of not only the cultures I found myself literally and psychologically speaking, but also an ethnographer of my inner territory. This is where I see myself as an auto-ethnographer who is undertaking the heuristic journey, something that I will discuss below.

c. Auto-ethnography

Ethnographic research is widely used in anthropology and the social sciences but less so in counselling and psychotherapy (McLeod, 2001). The narrative approaches typical of ethnography have shifted towards facilitating a more personal point of view by emphasizing reflexivity and personal voice (Mykhalovskiy, 1996; Tierney & Lincoln, 1997). Auto-ethnography is part of this methodological trend that Denzin and Lincoln (1994) have identified as the fifth moment in the history of qualitative research. In auto-ethnography, the researcher is not trying to become an insider in the research setting. He or she, in fact, is the insider, the context is his or her own. My understanding is that, in that respect, auto-ethnography and heuristics converge.

A definition of the term reveals that auto-ethnography is ‘auto (self) ethno (culture) graphy (presentation of the self within the culture)’ (Grbich, 2007: 56). According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), auto-ethnography is defined as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 73). This is relevant to the nature of this study where I am attempting to explore such layers and make such connections.

Heavily autobiographical research has been criticised in terms of two major perceived drawbacks: a. for being seen as ‘self-indulgent’ and ‘narcissistic’ (Rosaldo, 1993; Holt, 2003) and b. for representing a Western literary genre based on individualistic values that tend to be linear and bound to goal-oriented interpretations as to what makes a meaningful life experience (Cohen, 1992). I would challenge those views by explaining that my embodied knowledge of the dynamics involved in my inquiry may have facilitated the emergence of hidden and controversial meanings that would potentially be inaccessible. I admit that I have been constantly aware that I am occupying a ‘dual role’ in the research, i.e. the researcher and the researched (Grbich, 2007). But, the
mission became for me to overcome the muteness and find that voice, as explained by Meekums (2006: 287):

“The text of autoethnographic writing does not feature the traditional distanced researcher, but is written in the first person, highlighting stories of relationships and emotions affected by social and cultural frameworks. Researcher subjectivity is seen as a legitimate lens for examination of social and cultural phenomena, rather than a voice to be exorcised”

From the beginning of my PhD, I have been keeping a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as a repository of ideas, a medium for attempting to express and externalise my inner dialogue and use it as heuristic data, both in my own self-search and my relevant debating with peers. There I perceived that my understanding of autoethnography is taking heuristics a step ahead in that besides taking into account the researcher’s own experiencing, it also locates this experience in some understanding of ‘field’ or culture. What is the central state of being and operating in such a research approach is developing researcher reflexivity. In the following paragraphs, I am inviting the reader to witness how I acquired such a position in the context of this study.

3.5 Researcher Reflexivity

As a qualitative enquirer, I explained the ways in which I engage with the material in multiple roles, sometimes in transition (see Christodoulidi, 2006a). How I make sense of the literature and the participants’ accounts depends on my values, hopes and history (Kincheloe, 2003) which ‘inject a host of assumptions’ (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, it appears essential to be monitoring the process of the researcher’s reflexivity (Etherington, 2004; Finley & Cough, 2003) and the placing of the researcher’s self in the research (Lewis, 2001). According to Etherington (2004: 36), “reflexivity is more than self-awareness in that it creates a dynamic process if interaction with and between ourselves and our participants, and the data that inform decisions, actions and interpretations at all stages of the research”. Finlay (2003) makes a distinction between reflection and reflexivity as follows:

The concepts are perhaps best viewed on a continuum. Reflection can be understood as ‘thinking about’ something (an object). The process is a more distanced one and takes place after the event. Reflexivity, by contrast, involves a more immediate, continuing dynamic and subjective self-awareness (p. 108)
Cutcliffe (2003) discusses bias, unconsciousness and other ‘problematic’ areas of reflexive approaches to research and argues for the need for what he calls “greater intellectual entrepreneurship”, explained as the researcher’s active attitude of taking the risk of being bold. I see myself holding those tensions and seeking ways of bringing the tacit knowledge and intuition to the fore. It is true that I cannot produce arguments or be reflexive with unconscious material but I strive towards transparency around the experiences and positions which I am conscious of, as revealed in the process (Mantzoukas, 2005).

My responsibilities as a researcher adopting a reflexive stance are vividly demonstrated by Patton (2002, p: 66) and are summarised as follows (Christodoulidi, 2006 - as adopted by Lennie, 2005):

**Fig 3: Reflexive screens and researcher’s responsibilities**

My ability to be reflexive as a researcher was facilitated and sharpened through constant dialogue with my supervisors, peers and fellow researchers. There was a particular ongoing dialogue with a fellow student that led me to construct a reflexive questionnaire (see Appendix C) that I presented at a Research conference held in Manchester (July 2008). This framework shows that the researcher is in relationship with the PhD research, in all its dimensions: the concepts of the topic itself, the data, and the
participants in the study, the research process, the supervision received and personal support systems in place as well as the work in practice.

To be able to monitor my process, I also found it useful to acquire the perspective of the internal supervisor (Casement, 1985; Foskett and Lyall, 1988), the state of inner observer that I have learnt to operate from when sitting on the counsellor’s or counselling supervisor’s chair in my practice. Towards the end of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} year of this study, I used this questionnaire to monitor my process and wrote in my journal:

“I feel a need to ‘unlock’ my creativity and gain some perspective of the research process. I wish I could visualise my Thesis, as a way of starting to shape it - like the archaeologist who attempts to assemble a broken vase or the architect who puts the scaffolding in place” (May 2008)

Following that, I found creative flow through a dream that led me to find both containment and creative expression. Below I am reflecting on this process:

**What would this PhD Thesis look like? - A dream…**

“In heuristic investigations, I may be entranced by visions, images, and dreams that connect me to my quest” (Moustakas, 1990: 13)

In that dream I was sitting with my supervisor in his office where he was advising me to start writing the methodology chapter. In conversing about the shape of the Thesis, an image of a woman with drawers across her body appeared in my internal screen. When I woke up, I went to the library to search for art books where I remembered the art piece by Salvador Dali about the *Venus de Milo with drawers*. The dream was an expression of a heuristic illumination phase. When I looked at this image I felt that this is how I experienced myself and my Thesis, when beginning to write this chapter. Here is the image:
The original Aphrodite of Melos\textsuperscript{10}, by which Dali was inspired for the \textit{Venus de Milo with Drawers} is also ‘mis-placed’ away from its original Greek culture. The drawers that are half open echo the sense of fragmentation I often feel in my own chest, when asking the question of where I belong. Many parts in me that seem to reside in different cultures, different languages and often felt as a no-place or no-language. There is also the desire to be whole in ‘one piece’, carrying the different parts (drawers) together; hence the emergence of such a metaphor image in my dream expressed with a personification (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) that offers a sense of coherence. Looking at these drawers, I connect with the archaeologist in me.

The archaeologist is digging in the soil to discover fragments that need re-assembling to reproduce the object that came to pieces in the ground. Similarly to the archaeologist re-assembling a pot, the researcher faces the challenge to synthesise all the material and knowledge. Intrigued by what appeared in my dream being the typically English piece of furniture, the ‘chest of drawers’, I see connections, in my own internal experience of

\textsuperscript{10}\textit{Discovered in 1820 is the island of Melos in Greece, when still under the Ottoman Empire, it was shipped to France by a French Diplomat (Kousser, 2005). It is displayed at the Louvre Museum in Paris.}
the methodological threads that weave though this Thesis, between the anatomical
gut/chest feelings of tacit knowledge and the organising/archiving that can be located in
the piece of furniture. One could argue that this art piece appears to have some
psychoanalytic references, with the half opened drawers implying some link to the
unconscious realm.

The fact that the image of my Thesis is represented in an embodied way, also echoes my
own need to be embedded and embodied, as a way of containment that relates to both
topic and research process. In that sense I understand the body as “a site of inscription
and performance of identity” (Fortier, 2000:171) or “a point of overlapping between the
physical, the symbolic and the sociological” (Braidotti, 1994: 5). Elizabeth Grosz (1994)
presents the body as a threshold concept: “the body is neither – while also being both –
the private or the public; self or other; natural or cultural; physical or social;
instinctive or learned; genetically or environmentally determined” (p. 23). Throughout
the PhD years, my body has expressed various symptoms and changes that I do not see
as irrelevant to the research process. Additionally, at various points I became both
mobile and immobile – in my need for dwelling and settlement, not only at a personal
level but also the need for ‘finding home’ for my research. If I extend this insight
further, I can see the links with the existential questions that are brought within the
counselling room, seeking to cross some border or make change.

I have argued that my research as a whole and the writing of this Thesis is an embodied
reflexive experience; by this statement I am not emphasising the body-mind split but am
acknowledging my body and the metaphors and images that occurred in that form as
agents in understanding and ‘de-mystifying’ the research process (Boyd, 2007). I
believe that the emergence of a piece of furniture in my dream could be seen as some
form of transitional object that connects us to space. For people whose life is mobile,
furniture is significant in the sense that it may assist the creation of a sense of comfort
or nesting, even if it is temporary. During the years I have been living abroad, I had to
keep my possessions to the minimum and those that I did own had to be easily portable.
This piece of furniture expressed my need for structure and organising my thoughts in
drawers, as an archivist would do. By staying with this image, I moved from the
furniture to the architecture of this Thesis, writing this methodology chapter as the
beginning point in order to have a secure base to continue with the scaffolding.

Contemplating the above, I wrote the following poem:

**Chest of Drawers**

*Am looking at my chest  
My inner core  
Am trying to rest  
My feet feel s(h)ore*

*Am wandering around  
A writer in quest  
The world is so round  
Am looking for my nest*

*My furniture is boxed  
I want it in display  
My drawers seem locked  
And am about to play*

*I want to tell the method  
To anchor you in my port  
To find the words off record  
To touch your inner chord*

*I put the words in drawers  
Each chapter has its place  
I leave aside my quarrels  
To write at my own pace*

*My chest is full of drawers  
They’re open and convey  
I trust you in my corners  
And as we meet I pray*

(Manchester, September 2008)

Having shared this reflexive process, I wish to highlight the difference between *data-driven* studies and *insight-driven* studies of qualitative research (Alvesson & Scoldberg, 2000). This is a rather *insight-driven* study where my position has been to encourage, allow and witness emergence of understandings of the aspects of the phenomena, through self dialogue, my dialogue with the literature and my own experiencing, as well as in conversations with others. My compass has been to pay attention to what is communicated and conveyed in a concrete as well as in a subtle manner but also to
develop “the very ability to break away from a frame of reference and to look at what it is not capable of saying” (ibid. p. 246, italics by the authors). Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) uses the phrase ‘insight gathering’ instead of ‘data collection’. This term feels more compatible with my approach, although the word ‘gathering’ implies that something is visible and gets collected; therefore I saw the process more as resembling an act of midwifery.

Although this study is heavily auto-biographical, I have chosen to dialogue with others who share similar experiences, as a way of illuminating areas that have slipped my awareness. When appropriate, I have permitted self-disclosure on my part to elicit relevant disclosure in the dialogue (Jourard, 1968). Moustakas (1990) uses the word ‘interview’ in inverted commas to emphasise more the dialogical/conversational form they take rather than the question-answer approach that takes place in other methodological paradigms. In the light of the above explanations:

1. Instead of data collection, my approach is more of an ‘insight midwifery’
2. Instead of interviewees, I see the research participants as ‘fellow travellers’ (I will also use the word ‘participants’ to acknowledge their taking part in such a journey of research in a participatory way)
3. Instead of interview, I see the recorded encounters more as ‘inter-views’ (Kvale, 1996) or ‘conversations’ or ‘dialogues’

So, who are those ‘fellow travellers’?

3.6 The Research Participants

Although my starting point has been indwelling in personal experience, my curiosity as well as interest was focused on exploring how such experience has been for others in a similar position. Given that such study is original together with the fact that I would face practical problems in physically finding participants for face-to-face interviews in a specific location, we came to a co-decision with my supervisors that I would be opportunistic in finding participants, allowing for a broad spectrum in terms of which countries they came from or moved to. I identified informants through personal contacts and ‘snowballing’ (Tolich and Davidson, 1999) originally in the UK and Greece where I could be more easily geographically present. I also sought opportunities for dialogue
at international conferences I attended, or when travelling during the PhD years. In order to capture the whole spectrum of the experience, I actively sought some participants who have returned to their original culture after living and practising abroad. That proved practically possible with Greek repatriate therapists, who I call ‘returnee’ participants. I chose the interviewees based on the following selection criteria:

1. Participants should have had substantial experience of being practising therapists, with a training background in counselling, psychotherapy, psychology or a combination of those but with a professional training component. This could have been in any therapeutic modality so that the ‘culture of therapy’ is also explored and reflected upon. They shall have had all or significant parts of their professional training and practice in a country different than their original one, preferably in a second language.

2. They should have been abroad for more than 2 years. This was based on the idea that they shall have had enough time in a foreign country so that they can reflect on the experience beyond the early stages of what is described as initial ‘culture shock’. They shall have immigrated at an adult age and be in a position to describe their moving abroad as voluntary.

3. They shall be able to conduct the interview in English as our common, shared language of communication. Greek participants had the option of Greek language, if preferred.

Those criteria allowed for not too strictly defined boundaries around selection to allow for presenting the variations of the experience. I am not aiming at producing ‘expert knowledge’ but rather at reaching a point of new departures around meanings that are still evolving for those therapists ‘on the move’. Also, for relevant discourses and debates around meetings of cultures in understandings and practices of counselling and psychotherapy in an increasingly globalised and mobile canvas.

During a period of over a year, I conducted 23 interviews. I followed the natural flow of the study and stopped when I recognised that the interviews were generating enough data to be handled within my timeframe and paying attention to the danger that I could
potentially have “too much to handle in a meaningful way” (Kvale, 1996, 178). Nearly half the participants were of common cultural background as my own. I argue that this does not necessarily equate with common experience or perspective. I wish to acknowledge though the importance of the fact that “how we represent and account for others’ experiences is intimately related to who we are, and the connections need to be spelled out” (Bolak, 1997: 96). Although I did not have any personal connection with any of those Greek participants prior to our dialogues, I thought it was an obvious observation that the reader would make that needed that ‘spelling out’. This was mainly for two reasons: a. Greek participants were accessible to me geographically speaking b. there was a good reason for attempting to reach a deep level of reflexivity in my own bi-culturalism and bi-lingualism in relation to my personal identity and professional role through engaging with those ethnically ‘fellow’ colleagues. I also wanted to see if there was any difference in the research relationship due to the shared cultural background and “rethinking the familiar” (Reinharz, 1994).

The remaining 12 participants included an English and a Belgian living and working in Greece as their host culture; a Mexican, an Austrian, a Dutch, and an Indian living and working in the UK as their host culture; a Brazilian living and working in Canada; a mixed-race Anglo/African living and working in Canada; a Canadian living and working in South India; an English living and working in Germany and an English living and working in Belgium. To ensure their anonymity, I have used random pseudonyms and also slightly altered some of their demographic information, while maintaining though what is significant for the meaning making process. Some of their basic characteristics that contextualise their backgrounds in terms of gender, age group, original culture, host culture, years of professional practice, professional training, modality and area/setting of work are summarised in the table in Appendix D.
3.7 The Experience of Research Interviewing

“…the interviewer is a traveller on a journey to a distant country that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home” (Kvale, 1996: 4)

Rubin and Rubin (1995) describe interviews in qualitative research as “wonderfully unpredictable” (p.7). In my finding my way towards approaching the interviews and becoming aware of how my approach is influenced by the cultures within me, I conducted two initial interviews – with a Greek and a non-Greek in the UK - that I considered as pilot interviews. Both interviews were conducted in English and in those I could get a flavour of how much is assumed around the binaries of insider-outsider and similar-different. What the three of us shared was that we were all ‘foreigner therapists’ in the UK host culture for a few years, expressing ourselves in English as second language. In those pilots, I monitored how my two cultures operated within. Was I listening to the Greek interviewee in a different way than the Non-Greek? To what extent could I allow space beyond what may be commonly ‘assumed’ when interviewing the Greek colleague? What was triggering my attention during the interview with the non-Greek colleague and why? Here is an extract from my research journal that captures some of those tensions during that stage:

“I can see that when listening to the Greek participant, I have several ‘cultural scripts’ being activated. With the non-Greek participant, I hold a more ‘curious’ attitude. That is similar to when working with clients and needs to be kept in awareness. The roles and level of responsibility is of different nature; however the assumptions held may operate in similar ways” (Summer 2007)

In lengthy discussions with my research supervisor, I was being reassured and advised that I shall embrace all those questions and anxieties and treat them as data in their own right. I was encouraged to stay with the ‘unknown’ and the ‘liminal’ because these are states that are at the core of the experience of ‘leaving home’ and being in ‘foreign’ spaces. Usually research projects are viewed through the lens of a specific context. But what could be the context of my research since the context was changing through the mobility across cultures? I kept ‘normalising’ my anxiety and the demands of keeping continuously reflexive upon these questions by reminding myself that, at least in the clear context of my field:
“Both reflexivity and liminality and the interplay between them seem particularly pertinent to counselling research and practice, wherein we are continuously engaging in the spaces between that which is known and that which is not yet known” (Speedy, 2008: 28)

The two pilot interviews and the earlier Focus Group study have clearly revealed that my focus of inquiry is a complex one, presenting difficulty in finding the words to describe it. So, contemplating on how I would engage the participants in a process of tapping into their experience, I posed questions that would facilitate their narrative, offering some gateways that were more tangible. The interviews lasted from one hour to one and a half hours and were recorded, each producing a 14-20 pages transcript. The interview language was English. Our common threads were the experience of cultural mobility and the fact that we shared the same (or similar) professional group that uses a certain vocabulary - although when constructs drawn from one particular modality were mentioned, there was awareness of potentially different understandings too. What I learned from that is that how the researcher pre-defines the language used as a vehicle for the area of investigation is crucial. I wanted to acquire a manner where “the respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms” (Patton, 1990: 290).

Whenever I travelled from the UK to conduct interviews in my country of origin, I found myself feeling like ‘a “native” returning to a foreign country’. This is similarly described by Lal (1996: 192)), a south Asian woman who went to her native India to conduct her fieldwork during her postgraduate studies in the US, finding herself re-examining her own identity when sensing such a ‘dislocation even within the space that I had thought of as home’ (ibid.: 193). I noticed that I was trying to hold my own cultural ‘agenda’ and script into awareness; the more confident I was becoming as researcher and interviewer, the more I could embrace the fact that there are dynamics of power being activated between myself, the topic in its social, political and professionalism embedded-ness and the interviewees. The politics of my research are very subtle and not recognisable at first glance. Firstly, there seem to be inherited and collective dynamics of power in relation to what are the cultures that each participant is coming from or has moved to. For example, when a participant has moved from a culture that was colonised in the past by the culture that he or she moved to, this ‘victim’ position or ‘idealising’ the ‘powerful’ one may be in the background. As
highlighted by Sands & Krumer-Nevo (2006: 952), “interviews take place in a political context in which the contents of the conversation, the attributes of the participants, and the meanings that are constructed may or may not be aligned with privileged narratives”.

Additionally, there are dynamics of power in terms of the politics of the profession. For example, counselling psychologists appear to have more status than counsellors due to tradition. When a therapist moves abroad, such subtle dynamics may be reinforced, depending on the status or recognition of the profession in the given cultural contexts he/she moves from and to. Therefore, I strove towards acquiring sensitivity related to potential differential power dynamics in the relationship with interviewees, affected by class, gender, ethnicity, race, age and professional status. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) rigorously discuss the ‘power asymmetry’ in qualitative research interviews and advise researchers to be aware. To enhance my reflexivity I also deliberately volunteered for research interviews of other doctoral researchers. This gave me insight into and understanding of the experience of being an interviewee.

My interview style and manner inevitably drew from my Rogerian training that is the basis of my humanistic philosophy as a counsellor, although the research interviewer role and purpose is distinctively different. However, during the years of my supervised practice, I have developed a more integrative approach which is influenced by psychodynamic and transpersonal concepts and principles. For example, phenomena of transference and counter-transference were useful to explore throughout my research, something I will comment on in other chapters.

What I found most challenging was that although my questions were posed in a simple way, they involved underlying levels of experience that may be withheld or not easily articulated. I realised that what I sensed was not being said, was also ‘data’ about the phenomenon and the interaction. Towards the end of most interviews, the interviewee shared their puzzlement around how they have never or rarely addressed such an issue which is so central to their life and work. Most said that the interview felt as if was only the beginning of something they needed to explore further, probably in personal therapy or supervision. This was a confirmation and relief to my frustration as it reminded me
of Kvale’s (1996) note that one of the effects of a well-conducted qualitative interview shall be that it leads the interviewee to some new insight even if this relates to raising more questions rather than answers or concrete understandings. The interviewer-as-traveller is in a journey that “might instigate a process of reflection that leads the traveller to new ways of self-understanding, as well as uncovering previously taken-for-granted values and customs in the traveller’s home country” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 48-49). What follows is informing the reader about how I approached analysis of the material.

3.8 Summary of Data and Approach to Data Analysis

“Qualitative researchers deal with, and revel in, confusing, contradictory, multifaceted data records, rich accounts of experience and interaction” (Richards, 2005: 3)

I will begin by summarising what constitutes the “field texts” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) of this research:

1. My personal story and experience as recorded in my personal diary and research journal
2. The Initial Focus Group and Pilot interviews at the stages of preparing for the study
3. 23 recorded conversations
4. Any further dialogue with interviewees, fellow research students and professional peers as well as my research supervisors, recorded in email exchanges or my reflexive writings
5. Any creative or unconscious processes that occurred in vivid dreams, poetry or art form

Looking at this material, the immanent question was how to handle it in a way that would facilitate the emergence and comprehensive organising of meanings. In some respects, beginning the analysis is like standing at the entrance of a maze; several different paths are readily apparent at the beginning, and as you continue, additional paths and choices emerge. Traditionally, in qualitative research there has been the tendency to fragment data by using code and retrieve methods (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). However, I found myself being drawn into the approach suggested by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) supporting the principle of “working with the whole data and
paying attention to links and contradictions within that whole” (p.5). But to be able to view the whole, I had to also ‘get to know’ the data in more detail and establish a relationship with it, keeping in mind that “Data don’t speak for themselves. We have to goad them into saying things” (Turner, 1993 – unpublished lecture).

Each dialogue was voice-recorded and transcribed. I collaborated with a transcriber to produce the transcripts; she acted as an agent for triangulation (Patton, 2002; Golafshani, 2003) and another ‘eye’ in my research that, through dialogue, advanced my reflexivity (see Appendix E). The six phases of heuristic research by Moustakas (1990) that were explained earlier in this chapter are also to be adopted in analysis of heuristic projects. Boyd (2008) discusses the question of how relevant the ideas of a deductive (from the general to the specific) or inductive approach (from the specific to the general) to data analysis can be in heuristic projects and uses the ‘beach comber’ metaphor to highlight the inevitability of the researcher picking up from the data what resonates as interesting at a given point in time, as one would pick up pebbles or shells from a beach. For reasons of transparency, I summarise below the steps I took in analysing the data.

With each interview transcript or any other text I produced reflexively, I:

**Step 1:** Read through the document to get an idea about the content as whole

**Step 2:** took a highlighter pen and underlined anything that appeared substantial in meaning

**Step 3:** read again the document and took notes in the margins around themes and concepts or words that held key ideas; this happened several times and at different periods of my heuristic immersion

**Step 4:** identified ‘meaning threads’ of experience, either related to the questions posed or as they emerged in each individual’s story and took notes of relevant verbatim quotes
Step 5: ‘suspended’ the active process for a day or few days or periods of time to allow for heuristic incubation

Step 6: re-read the document and highlighted new insights or reflected upon what was already given attention - heuristic illumination.

Step 7: wrote individual depictions in 4-6 pages (similar to the exemplary portraits) where, through explication I ‘teased out layers of meaning’ in the narratives. Following that and at unexpected times that occurred naturally, expressions of creative synthesis occurred in different forms.

I used thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) that allowed me to determine the themes in different ways, paying attention to keeping consistent. The topic and my relationship with it have been so intrinsically driven by the process of surrender that it was the ‘inner data analysis’ (West, 2004) that did ‘justice to the complexities of our interrelatedness and interconnectedness’ (p.132) in such areas of inquiry.

Together with working with the themes and patterns, I also became aware of some more unique accounts being expressed, given that some participants were unique in their context or the particular cultures that were relevant to their story. Also, I allowed space for images or symbols to emerge that often contain powerful meanings (Ryan, 1999). I kept anchoring my understandings in remembering that “it is difficult to describe the heartbeat of heuristic inquiry in words alone – so much of the process lurks in the tacit dimension, in the mystery, in the wild promptings of imagination, and in edgings of subtlety” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985: 53)

Contemplating upon the concept and value of trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), it appears to be one of meaning in heuristic studies: Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one’s own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others, present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essence of the experience? On a practical level, I see that the trustworthiness of this piece lies in my striving to be transparent. This transparency relates to providing clarity and explanations on how I conducted the research, my contextualisation of the
study, my levels of reflexivity, and my commitment to present the material authentically through receiving validation of my writings from those involved, when possible (Stiles, 1993). In that ‘tension’, there was also a point where I accepted that the purpose of this research was not necessarily to lead to concrete answers but possibly to find the words for the real questions to be asked. That includes an ethical commitment, approached as follows.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

“Knowledge contains the power to prosper good and ill ends both individually and collectively. Knowledge, then begs ethical and political awareness” (Braud and Anderson, 1998: 246)

Bond (2000) refers to the term ‘ethical mindfulness’ which acknowledges facing the common uncertainty involved in ethical dilemmas and taking personal ownership as researchers for acting ethically. As a BACP accredited practitioner, I hold the responsibility of abiding with the ethical principles and guidelines outlined by the BACP Ethical Framework I follow in my practice (BACP, 2010). As a counselling Researcher, I am also committed to abiding by the Ethical Guidelines for Researching Counselling & Psychotherapy (Bond, 2004) and as a Manchester University student I am informed about Guidelines on Ethical Procedures in Research. I have given consideration to applying these in my research design, communication with participants and application of research methods and have informed participants about doing so.

De Vaus (2002) identifies five ethical responsibilities towards research participants: voluntary participation, informed consent, no harm, confidentiality and anonymity, and privacy (each of those is addressed in my Ethical Statement approved by the Review Panel of Manchester University in June 2007 in Appendix F). The informants participated voluntarily (see forms provided to them in Appendices G and H) and despite the fact that they were qualified therapists themselves, the issue of care on my behalf was not underestimated. The experiences explored have indeed provoked certain emotional responses for participants and I employed the skills of empathy, showing sensitivity, pacing and maintaining clear boundaries to maximise the containment of the process. I also made myself available for debriefing, should an interviewee have wanted to discuss something at any period after the interview took place.
Ethical relationships in reflexive research projects are bound up with dynamics of power in relation to roles adopted, the levels of intimacy established and the ownership of the written accounts disseminated (Etherington, 2004). My aim has been to empower myself and the participants (Woskett, 1999) in the process. I found that some of my own risk-taking in voicing what may feel difficult served the empowerment mentioned, in the sense that:

“Ethical action usually requires courage that in turn requires overcoming fear. Ethical living is an ongoing commitment, as we meet life’s day-to-day challenges and opportunities, to assume risks in honour of self and all others. To choose the good over the safe ground, when the two are not the same, may seem foolish, but it strengthens passion especially for the already marginalized” (Bell, 2002:39).

An issue that occupied my mind in this research process has been around the anonymity of the participants. Walford (2005) makes a distinction between confidentiality and anonymity - where the former refers to the responsibility of the researcher to not pass onto others what was said but still to generate insights after analysis that he/she can discuss with ownership; while the latter refers to not offering the real names of informants or information that makes them identifiable - and he discusses how total anonymity is usually impossible to maintain. I addressed this concern by asking the participants if they would object to the idea of being identified and most stated that they would not. For those for whom this was a concern, I have altered some of their reported characteristics in order to ensure that the readers would not recognise an informant.

My reflexivity around research ethics was deepened by my participating in Byrne’s (2008) doctoral project which involved the processes of learning ethical research competence in qualitative research. I was given the opportunity to discuss individually and in groups the tensions around making ethical decisions and owning my writings in relation to other people as a researcher in counselling. In that, I also became aware of holding an ethical responsibility towards my own self as person in the researcher’s role (Grafanaki, 1996; Berger, 2001). In this thesis, I took the risk of self-disclosure and exposure that has sometimes challenged my ability for self-care. The support of my supervisor and the PhD group was invaluable (see Appendix I). One could claim that conducting heuristic research may require the input of personal therapy for the
researcher, given the high emotional involvement in the process (see the relevant section of my personal experience in chapter 2).

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I navigated the reader around various issues related to methodological choices, the process and practicalities involved as well as my stance towards tensions, challenges and decision making issues. My self-reflexive engagement, although often experienced as ‘risky’ (Etherington, 2003) has also “encouraged me to consider my development within a historical and social context, which has been empowering as it relocates my lived body experience beyond the personal and into political discourse” (Meekums, 2008: 300).

I am reminded of West’s (2007) command that “philosophical musing or ideological and passionate commitment to a particular methodology should not blind us to a pragmatic choice of what works best” (p.172). So, I have adopted a more ‘holistic’ approach whilst also remaining pragmatic in combining reality and rhetoric within my inevitably interpretive repertoire. Researching this topic that relates to cross-cultural transitions of place, identity and working styles for therapists but also the act and process of researching itself and all the tasks involved towards completing a PhD feels like a rite of passage to be traversed (Byrne-Armstrong et al., 2001). In my writing and relationship with texts, I acknowledge the multiple voices, pluralism, multiple reality and ambiguity ( Alvesson & Scoldberg, 2000), compatible with postmodern discourses. I now invite the reader to follow me in discussing the texts of relevant literature that I engaged with and that inform this study.
Chapter Four (4): A (Re-)view on the Literature

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Rationale for the Study: Identifying the Literature and Research gap

4.3 Delimiting the Topic: on seeking the ‘borders’ of the ‘research territory’

4.4 Reflecting on literature from Migration Studies

4.5 Relevant Concepts from Cross-Cultural Psychology and Anthropology
   a. On Culture Shock
   b. On Transitions
   c. On Acculturation

4.6 The effects of Migration on Identity: Cultural and/or Racial Identity Development Models

4.7 Literature on Professionals with non-native cultural background

4.8 International students in Counselling and Psychotherapy

4.9 Therapists as Migrants: writings on bilingual and bicultural perspectives

4.10 Accounts from immigrant therapists-writers

4.11 Summary and final thoughts
4.1 Introduction

*The tension that we need to maintain between the rich diffuse, complex character of everyday life and the ways our literatures organise and symbolise its buzzing confusions sustains the moral tenor of our work* (Grumet, 1990: 339).

The purpose of this chapter is to locate the study and present a critical review of readings undertaken, as a basis for the exploratory nature of this research. As a starting point, I recognise the tension and moral responsibility reflected by the quote above, where the attempt to capture the rich and complex nature of human experience within text is a challenging endeavour.

Literature related to culture and encounters with new social environments is ‘extensive but fragmented’ (Shaules, 2007: 18) drawing from disciplines like anthropology, sociology, politics, migrations studies, human geography and so on but less within the mainstream psychological, psychotherapeutic and social science research field. In the light of the above, I curiously acknowledged that a traditional comprehensive literature review would not be realistic; my approach would rather be to attempt and include those areas that would inform the thinking and meaning-making process of my area of exploration. In that sense, my research is contributing to knowledge by attempting to bring light into areas that are unexplored or non-articulated. My wish is to provide the reader with an insight into critical discourses that underpin this study. This is why I am not presenting a review of the literature, but rather a (re-)view upon the literature that appears relevant.

My immersion in the literature began at the early PhD stages, with periodical periods of voracious reading, leaving literature aside, returning to searches and reading again, making space for reflection time and so on. This approach was compatible with the heuristic process where periods of deep engagement followed by periods of incubation are necessary for meanings to emerge in awareness. At a practical level, I approached the task of literature search as follows: I used library catalogues (such as OPAC and PsycInfo), bibliographical databases (such as ProQuest and Dissertations Abstracts International), internet subject gateways, internet search engines (such as Google Scholar) and personal communications through email and face-to-face discussions. I found myself making intuitive choices about what to draw attention to, given that most
of the literature available was more from peripheral sources rather than directly related to my focus. So, producing this chapter has been a cyclical process of continuous searching, reading and writing, activities that have been interconnected and feeding into each other (Ridley, 2008), as demonstrated below:

![Cyclical Process](image)

Fig.5: Cyclical Process (Christodoulidi, 2010)

During my readings, I consciously continued being reflexive and questioned my understandings, considering the following:

- *In what ways, if any, is this piece of writing informing my thinking around the concepts related to my topic?*

- *Is this piece of literature relevant to my specific focus of the experience of this particular professional group I am focusing on?*

I will continue this chapter in the following structure: I will first present the rationale of the study, recognising a literature and research gap; I will then explain the choices made in delimiting the topic. This is followed by discussing some relevant literature from Migration Studies before introducing some relevant concepts from Cross-cultural Psychology and Anthropology and making links to the effect of migration on Identity. What follows is literature on professionals who move to work overseas, in an attempt to find relevant resonances for the specific professional group of this study. I then present some of the literature on international students in general and in the field of therapy.
Finally, I present literature on the migrant therapist, focusing on bicultural and bilingual perspectives.

4.2 Rationale for the Study: Identifying the Literature and Research gap

Several occupational groups have been studied in terms of their experiences linking to adjustment patterns in new cultures: international students, business executives, missionaries, volunteers, teachers, social workers, migrant workers and so on (Zapf, 1991); most such studies propose certain stages ((Bochner, 1982) in that process. There is not a broad psychosocial framework for understanding this phenomenon (Sussman, 2000), let alone sufficient research that examines this perspective for mental health professionals whose psychological equilibrium is essential for their work.

In the literature around mental health, the predominant focus is on the needs and traits of the immigrant as consumer but not as service provider, something only recently raised and explored (Isaacson, 2001; Chen, 2004). There is a growing literature on multiculturalism in relation to counselling the ‘culturally different’ client (see for example: Moodley and Palmer, 2006). But, what is the experience of therapists who make themselves ‘foreigners’ through moving to train and/or work abroad? Isaacson (2001) refers to those practitioners as ‘immigrants’ or ‘foreigners’ or ‘trans-culturally dislocated’, terms that appear accurate in description but may leave one uncomfortable due to being potentially loaded with derogatory connotations. This study is intended to investigate that angle that involves the challenges as well as opportunities that such life career transitions at different cultural contexts entail for therapists.

So, what have been the challenges in my literature searches that resulted in highlighting the relevant gap? In attempting to decide what sections this chapter shall encompass, I encountered the following:

- I soon discovered- and confirmed later with a couple of email exchanges with respectful academics\(^{11}\), as recommended by Fink (2005) - that there is limited

\(^{11}\) During different periods of my literature searches, I sought communication with few researchers in the field of therapy and culture - such as Colin Lago (UK), Nickolas Ladany (U.S.), Roy Moodley, Ruth
literature on the specific subject of therapists’ experiences of training and practising abroad

- In searching the literature, I found relevant literature but from the client’s perspective (see for example, Sue & Sue, 1999; d’Ardenne & Mahtani, 1999; Palmer, 2002). Although my focus was different, I read critically to inform my thinking around similar phenomena that therapists - who may once have been clients in a different country and culture - face in their own life and work. I also noticed that the relevant issues lie on the boundary-line between different disciplines and therapeutic modalities. That posed great dilemmas in how to designate clear criteria about what material to include for inclusion and exclusion.

Considering the above, a pragmatic approach was to delimit the topic by providing partial inclusions of literature that offered, in my view, critical observations. This is without claiming that I could exhaust such a search in a vast and inter-disciplinary territory.

4.3 Delimiting the Topic: on seeking the ‘borders’ of the ‘research territory’

Most participants in this study, including myself, are individuals who have chosen to migrate abroad, and settled in a new country for a number of years. Some of them have received their counselling/psychotherapy training in the host country and have been practitioners in that different country and culture. Bearing this focus in mind, it is essential to declare what was purposefully excluded from this chapter:

In the psychotherapeutic literature, there are numerous studies conducted on the experience of forced migration, for those individuals or groups that were exiled as refugees or asylum seekers or those identified as ‘displaced’ people (notable examples include Papadopoulos, 2003, 2007; Tucker and Price, 2007; Ingleby, 2005; Summerfield, 2001). A Handbook for Mental Health Professionals for immigrant health together with detailed health beliefs and practices of 30 cultures from more than 40

Litjmaer (Canada), Mark & Miranda Thorpe (NZ) - they confirmed the gap in the literature resulting from their own searches, that I, therefore, set out to research in an exploratory manner.
countries is reviewed by Kemp and Rasbridge (2004). So, such literature that shows that the experience of voluntary as opposed to forced migrants is less addressed (Madison, 2005). Additionally, literature on multiculturalism and cross-cultural counselling and psychotherapy highlights the competencies required when working therapeutically with culturally different clients (see for example, Pedersen et al. 2002; Harper & McFadden, 2003; West & McLeod, 2003; Vontress & Jackson, 2004; Lago, 2006; Moodley and Palmer, 2006). Palmer (2002) offers an example of a Reader in Multicultural Counselling where a variety of authors debate the implications of attempting to ethnically match therapists and clients and make suggestions about the trends into multicultural counselling research. Comprehensive literature reviews can be found, for example, in Ponterotto et al. (1995) or Pedersen et al. (2002). This body of literature above focuses on the client’s perspective and although it discusses crucial perspectives in relation to therapy and culture, it is not included in this chapter. The focus of this study is from the therapist’s perspective and as such, I am committed to maintaining that lens.

In terms of literature on the ‘different’ therapist, there is increasing literature on therapists’ experiences in relation to sexual orientation (for example, Decrescenzo, 1997) or a form of disability or impairment (for example, Beck, 2004) which are also considered as ‘culture’ (Leigh et al., 1998). These are angles that are specific to another focus and are not relevant to this study. One could reflect the curious reality of the unexplored discourse in relation to therapists being in a ‘different’ position or non mainstream when they cross geographical and cultural borders. I considered as useful beginning some writings in Migration Studies.

4.4 Reflecting on literature from Migration Studies

Akhtar (1999b) defines an immigrant as “one who has taken up residence in a region or country other than his place of birth” (p.174). Migration is a phenomenon explored through cross-disciplinary approaches that include sociology, demography, politics, economics, anthropology, history, psychology, geography, philosophy, cultural studies, architecture and so on (Papastergiadis, 2000). There are no standard definitions or typologies around migration phenomena due to the multiple dimensions of population mobility (Marsella & Ring, 2003); however, critical reviews on migration literature can
be found in Rapport & Dawson (1998) and Rapport (2003). Studies on Migration appear to range along the spectrum between migration causality (for example, see Richmond, 1994) and migration effects. The majority focuses on the immigrant as help-seeker and appears to be based on certain assumptions, such as related to cultural adaptation and other ‘psychological’ concepts. Bochner’s (1982) model is an example suggesting strategies for adaptation in a host culture, according to which immigrants:

1. May hastily reject the values of the adopted culture, leading to attitudes of chauvinism, racism and nationalism

2. May choose to denigrate and reject their own culture. The psychological vacuum and the existential alienation created by this rejection may be filled by a blind ‘swing’ to the adopted culture.

3. May vacillate between two cultural norms, unable to work out the means by which these two may be reconciled. Painfully aware that they belong neither to the host cultural group, nor to their own cultural group such people may feel marginalized. This can lead to ‘identity confusion’ and ‘identity crisis’

4. May genuinely attempt to integrate into the new culture by acquiring a set of compatible and complementary value systems from their indigenous and from their adopted culture, which would lend meaning and significance to their lives. In other words, they may acquire the rationality and the wisdom to appreciate the positive values of both cultures, and bring about a mentally and spiritually healthy integration of their identities.

My perspective is beyond generalising due to acknowledging that such an experience is influenced by social, educational, political, professional, economic and idiosyncratic factors. There is a literal and metaphorical transition in space and time that affects individuals who migrate (Ponzanesi and Merolla, 2005), which often carries an indefinite question of ‘return’ or not either at a fantasy or a literal level (Skeldon, 1997). The temporal dimension of migration or the transition from one type of migration to another is generally neglected (Khoo et al., 2008). My understanding is that this is possibly because there is an ongoing or long-term question for many of those who
choose to migrate around where they will settle long term. This decision may be
influenced by a number of factors, such as whether an individual had undergone
changes in their personal lives (such as a marriage when living abroad) or whether there
are employment opportunities available.

I find that in Migration studies there is a tendency to rationalise and isolate the
dimensions related to a migrant’s decisions and experiences of mobility, based on
maintaining consistency of a certain values system that is ‘transported’. Therapists’ role
is often one that relates to offering alternative discourses for issues and positions that
are marginalised or excluded or non-fitting. Therefore therapists are to be encouraged
to explore non-normative values systems and diverse realities (White, 1997). Mobility
and immersion in a host culture and second language is a very powerful experience for
professionals in such a field. This encourages the view of migration and its impact as a
process, in the sense that:

“Migration is a process which is not complete by the arrival of an
individual in a foreign place. Arrival rarely means assimilation. Migrants
are often transformed by their journey, and their presence is a catalyst to
new transformations in the spaces they enter. Similarly, their relationship to
their original ‘homes’ is rarely erased” (Papastergiadis, 2000: 205).

Considering the effect of the migratory experience on one’s relationship with self,
society and culture, I will now discuss some concepts from cross-cultural psychology
and anthropology.

4.5 Relevant Concepts from Cross-Cultural Psychology and Anthropology

The relationship between notions of self and culture in relation to mental health and
identity has been addressed primarily in the fields of cross-cultural psychology (Berry
et al., 2003; Shiraev & Levy, 2006; Laungani, 2007) and anthropology (Kleinman,
1987; D’Andrade, 1995; Littlewood, 2002). U.S. based research appears to focus on the
self, whereas European and Asian psychological research focuses more on group and
social membership (Sussman, 2000). Although the self and the group appear to be
examined separately, a shift has occurred by acknowledging that the study of the
collective is a necessary companion to the study of the self (Miller & Prentice, 1994).
In terms of the impact of mobility between different cultures upon both individuals and groups, I see that the concepts of **culture shock**, **transitions** and **acculturation** appear to be the central axis of such discourses. I see those concepts are influencing each other and present them in turn:

### a. On Culture Shock

"When an individual enters a strange culture, all or most of these familiar cues are removed. He is like a fish out of water." (Oberg, 1960: 177-82)

Culture shock occurs when a person is subjected to an unfamiliar way of life. Common reactions to such experience include the following (Ward et al., 2001):

- Feeling *strained or frustrated* because of a lack of understanding of others
- A *sense of loss* regarding friends, status, profession and possessions
- *Rejection* of and by members of the new culture
- *Confusion* regarding role, expectations, values and identity
- *Anxiety and anger* prompted by cultural differences
- Feelings of *helplessness* and feeling *out of control*

In the context of applying the culture shock approach to professionals who move to work abroad, a predictable process is suggested as related to adapting to a foreign environment (Marx 2001: 9, after Oberg 1960):

1. Firstly, there is a ‘honeymoon’ phase when there is a positive and enjoyable attitude towards the foreign experience
2. The newcomer gradually experiences increasing problems, resulting in a period of culture shock, accompanied by
3. Disorientation, helplessness, irritation and perhaps depression.
4. Gradually, this period is managed and the potential crisis situation is overcome
5. The phase of recovery or adaptation occurs when acceptance and understanding of difference is reached.
6. A brief mention of re-entry shock – there’s more recognition these days that returning home to work can be just as much of a challenge as leaving was. This has often been expressed by a high rate of people leaving the country and/or their job quite soon after a contract has ended.

The culture shock phase usually gives way to a process of acculturation, adaptation or adjustment that takes place after a transitional state as a natural process towards change (Fisher and Cooper, 1990).

b. On Transitions

Literature on transitions seems to be relatively a-theoretical (Sussman, 2000); however the major theoretical frameworks by key authors would include studies drawn from the following: a) stage models of transitions (Grove & Torbiorn, 1985; Zapf, 1991), b) a clinical approach (Ward & Searle, 1991), c) a social learning approach (Bochner, 1982; David, 1976), and d) a social cognition approach (Ward & Searle, 1991). The theme of transition, provoking feeling of loss, anticipation and uncertainty, appears a common feature in such models. Within the context of human mobility, there is literature on the experiences of people who work and study overseas (Goodman, 1994; Ward and Kennedy, 1993). In those experiences there is the concept of a ‘transcultural transitional space’ (Kast, 2009), where “…what belongs to your culture and what belongs to the other culture – can be seen, discussed and it will change the cultural beliefs for all” (p. 12).

When one is exposed to cultural customs and surroundings different from one's own, the challenge of re-defining a sense of self and/or the world becomes crucial (Zaharna, 1989). There is a transition from a familiar way of existence to a different context that causes inevitable shifts in self-identity, values or perceptions about others (Ishiyama, 1995). Van Gennep (1960) developed his theory (Ritual Transition Theory) in an attempt to describe the positions or events that people move from and towards across the lifespan and identified a common pattern, having three phases: separation, transition (or limen) and incorporation. He coined this schema as rites of passage or
the patterns of rites of transition. He argues that the transitional or liminal phase is particularly challenging due to being in a state that resembles a kind of no-man’s land.

Schlossberg’s (1981; 1984; 1997) Transition Theory has been used in the context of exploring career transition processes of different professional groups. When considering that this may take place in the context of also having a transitional experience in a new country and culture, the experience is inevitably more demanding for the individual. This model is described below:

![Schlossberg's Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition](image)

**Figure 5: Schlossberg’s Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition**

(Schlossberg, 1981: 5)
In the context of this study the concept of cultural transitions that occur when one moves from one country to another and encounters differences, predominantly cultural and linguistic ones, involve both personal and professional dimensions (Goldner-Vukov, 2004) that bring, for many, the need for some sort of adjustment.

c. On Acculturation

The Social Science Research Council (1954, p. 974) defines acculturation more broadly as ‘culture change’ that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. This concept, though widely used in cross-cultural psychology, has been also criticised due to the gradual erosion of its original meaning, resulting in it being understood as synonymous with assimilation. Searle and Ward (1990) suggest distinction between two interrelated types of adjustment: a. psychological adjustment (referring to feelings of well-being and satisfaction) and b. socio-cultural competence (ability to fit in to the new culture and interact effectively). Berry’s (1990) popular acculturation model refers to how individuals react when they immigrate in a new society, ranging between cultural maintenance of native characteristics to participation in the new cultural norms. Such reactions are relevant to both personal life and work context.

Although the dynamics caused by acculturation appear to be influenced by the factors of voluntariness, mobility and permanence (Berry & Sam, 1997) the process of adaptation seems to be common, regardless of those factors, presenting a different range of challenges. And, when Berry and his colleagues discuss integration of the two cultures, it seems to be assumed that the majority and minority cultures have equal status and power. I see that as invalid but also potentially dangerously invisible. I agree with the stance that cultural relocation and the unfolding of migrant identity is not a process with a beginning and an end but rather a constant negotiation between old and new components (Hedge, 1998), connected to a larger set of political and historical dimensions that are influenced by issues of gender, race and power.

The U-curve hypothesis\textsuperscript{13} (El Said 2006: 47) has been used to describe the course of adjustment of expatriate employees or sojourners within a host culture. In Lysgaard’s words: “[w]e observed that adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a ‘crisis’ in which one feels less well adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community.” (Lysgaard 1955, cited in Tange 2005).

![Figure 7: The U-curve Hypothesis (El Said 2006: 47)](image)

The above has been extended to a ‘W-curve’, adding a second curve to represent the re-entry phase of those choosing to return to their country of origin (see e.g. Kim, 2001 or El Said, 2006). Although such models are suggestive, particularly in terms of a chronological pattern, they do not encapsulate the experience of all individuals, especially those that identify as liminal identities, revealed in my study.

Because acculturation in cross-cultural psychology is discussed as the process occurring when a person moved from culture A to culture B (Hermans and Kempen, 1998) that implies that ‘culture’ is often conflated with ‘nation’. Although I consider

the multifaceted manifestations of culture, when in dialogue with participants of this study, I found that often the boundaries between cultures were discussed as coinciding with the boundaries between countries (Gudykunst and Kim, 1997). Bhatia and Ram (2001) suggest that instead of approaching migrant identities from a false universal standpoint of acculturation, a postcolonial perspective that emphasises a rather process-oriented notion of acculturation, appears more accurate in the sense that:

“…postcolonial and diaspora theories of hybridity force us to think beyond fixed national and cultural boundaries and allow us to think more in terms of moving cultures where here and there, past and present, homeland and hostland are constantly being negotiated with each other” (p. 15).

I agree with Misra and Gergen’s (1993) warnings that cross-cultural psychology models are based on manipulating different variables, often based on Western dimensions of self and relationships and therefore present as problematic in understanding the pluralistic phenomena of culture. Also, it is essential to remember that such models of acculturation are discussed in the context of the process taking place in a dominant culture and would not be relevant to, for example, a colonial setting (Cheung-Bleuden and Juang, 2008). Basu (2007) highlights that “much recent academic discourse concerned with modern Western identity has sought to demonstrate that individuals are quite ‘at home’ in a world of movement, that they are quite adept at negotiating the flux of multiple and mobile attachments” (p. 6).

On a final note, it shall be noted that most writings in cross-cultural psychology and anthropology tend to adopt a culture-specific related approach, which may not be as relevant to those identifying themselves as influenced by a blending of cultural influences. This is demonstrated in considering the effects of migration on identity; popular models are discussed below.

4.6 The effects of Migration on Identity: Cultural and/or Racial Identity Development Models

There are numerous theories and studies (Stephan & Hendrick, 1987; Berry, 1990; Turner et al. 1994; Kosmitzki, 1996; Hermans and Kempen, 1998) that support the idea that culture contact has an effect on cultural identity. Identity and development appear to be key constructs. But which identity and which development?
Theories of Identity are again vast and come from the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, social theory and so on addressing “various forms of categorisation, association and differentiation, in an attempt to understand the person as formed through complex relations of mutual constitution between individuals and groups” (Wenger, 1998: 13). When considering identity in the context of cross-cultural transition experience, it is important that the individual self is not assumed as the point of departure; there are also the societal, cultural, sub-cultural, historical, institutional dimensions involved, amongst others. Wenger (1998: 149) sees identity as:

- **negotiated experience** of self, in terms of participation and reification. Going beyond category or label; identity is not developmental but ‘a becoming’

- **community membership**, in terms of what we consider familiar or unfamiliar

- **learning trajectory**, in terms of perceiving ourselves in relation to where we departed from and where we are going; past and future are considered in the meaning of the present

- **nexus of multimembership**, in terms of our attempts to reconcile different roles in one whole

- **a relation between the local and the global**, in terms of negotiating the interplay between local ways of belonging and broader contexts and discourses

Cultural identity is often used as coterminous with national identity; there is also a tendency of society towards ‘otherisation’ which exaggerates differences amongst people and is described as “the process whereby the 'foreign' is reduced to a simplistic, easily digestible, exotic or degrading stereotype” (Holliday, 1999: 245) In the context of globalisation and mixing of cultures depending on the historical and political background of one’s country of origin, there is strong or loose identification between perception of cultural and national identity. Taft (1981: 94), makes reference to the term ‘heterocultural personality’, to express the possibility of one finding a healthy balance between the old and the new sense of self, resulting from mobility and
immersion in more than one culture. I am reminded that “there is no single definitions of migrant identity, as all forms of subjectivity are always situated within dynamic fields of power differentials” (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 199). In the context of this study, the phenomenon explored is addressing a state of being that is inevitably affected by such dynamics but also goes beyond those, in that liminal state of flux and multiplicity, where meaning is constantly negotiated.

And, close to identity, in what sense is development considered? Development involves the process of change and/or transition where there is movement from one state of being and experiencing to another, throughout one’s life (Lerner, 2002). In the context of this study, the idea of change occurring in any ‘linear’ manner or movement taking place at any ‘fixed point’ is not accurate. The factors taken into account cannot determine exactly how the individual deals with and internalises such experiences (Valsiner, 2000). However, certain models of development have been developed in attempting to understand individuals who are outside a given dominant culture and show how such people may negotiate the attitudes that the dominant culture projects upon them. They were described as the ‘leading edge’ when referring to transcultural therapeutic practice (Lee, 1994).

According to McWilliams (1999) the theoretical construct of identity and many of the theories of identity development began to emerge with the work of Erikson (1959/1980), a pioneer in the field of life span development (see Lemme, 2005 for an updated multidisciplinary text where there is a comprehensive review of life-span development). He introduced the 8 stages of psychosocial development where emphasis is given on the influence of interaction of the person with society (and inevitably culture). These stages occur in a predetermined order and during a specified time frame and there is a crisis – in the sense of “a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential” (Erikson, 1968, p. 96) - to be resolved before one can proceed to the next stage. Broadly speaking, Stage Models assume universally applicable developmental tasks at aged-linked times, whereas Time Models refer to the influence of specific personal or environmental events (Giele, 1982). In relation to the influence of culture and culture contact, the following broad models of development are suggested:
- **Racial Identity Development:**

These models were originally developed primarily for African Americans to understand the black experience in the United States. Phinney (1990) made the distinction between race and culture by developing a model of *Ethnic Identity Development*. This would include components such as self-identification, language, religious affiliation, social networks, cultural traditions and practices. This appears similar to *Minority Identity Development* model (Atkinson, Morten and Sue, 1993). The binary of Black and White racial identity discourse (Helms, 1990, 1995) discusses Black Racial Identity Development (Cross, 1995; Constantine et al., 1998) versus White Racial Identity Development.

- **Ethnic Identity Development:**

These models focus on what people learn about their culture from family and community. In other words, a sense of ethnic identity is developed from shared culture, religion, geography, and language of individuals who are often connected by strong loyalty and kinship as well as proximity (Torres, 1996). Phinney (1990, 1996) discusses the multidimensional view of ethnicity, encompassing ethnic culture, ethnic identity and ethnicity as minority status. What appears limiting is that there is no discussion of the positive aspects of immersion in one’s culture.

- **Cultural Identity Development:**

The above could be examined under the broader umbrella of cultural identity development models. Traditionally cultural identity development has been conceptualised as a linear stage process (Atkinson et al., 1993; Cross, 1995) with some exceptions, like the one suggested by Helms (1995) who discusses more of a dynamic process. Sussman (2000) proposes an *integrated theory* of the transition cycle using a social psychological framework, specifically focusing on self-concept and cultural identity. It includes both the process of adaptation resulting from overseas transition and the shifts that take place if one chooses to return. In that sense, shifts in cultural identity appear to serve as a mediator between cultural adaptation and the repatriation experience. The model is also placed within a contextual framework, suggesting that
this paradigm is most applicable to sojourners from cultures in which individualism is high and cultural identity is low in centrality and salience. The cultural identity model posits four types of post-adaptation identity: affirmative, subtractive, additive, and global, each with a resulting repatriation outcome.

Fig.8: Sussman (as in: 2002:394) - Subtractive and additive identity shifts

Steward and Baden (1995) discuss the *Cultural-Racial Identity Model* in a study attempting to understand the racial and cultural identities of trans-racial adoptees. This model challenges the usual dichotomous perspectives that are relevant to models mentioned above and provides insights about individuals who identify with more than one culture and/or race (such as bi-racial children and so on). Also, previous models appear to be based on the assumptions that: 1. identity is formed through a developmental process and 2. sense of self and equilibrium is dependent on the interaction process between the individual and a given environment. The models appear to have a structure that is similar, usually having an initial stage where the person experiences ignorance, confusion or negative feelings towards self and a final stage which implies an integrated sense of self-identification. Due to these similarities in the

The models presented can be useful however there are some profound limitations (Rutter & Rutter, 1992; Bardwick, 1980) that are mostly relevant to the context of this study: 1. they cannot be globally applied; 2. they seem to carry value judgement in relation to what is considered as healthy through the binaries of majority/minority or dominant/non-dominant groups and discourses 3. There are interpersonal, institutional, societal, and cultural factors which may facilitate or impede cultural identity development, to be taken into account and most importantly 4. They refer to clients’ cultural identity development without taking considering that of the therapist. Acknowledging these limitations appears crucial in my view, and poses questions towards applying theories of adult development. In contemporary societies, *multiple dimensions* of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) are more compatible with how people identify themselves.

The relevance of these models is discussed in the context of the practice of counselling and psychotherapy with culturally diverse client groups (Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993; Atkinson et al., 1993; Carter, 1995; Courtland, 2006). From a therapist’s perspective, my understanding is that consideration of cultural identity is closely related to culturally responsive counselling provision by culturally self-aware therapists, in the sense that “*effective cross-cultural counselling intervention is enhanced when counsellors work on the evolution of their own cultural attitudes and perceptions*” (Courtland, 2006: 186). When the therapist is a migrant professional, shifts in his/her own identity will inevitably occur, alongside challenges and opportunities related to being a professional abroad, as discussed below.

**4.7 Literature on Professionals with non-native cultural backgrounds**

Several occupational groups have been studied when moving abroad: international students, business executives, missionaries, volunteers, teachers, social workers, migrant workers (Zapf, 1991; Selmer, 2002). Findlay (1995) refers to ‘skilled transients’ to emphasise the uncertainty around permanent settling of such professionals. The motives related to an individual seeking to receive education and/or professional
experience abroad may have an impact on how he/she is affected by the experience. Literature on independently mobile professionals (for example: Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Banai and Harry, 2004; Richardson and McKenna, 2002) suggest various motivator factors that McKenna and Richardson (2007: 311) summarise as follows:

1. *Mercenary reasons*: individuals who wish to move because of reasons related to maximizing rewards, e.g. money, lifestyle, status, and benefits.

2. *Architects*: individuals who move in order to build the architecture of a career independently of organizational structures. Such professionals may follow a more boundary-less route in their career trajectory (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996).

3. *Refugees*: individuals whose motivation to go is related to a desire to escape. Such individuals may wish to escape personal problems, e.g. financial problems, divorce. They may also want to escape a climate, or what they consider as an unsatisfying professional or personal life.

4. *Explorers*: individuals whose motivation is to experience the adventure of a new cultural and professional environment.

5. *Seekers*: individuals who may be seeking something for their personal life, e.g. a husband/wife; or those who are seeking self-knowledge, self-awareness and believe it can be facilitated in a different environment.


7. *Missionaries*: individuals who want to “do good”, “add-value”, improve others and spread skills, knowledge, and “advancement” to other parts of the world.

Docquier (2006) provides a recent review of the theoretical and empirical literature in relation to international migration of skilled individuals, discussed though from an organisational point of view. It is notable that in HR literature (for example, Selmer, 1998; Yan et al., 2002) the impact of international assignments has been investigated
but not in relation to its impact on mobile professionals’ identity (Kohonen, 2008). The challenging effects on identity resulting from expatriation and its link with career conceptualisation have been recently given more attention, though limited (Osland, 2000; Hartl, 2004; Luijters et al., 2006). There are two most influential concepts in relation to a career abroad: a. the ‘protean career’ (Hall 2004, Hall & Chandler 2005, Sargent & Domberger 2007), which is self-driven mobility with the goal of continuous personal transformation and b. the ‘boundaryless career’ (Stahl et al., 2002; Banai and Harry, 2004; Sullivan and Arthur, 2006), which crosses national, psychological and organisational boundaries. The emphasis in both is seeing this experience as an opportunity for personal and professional development.

The bigger the contrast between original and host culture, the greater the challenges (Church, 1982; Furnham, 1988). However, studies such as Selmer’s (2007) on American Business expatriates in Canada and Germany show that the similarity/dissimilarity may be irrelevant. In the context of this study I would say that therapists are in a different relationship with self/place/time in relation to their work. Emerging rigorous research (Kraimer et al, 2001) shows that there is a link between the adjustment of expatriates and their performance at work. A subjective perspective may be more accurate. This is discussed in the study by Varner and Palmer (2005) who suggest a process by which cultural self knowledge can be incorporated into the preparation of those assigned to work abroad – it looks like a process of synthesis where personal and cultural references are seen as related to those that the employee is likely to encounter abroad.

Hofstede (1980) researched over 116,000 employees of subsidiaries of the multinational corporation, IBM, in more than 40 countries, and analysed cultural differences in terms of four cultural dimensions: individualism-collectivism; uncertainty avoidance; power distance, and masculinity-femininity. I see Hofstede’s work as dated and acknowledge Poncini’s (2002) warning that participants in multicultural workplace settings should not be viewed as representatives of homogenous national cultures; other factors, such as organizational roles, business contexts, and individual differences, may be important. Storti (2001, 2003) wrote two exceptional volumes describing the processes of expatriation and repatriation (with main focus professional expatriates and their families) as an ‘art’. His book The Art of
Crossing Cultures (2001) discusses the various psychological processes involved in cross-cultural experiences that take place when one is immersed in a foreign culture. In the second volume, The Art of Coming Home (2003), he takes a step further in discussing the re-entry experience of those who choose to return after living abroad. Such volumes show that the themes of departure, adaptation, change, revisiting of values, relationships and beliefs as well as the possibility of homecoming, which may have metaphorical dimensions are central to the experience of migrating.

According to Osland and Osland (2006), there are a number of paradoxes in the expatriation experience, which could be summarised as related to:

1. **Identification and personal boundaries**: dilemmas are faced around how much of one’s own cultural values shall be relinquished in order to be acculturated and/or successful. This may occur versus one’s own cultural identity becoming even stronger as a result of contact with difference.

2. **The relationship with the other culture**: fitting in versus marginalisation; dynamics of sameness and difference.

3. **Job-related role conflict**: conflict related to loyalty and/or commitment to one’s cultural identity when overseas versus that within a given professional role.

Such paradoxes appear compatible with contemporary identity states, when individuals face complex challenges that often require operating in multiple roles at once. Luijters et al. (2006) refer to the state of developing a dual identity, defined as “the strategy in which strong maintenance of one’s cultural background is combined with a strong identification with one’s work team” (p. 563). Although this can have benefits, it does not mean that it does not come with stress or conflict and the process depends on individual personalities too (Bakker, 2005).

In linking some of the concepts so far, it seems that the participants of this study, including myself, may identify more with the state of being identities in transition (Kohonen, 2008); this refers to both personal and professional level, triggered by the
experience of mobility as well as the transformative process of training as a therapist and practising abroad.

4.8 International students in Counselling and Psychotherapy

There is a large body of literature (Singaravelu & Pope, 2007; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Chen, 1999) on the challenges faced by international students, relating to stress due to the transition to a different country and a different educational environment. Sandhu (1995) discusses both interpersonal (communication problems, culture shock, loss of social support systems, miscellaneous difference) and intrapersonal (feelings of loss, sense of inferiority and/or uncertainty, home-sickness, threats to cultural identity) factors, closely intertwined, that contribute to such students’ psychological distress. A comprehensive literature review can be found in Chen (1999), drawing attention also to the great heterogeneity among international students (Yoon & Portman, 2004).

There are inevitable links between culture contact and intercultural training (Ward, 2004). Dirkx et al. (2006) discuss the study abroad experiences of adult learners, in terms of their intra-psychic or intra-personal meanings. When learners of foreign background encounter the challenge of ‘learning in a context of difference’ (Howes, 2001), they may face difficulties around negotiating new sets of values, behaviours, beliefs and practices. Additionally, one could argue that the cultural identity development models mentioned earlier have implications for adult learning in a multicultural context (Martin & Chaney, 1992; Leininger, 1997).

In the mental health field, it is social work trainees that appear more influential in internationalising training programmes (Mittal and Wieling, 2006). In terms of trainees in therapy, studies are limited and related predominantly to applied psychology (Giorgis & Helms, 1978; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004) and family therapy (Killian, 2001). The level of training shall also be considered; for example, in the study by Mittal & Wieling (2006) on the training experiences of international doctoral students in family therapy, attention is drawn to considering the individual needs of each of those trainee/practitioners, due to the wide diversity of backgrounds and circumstances. Rastogi and Wieling (2005) is an exceptional volume in addressing training, academic, and professional experiences of ethnic minority therapists in a host culture. Issues of
subtle racist attitudes, complexities of being or becoming bilingual and bicultural, cultural biases, spiritual perspectives as well as several professional issues are discussed vividly with examples from personal narratives.

Literature also presents examples of the professional counsellor identity development process in relation to students of particular cultural background (see for example Nelson and Jackson, 2003 – referring to Hispanic student interns). Smith and Ng (2009) conducted a study on the experiences of international counselling trainees in multicultural training programmes in the U.S.; the focus was to examine the unique training needs of foreign students in such programmes as compared to domestic trainees. Watson (2004) discusses the experience of black trainee counsellors in the UK and emphasises that her findings may be relevant to other therapists of foreign background but may be of different intensity due to the different level of visibility of their being the ‘other’ that is so related to skin colour, in historical terms of oppression, racism and discrimination.

Vasquez and McKinley (1982) maintained that it is necessary for ethnic minority students to develop a bicultural identity in order to develop a professional counselling identity. Chen’s (2004) study on non-Western trainee counsellors’ experience of cross-cultural transition recommends the need for further research. Bartin and Porten (1996) describe the challenges related to setting up a 2-year long, culturally sensitive program for re-training Russian mental health workers (social workers, psychologist, psychiatrists and allied professions) who would work with Russian immigrant families in Israel. This revealed numerous changes for them in relation to accommodating all the ‘foreign elements’ involved in terms of a different culture, language and professional attitudes. Intensive supervision by supervisors who were familiar with immigration issues themselves proved crucial.

Relevant to the experiences of international trainees in such programmes are the attitudes of educators towards them (Guitterez, 1982). For example, Ng (2006) examined trainers’ perceptions in working with international students in counselling training programmes, highlighting the value of mentoring (Bradley, 2000) in dealing with their anxieties. This study also showed how beneficial is the presence of international students in counsellor training programmes in terms of providing
opportunities for inter-cultural interaction and relevant discussions around culture within the class; also encouraging counselling and psychotherapy educators to develop multicultural sensitivity in their practices. Pattison’s study (2003) on working with international students as a counselling educator in a UK University revealed similar mutual benefits for both parties in such multicultural programmes.

Although ‘western education’ is popular (Barron et al., 2007), there is also a question around the appropriateness of a model or training programme developed in one culture being transferred into another (Ezeilo, 1994; West, 2007). A review of the literature around psychology beyond western perspectives can be found in volumes like Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (2000). This reveals how the focus on individuality in western psychological and counselling approaches is often incompatible with values in non-western cultures that favour communalism. In terms of research, there have been projects conducted mainly in the Hispanic, Afro-American and Asian populations living in North America and much less so in Africa (Sue and Sue, 1999). For example, Caley (2007) conducted research evaluating the western counsellor training model as applied in Kenya and found that there were major discrepancies in the relationship between the values and understanding underpinning such a model in relation to those of the Kenyan culture.

Given that most foreign students in counselling and psychotherapy programmes move to a Western country (mainly north Europe, US or Canada) to undertake such training, it is useful to consider the role of whiteness in psychotherapy as the factor mostly related to visibility or non-visibility of complexities in the experiences (Lago, 2005; Ryde, 2009). A review of the literature on white identity and the experience of white people in multicultural education produced a number of observations regarding white people such as the denial of whiteness (Powell, 1996), color-blindness (Helms, 1993), lack of understanding of systemic or institutional racism (Powell, 1996), and the acceptance of unexamined white privilege (McIntyre, 1997; Kivel, 1996). Helms (1993), pulling from these observations in a sample of pre-service educators, developed a model to describe a progression of resolutions of these issues toward the development of a positive white identity.
To summarise the issues related to those who chose to undertake therapy training abroad, they seem to be related to a need to become familiar with a different training context, the questioning occurring around personal cultural identity and biases, issues around home and belonging, and the relevance and applicability of the training to their own cultural contexts in the prospect of possibly returning to their country of origin (Nilsson and Anderson, 2004; Killian, 2001 and Morris and Lee, 2004). When entering an era that may naturally require the internationalisation of counselling and psychotherapy (Leung and Emener, 1999), such issues appear crucial.

A core metaphor that appears to link with the transitional experience of studying overseas seems to be that related to home. In understanding that, I reflect on my personal story and my work with international students when working at Student Counselling Services. I can identify with and also think of various examples that are compatible to Kenyon’s (1999) findings when researching students’ experiences around their transitional experience of home. In that study, home was experienced to exist in four levels, as illustrated below:

1. The personal home
   - Home is meaningful
   - Home is a sense of independence and freedom
   - Home is a personalised space
   - Home is a sense of belonging
   - Home is memories

2. The temporal home
   - Home is stable and permanent
   - Home has the potential to be familiar and lasting

3. The social home
   - Home is made of significant others
   - Home is a supportive atmosphere
   - Home is a friendly neighbourhood
4. The physical home

- Home is made of meaningful possessions
- Home is a comfortable environment
- Home is a single household dwelling
- Home is a safe haven

Kenyon (1999, p.87) – The elements of home

In my view, those dimensions of the personal, temporal, social and physical seem to be the undercurrent of the experience of mobility and transition. I experience them relating to various aspects of inner ‘inhabiting’, beyond the concept of home, such as language, culture and relationships. In the following paragraphs, I am reflecting on literature written mainly by therapists or researchers who have been migrants themselves.

4.9 Therapists as Foreigners: writings on bilingual and bicultural perspectives

Working in a different culture impacts a professional’s life (Williamson, 2007). When talking about therapists, such moves have a greater impact due to the nature of such work and the fact that the therapists’ personal equilibrium and state of mind are keys to their ‘fitness to practice’. Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, and many of the early analysts were immigrants themselves; yet, there is a paradoxical absence of early psychoanalytic literature on the subject of immigration (Akhtar, 2006; Thorpe & Thorpe, 2008).

Halperin (2004) offers an in depth discussion of the psychodynamic formulation of the adult immigrant’s unique experience, related to intrapsychic, interpersonal and cultural dimensions of psychic reality. Transference-countertransference enactments between patient and analyst are conceived as embodying aspects of the historical relations between their respective cultures (Bonovitz, 2005). The work of Grinberg and Grinberg (1984, 1989) is considered key literature for the understanding of the multi-phase migratory experience and process, from a psychoanalytic perspective. They used object relations theory to systematise their understanding and treatment of their immigrant clients, mainly non-voluntary ones. The Grinbergs appear to present the phenomenon through an analytic discourse that focuses on pathologising, they do not address the existential dimensions related to the migratory decisions and processes and
they make very brief reference to voluntary migrants (Madison, 2005). Though such analytic literature focuses on the client’s perspective, it may be useful to reflect on the transferential phenomena, when/if triggered from the therapist’s own foreignness.

Comas Diaz and Jacobsen (1991) discuss the issue of cultural transference and counter-transference in therapy. They explain that a client’s cultural transference can be manifested in the forms of denial of ethnicity and culture, mistrust and suspicion, ambivalence towards the therapist or over-friendliness. From the therapist’s perspective, cultural counter-transference can be manifested in the forms of denial of ethno-cultural differences, being extremely curious about the client’s cultural background or holding feelings of guilt, anger, or ambivalence towards a client, depending on the historical relationship of the cultural backgrounds between the two. Tova (2005) highlights the need to help immigrant therapists recognise their own identity conflicts and resulting counter-transference, as well as the relevant identity issues of their clients.

Certain warnings have been highlighted in relation to maintaining a sensitive approach in the transition to a new culture for mental health professionals; Giordano and Giordano (1977) were amongst the early writers to pay attention to these, relating to the following: potential collusion with painful issues such as loss, sense of belonging, loyalty, fairness and feelings around power dynamics; mirroring back unresolved perceptions about ethnic identity; ideological commitment to civil rights that may differ from culture to culture; paying extreme emphasis on larger societal issues; over-identification with migrant minority groups and loss of objectivity in dealing with clients or families of the same cultural background as the migrant professional.

Eleftheriadou (1994) highlights the significance of therapists examining their relationship with their own culture in order to enhance cross-cultural competence in their work; Gorkin (1996) goes on to add the debate around if and when a therapist may initiate with clients the discussion of their cultural differences. Those stances may assume that the therapist is working within their own cultural and domestic space with culturally different clients. There is another end to this spectrum. When both therapist and client are migrants with the same background in a different country, the process of therapy is not without challenges or areas of careful consideration around the assumptions they may hold due to a perceived sameness (Kogan, 1999). There are
inevitable connections between counter-transference, racial similarity and racial identity development, especially for groups that have suffered overt racism (see the vivid example of African-American therapists and clients in Hall, 1999). The danger of *nostalgic collusion* is discussed by Akhtar (2006: 39) as a defensive response towards the lost places and things that can be unconsciously shared by both immigrant therapist and client. He concludes that:

> “the analyst’s (or therapist’s) personal analysis (therapy) and mourning over immigration determines his capacity to work peacefully with individuals of diverse cultures” (2006: 41).

Reflecting on the above, it is necessary to note that the impact of migration upon a therapist’s sense of self in a host country as well as the attitudes of clients towards them depends on the extent of difference, culturally and linguistically speaking, that exists between original and host culture. For instance, Akhtar (2006) refers to personal communication with Shanfield where the latter refers to Canadian, British, Irish and some European therapists who practise in the US as ‘invisible immigrants’ as they share skin colour, cultural and linguistic proximity to the North American language and culture. Altman (1995, 2000) discusses the underlying racism that can occur in the transference-counter-transference matrix, through the lens of polarity between images of Western and third world countries: If individuals in the third world are assigned the qualities of irrationality and impulsivity, they may be devalued in Western culture and in the culture of psychoanalysis. If that is the attitude adopted, then *what happens when it is the therapist who may be seen as ‘third world’ (by a client, or colleague or employer), even when sitting on the chair of the selected trainee in an educational context or the qualified professional in the workplace?* My immediate response is that it depends on context, in terms of whether it is a multicultural and diverse society or not. Also, there is the impact of someone belonging or being perceived as ‘visible minority’ (von Zweck & Burnett, 2006).

I consider bilingualism maybe the strongest factor that affects a migrant’s life. It is surprisingly notable that ‘…experiences of the bilingual client in therapy have received attention in the literature but accounts of the experience of the bilingual therapist are strikingly sparse’ (Mount, 2007:3). It is again mainly psychoanalytic literature that has attempted to explore the use of second language and bilingualism (Skulic, 2007).
Bowker and Richards (2004) explain that this is possibly due to the fact that the theory and practice of psychoanalysis originated in a cultural and social climate where there were early migrant and exile analysts and analysands\(^{14}\); therefore early analyses were often conducted bilingually (Mohavedi, 1996).

The vicissitudes of bilingualism in therapy that is discussed analytically in terms of transferential phenomena involves the counter-transference of the therapist who works bilingually (Bowker & Richards, 2004; Kitron, 1992) or in their second language (Sprowls, 2002; Jimenez, 2004). Broadly speaking, a bilingual is one who uses two languages; however Verdinelli (2006) emphasises that bilingualism is hard to define due to a wide variability in second language acquisition and proficiency, as well as in what context, mode and life stage languages are learned and utilised. Polyglottism relates to the time difference between acquiring the mothering tongue and subsequently acquired languages (Amati-Mehler et al., 1990) and in discussing such distinctions Skulic (2007) clarifies that “a polyglot therapist denotes therapists practising in their second language that was learned at a later stage in life” (p.8). Most research on bilingualism in the context of psychotherapy relates to therapists who are bilinguals termed as ‘balanced bilinguals’ or ‘proficient coordinate bilinguals’ (Foster, 1992), meaning that they can speak two languages proficiently and use the linguistic structures that are native to each language. In this research, many of the participants and myself who use a second language are polyglots (acquired 2\(^{nd}\) language later in life) and coordinate bilinguals, as defined above.

Stanley (2000) conducted a study with 11 participants who were counsellors of 7 different nationalities practising in the UK in a second language, aiming at exploring how the personal experience of changing language and culture influences the awareness of cultural, social, and personal issues in them. In that study, she acknowledges the lack of literature in this area, apart from a few early psychoanalytic papers (Buxbaum, 1949; Krapf, 1955); she interprets that as a possible resistance of therapists to admit their own ‘not knowing’ as it would threaten their sense of personal and professional power even further. I find that reason possible, especially when a migrant therapist’s knowledge,\(^{14}\)

\(^{14}\) For example, Freud himself spoke other languages and treated people whose German was not their first language. Other analysts that followed, like Buxbaum and Greenson were both bilingual therapists of English and German. Interestingly, they all wrote about bilingualism in therapy, but from the client’s perspective alone, not their own, unless talking indirectly about counter-transference.
credential recognition and ‘expertise’ or sense of authority or status is devalued when moving to another country. I also agree with her further argument that, when a therapist openly faces the vulnerable feelings in their role in a new culture and in a second language, that can advance the quality of their work. Those therapists may consciously check out feelings and meanings of words with clients, possibly avoid strong interpretations and therefore create more choices for clients towards change. As a polyglot counsellor, I notice being attentive to meanings and language use through both awareness of second language limitations and knowledge of the richness that the different vocabulary of other languages offers.

In Burck (1997), Dwivedi highlights the richness of Asian languages and their complexity in describing relationships, which encodes distinctions made in relationships not possible in English. This applies to other languages too, as for example in my Greek mother tongue where there are many words, particularly to describe certain highly nuanced feelings and states of being or interaction that are not available in English. In any case, I agree with Sculic (2007) who claims that “bilingual therapists need to be aware of the ways in which their own bilingualism and cultural positioning influence the way they perceive themselves, their work and their clients in order to effectively conduct psychotherapy across cultures and languages” (p. 44).

4.10 Accounts from migrant therapists-writers

Akhtar (2006) is amongst the very few writers who wrote specifically about the experiences of migrant therapists, from his analytic perspective. He was medically trained in India and when moving to the US, he had to repeat his psychiatric training and then trained as a psychoanalyst. In an evocatively written paper (2006), he summarises the ‘technical challenges’ faced by immigrant therapists, from a psychoanalytic perspective, as follows:

- maintaining cultural neutrality when working with clients of ‘native’ background
- managing curiosity around the client’s unconscious motivations in choosing a therapist of different ethno-cultural background
• recognising any clues related to ethno-cultural transference
• offering therapy in a second language
• avoiding collusions, shared projections and acculturation gaps when in a therapeutic relationship with clients of their own or similar cultural background

In the field of transcultural psychiatry, Mila Goldner-Vukov (2004), a Serbian psychiatrist who migrated to New Zealand after training and practising as a therapist in her home country for several years (i.e. moving from a less culturally diverse context to a multi-ethnic country), found herself facing a number of dilemmas, understood as ‘side effects’ of her personal and professional cultural transition. Those were:

• personal dilemmas in relation to experiencing stages of the impact of the migratory experience upon herself
• her struggles in relation to working therapeutically in the host culture with clients from her own ethnic community, whilst sharing the same socio-political crisis in country of origin
• facing lack of knowledge provision or support about how to work in a bi-cultural and multiethnic context
• her difficulties around what she considered as a therapeutic way of working for certain presenting issues of clients in the host culture and them acquiring a different approach towards help-seeking or understanding ‘psychopathology’ which was not compatible
• her awareness around risking over-identification or collusion with clients who were also immigrants or minority, whilst being ‘a minority within a minority’ herself.

She concludes that in searching a philosophical paradigm that would offer her a useful narrative and perspective in addressing those tensions, she found that existential humanism was the framework that allowed her to bridge the cultural gaps encountered. That reminds me of the work of existential therapist Emmy van Deurzen; in her book Paradox and Passion in Psychotherapy (1998) she dedicates a chapter on Being a Stranger in a Foreign Land. She discusses the three common solutions that people who move to live abroad usually adopt as coping strategies, before introducing a fourth one that she adopted as a migrant person and therapist herself. Those three solutions are: 1. Decide to go back to their country of origin and make the most of what they gained
through travel whilst finding comfort in the familiar, 2. Stay abroad and attempt to get integrated to the local population, which can raise paradoxes and 3. Remain abroad but stay with a community of one’s country. The fourth solution she suggests is ‘*not to hold on one's origin but to embrace the new position of foreigner wholeheartedly*’ (p. 60) and be one of the *rootless, international people* by conscious choice. The later is a position I personally work on, given that there are aspects to the previous strategies tried out already but left aspects of myself in a state of non-authenticity, which I wish to avoid.

In my searches for PhD projects that would be relevant to my study, I encountered two doctoral theses that have informed my thinking, as well as confirming that this area is very limitedly explored in literature and published research: one was conducted in the UK by Greg Madison (2005), with his PhD on Existential Migration; the other is the doctoral study conducted in the US by Eliran Isaacson (2001) on the effect of evolving cultural identities on the experience of Immigrant psychotherapists.

Greg Madison, an existential psychotherapist of Canadian origin who lives and practises in the UK conducted his PhD study on the experience he called ‘existential migration’ to describe the experience of voluntary migrants of not being-at-home in the world. The researcher is himself a migrant psychotherapist and many of the participants in his study, residing in London, were also therapists. He followed a phenomenological approach (Spinelli, 2005) informed by the philosophy and approaches of Existentialism (Cooper, 2003) and Focusing (Gendlin, 2003) that emphasises the ‘felt-sense’. In this exploratory study a number of themes emerged related to voluntary migrants sense of self and identity, their relationship with space, home and belonging, the influence of their mobility upon their philosophical and spiritual worldviews, their attitudes towards difference and foreignness, the impact of their move on family and close relationships and so on. Wearing the practitioner’s besides the researcher’s hat, the author extrapolated the implications of such an experience upon intercultural training and therapeutic considerations as informed by his study.

Isaacson (2001) conducted ten in-depth interviews with immigrant practitioners in the US for his Doctoral study, focusing on the experience of evolving cultural identities of those immigrant therapists. In this study, it is emphasised that despite the challenges
involved in the immigration experience, this very experience can offer opportunities for
growth and enhance the therapeutic work of therapists who identify themselves as
foreigners practising abroad. The dimensions of culturally related transference and
counter-transference are explored, from a psychoanalytic perspective. The author draws
attention to the importance of acknowledging that identity is fluid, non-static and that:

“...the identity status of individuals is prone to evolve, but current
literature does not address the implications of this process when the
therapist is not of the dominant culture. There has been no exploration of
how the development of a minority clinician’s identity affects his or her
countertransference. This seems particularly relevant to immigrant
psychotherapists due to the upheaval that their identities undergo in
migrating to a new place” (p. 39-40).

Period of stay is crucial to evaluating those effects. It is common sense that newcomers
differ greatly from those who have spent years in the new cultural environment. The
findings of this study relate to the following themes: immigrant therapists becoming
bicultural; the effect of contrasting values systems; the experience of being different;
the challenge of prejudice on behalf of client or therapist; the levels of comfort-
discomfort in terms of relating. The study concludes by suggesting that “immigration
with its concomitant influence on identity can over time provide the culturally
dislocated psychotherapist a rich palette to work with, one in which cultural differences
and the therapist’s own cultural evolution introduce unique ways to reach clients”
(Isaacson, 2001: 111). The implications for the actual practice of those therapists were
summarised around 3 main areas:

1. Attending to cross-cultural differences in the therapeutic dyad

2. Risking being more inquisitive during sessions for ensuring clarifications and
avoiding confusion around cultural assumptions

3. Experiencing increased level of comfort in practising psychotherapy in a host
culture, despite the obstacles.

Lijtmaer (2006) discusses very eloquently her perception of her bilingual and bicultural
self as an immigrant analyst as well as her ‘cultural/linguistic counter-transference’.
She was raised in South America with Spanish as her mother tongue, her ancestors were from Eastern Europe and she describes herself as ‘a Hispanic female and a non-practising Jew’ who has migrated to the US and is a practising analyst. She offers very demonstrative examples of how she perceives herself when working with patients of the same or different cultural and/or linguistic background, mainly focusing on assumptions or relations dynamics around sameness and/or difference. Drawing from Foster’s (1998: 186) description of sets of culture related factors that get activated within a therapist when working with clients of a dissimilar culture (termed as ‘clinician’s cultural countertransference’), she discusses her challenges in terms of maintaining therapeutic boundaries and handling self-disclosure and neutrality when in a bilingual/bicultural dyad. Although her papers, like the few others, are based on psychoanalytic interpretations of such a dyad, I found it particularly relevant to therapeutic work of other modalities too. What is emphasised is the importance of the relational and dialectical perspective, particularly crucial when referring to the dynamics of multicultural and multilingual dyads.

In her other paper, Litjmaer (2007) challenges the axiomatic beliefs of many therapists around anonymity and self-disclosure. She explains that when the therapist is an immigrant that may become obvious through accent, skin colour and so on, transference is not contaminated; tentative self-disclosure may facilitate a sense of security in the therapeutic alliance where inevitable fantasies are intensified, due to the presence of difference. Iwamasa (1996) discusses the experience of being an ethnic minority cognitive behavioural therapist in the US context and suggests the need for this to be addressed during training. Finally, Comas-Diaz’s (2005) paper is worth attention being written in a personalised style which fits with heuristic research. The author narrates her own story around her cultural influences in her becoming a therapist, similarly to how I offered my own account in chapter 2.

4.11 Summary and final thoughts

In this chapter, I attempted to find the boundaries containing notions and ideas that would enhance understandings of a rather ‘boundary-less’ experience. Concepts from related fields such as cross-cultural psychology, anthropology and migration studies were discussed critically before looking at literature related directly to the experience of
studying and working abroad, within a complex role such as that of counsellor or psychotherapist. In dwelling in the literature, I became both an observing and critical wanderer of different theoretical territories. I was troubled by dualistic notions and dichotomous frames of understanding that emphasise difference and fragmentation of self, identity, values and understandings (Hermans et al., 1998). My aim has been to become familiar with those, in attempting to transcend them in my writing.

Additionally, I soon realised a possibility of getting caught into the perspectives written by White versus Black authors, with the literal and political sense of the terms. There is a predominantly white discourse, with a plethora of white authors out-numbering Black or ethnic minority ones (Rastogi & Wieling, 2005; Ryde, 2009). Smith (1999) highlights this when she states that “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism”, as it has traditionally stood as a practice and metaphor for knowledge, power and truth which was collected or claimed by white Westerners who ‘re-searched’ indigenous people to report back to the West representations of the, usually dark-skinned, ‘Other’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). At some point I questioned: what kind of colour author am I?

Before I moved abroad, I perceived myself a white, born and raised in Athens by white Greek parents. When I moved to the UK, I became aware that I was ‘brown’ and often called ‘black’ by the ‘very white’ British people. Even in societies that promote and celebrate multiculturalism, the issues around black and white in relation to privilege are present, let alone when a society is less diverse or exposed to or accepting of difference. When reading literature like that in this chapter, it is important to recognise the dynamics of white privilege and power (Kivel, 1996; McIntyre, 1997). Lago (2005) stresses the importance of white therapists recognising the impact of their own ‘colour discourse’ in therapeutic work. My approach towards the discourse of black and white has formed in my mind as a matter of visible versus invisible. I believe that this is an important lens in approaching this study and questioning oneself as both researchers and practitioners. Once something becomes visible in awareness, then choices can be made in relation to how to be handled for the good of all concerned.

One can see how difficult it has been for any single theoretical perspective or empirical inquiry to adequately address the interface of culture and individual dynamics.
(Tummala-Narra, 2004: 303). My hope is that the literature discussed here will act as a vehicle or point of departure for the reader in order to discover their own meanings. In the following chapter, I invite the reader to witness and engage with the participants own experiences, as co-constructed though our dialogue and my embodied interaction with the meanings in the text produced.
Chapter Five (5): Findings

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Exemplary Portraits

   a. The Migrant Therapist
   b. The Returnee Therapist
   c. The Commuter Therapist

5.3 Main Themes

   1. Reasons for moving abroad
   2. Training as a therapist abroad
   3. Practising as a therapist abroad
   4. The role of second language
   5. The fantasy or experience of repatriation
   6. Support Systems and Supervision
   7. Broader perspectives

5.4 Further layers in Heuristics

   a. On Liminality
   b. On Transition
   c. On Dynamics of Power
   d. On Sameness and Difference
   e. On Splitting and Attachment
   f. On Resilience and Transcendence

5.5 Conclusion
5.1 Introduction

At this stage, another metaphor has been riding my process. Especially in writing this chapter, I have often felt like the bearer and midwife of my own ‘baby’. In conversations with others, I have also experienced the role of midwife in assisting the ‘delivery’ of meanings. But, before the baby is delivered, the limbs and organs must attain full form at their own timing. This stage has led me to continuous and careful ‘scanning’ of my research material. In this chapter, my attempt is to share with the reader the different angles and views of such ‘scans’.

In the following paragraphs, the insights/findings will be presented as follows:

- Three of the participants’ stories will be presented as ‘exemplary portraits’ (Moustakas 1990, p54)

- Themes/threads of meanings that relate to the questions posed during the semi-structured interview conversations will be presented

- Further layers of meaning and notions that occurred to me through heuristic illumination and explication will be noted

Before I was able to explicate what I discovered in my writing, a new phase of heuristic process occurred with new immersion, incubation and moving into illumination phase, showing me that analysis is continuous and facilitated by the process and act of writing itself. I had dialogues with others but kept reminding myself that the meanings reside in the tacit embedded in the self. In returning to the self-search, my inner self-dialogue occasionally shifts to dialogue with the Reader, in the form of ‘letters to the Reader’.

With the intention not only to bring the experiences of participants more alive but also to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the research process, I will be presenting the sections of this chapter with use of verbatim quotes from the transcripts, blended in my narrative (Creswell, 1998).
5.2 Exemplary Portraits

Moustakas (1990) argues for using ‘exemplary accounts’ so that the topic is explored from the perspective of ‘whole persons’ rather than just composites. In this light I have selected the following accounts, hoping to illustrate the richness of the phenomenon. It is important to explain that the participants are not a homogenous group, each is unique in their context and therefore any generalisation was neither sought for nor explored on my part. However, I looked for patterns whilst acknowledging some aspects of the experience that may have been relevant to an individual alone. I have identified certain examples of the experience that I intend to offer accounts of, through three exemplary portraits that demonstrate a different angle. In those, there are threads of meanings that may be relevant to others’ experiences but should be understood within each person’s context. I begin with Isabel:

a. ‘The Migrant Therapist’: ISABEL

Isabel is a counselling psychologist in her mid 30’s, practising in Canada for 5 years. She was born and grew up in a rural city in South America, then moved to the capital where she originally studied psychology. She started working as an organisational psychologist, keeping in mind that she would go into psychotherapy at a more mature stage. She described her decision to move abroad and make a career change through training in psychotherapy in a different country as an ‘existential calling’:

“I wanted to change the direction of my professional life, I was getting restless where I was in my country, and there was almost an existential calling; I wanted to have an international experience that would broaden my horizons as a therapist”.

She originally identified the need to learn English so that she could live and study abroad. She then decided to move to Canada, thinking that she would be employable with the qualifications she had already and also look for psychotherapy training. She encountered numerous problems with language barriers and attitudes that obliged her initially to work in low-income positions which were irrelevant to her professional background. In her words:
"When I first moved to Canada, I had no legal problems but had a cultural problem and lack of language fluency. I was a highly trained professional with a good salary in my own country. When I was rejected during interviews in Canada, it hit my pride, I felt inadequate.”

Isabel eventually improved her English and undertook counselling psychology training where she found trainers and supervisors that understood her processes. She found herself in a different educational system and different attitudes towards the therapist’s persona, when comparing her original and host cultures. She said:

“Even though psychology in S. America follows a lot the footsteps of Europe and US, I think we appropriate a lot of that into our own culture, we are far more emotional. Entering the therapy world in North America though was a huge shock; there is a whole different perspective around what therapy means and what is accepted or not in that culture”

Isabel sought personal therapy to assist her with her transition in another culture. In that experience, she observed differences in mannerism and approach, as contrasted to therapists in her country. For example, she talked about physical touch, greeting and disclosure of emotions. She said:

“I think Latinos are very physical, even in the therapist role, they would hug or kiss a client in certain situations and that is ok, we are tactile. In Canada, outside social circles, that could be considered something unethical or non-professional. Disclosure of emotions from the therapist, in the way we perceive it, is also not allowed; it is the UK-North Europe model, although it varies according to the approach…but in S. America the whole attitude is different around emotions”.

She went on to mention an example when she went to see a therapist in Canada and she experienced him as extremely formal and cold. She also talked about another experience though, where the working alliance between her and her therapist did work well for her, although this therapist was of a different culture and of a modality that she was not too keen on. In her words:

“I found a CBT therapist and although I was not keen on that, it worked. There were times that she did not understand some of my cultural values, I was mad at her and questioned her a lot but she was there for me, open to explore and accepting. Even though her approach was sometimes against what I felt I needed; but she was open to talk about that too and be challenged
so in that case, who was that human being and the chemistry between us was what spoke louder for me”

After few years of living in Canada, Isabel obtained Canadian citizenship; however, she defended her cultural identity and sense of belonging as ‘very Brazilian’ and clarified that in the following way:

“I still feel that I belong to Brazil but had to leave to open up my horizons and opportunities. I am now a Canadian citizen, but if people ask me about where I am from I always feel the need to highlight my Brazilian origins, as if I also want to keep reminding to myself”

During the conversation, there was a lot of movement between past and present and her experiences in the two cultures. Besides her strong identification with her Brazilian background, when I asked her about her fantasies of a possible return, she talked about feelings of loss and grief and another sense of displacement and alienation:

“Going back to Brazil after having moved and worked abroad would be so hard, I would have to start again and bear a new series of losses and adjustments…a lot of grief involved and loneliness in that experience. I would feel that my people would not understand me; you do end up feeling like a stranger in your own country”

Having established herself as a therapist in Canada after a number of difficult years of adjustment at personal and professional level, Isabel talked about her experiences of providing therapy in Canada through vivid examples. One area of challenge has been her use of second language and having an accent in relation to clients' perception of her and establishing trust. She said:

“When I meet a client, it is evident that I have an accent and that I’m a foreigner. Especially in the beginning of my career, I questioned whether clients would respect and trust me as their counsellor when realising that I may have missed some nuances or had to ask for clarifications”

Also she said:

“Language is very powerful, there are idioms, metaphors and so many symbolic meanings. Sometimes I found myself translating from Brazilian and the result would make no sense in the Canadian language. I gradually overcame that but it had huge impact on my counselling for a long time, it made me lose some of my spontaneity and flow”
Another challenge for her has been the concept of ethics and professional boundaries as they differ from culture to culture. In contrasting Brazil and Canada, she mentioned:

“I had friends in Brazil who had social contact with their therapists. In North America I have seen that this is a no situation and if or when it happens, it is very secretive, which makes me wonder what attitude is safer really. I think there needs be some flexibility in deciding where the distinctive line lies and how to manage that.”

She mentioned examples of her dilemmas around her mannerism as a therapist in Canada as related to what is acceptable within the therapy culture, such as:

“My whole mannerism had to adjust otherwise I kept feeling I was crossing the boundaries. Things like whether I shake hands or whether my eyes get watered during a session…my principle is to be genuine, with my emotional and cultural make up; that does not mean am not professional enough”

Despite the above challenges, Isabel talked about the fact that many of her clients choose her as their therapist for the very reason that she is an immigrant, especially when they are immigrants themselves. She said:

“I had feedback from clients sharing that they find me very compassionate, especially if they also struggle with issues related to finding themselves in another culture. When in a new culture, I was challenged to expand and deal with feeling out of place; that is so relevant to client work, where many people feel alienated or different than a certain norm”

Working in a multicultural society like the Canadian one, Isabel mentioned that she sees clients from all over the world, including Latin clients who may expect or assume certain manners too, due to their common cultural background, something that requires re-negotiating within the therapist. In her words:

“Besides the diverse client groups I am counselling, I see Latin clients too, which is often difficult cause I have again to re-negotiate with myself how I marry the different influences I have in a congruent way whilst taking into account what they may be expecting of me, due to being both foreigners but of the same origin”
With those clients where she shares the same mother tongue, Isabel reports a sense of ‘forgetfulness’ around her native language, given that she predominantly operates in a second language, especially in her professional role:

“Sometimes, I may have a client who wants psychotherapy in Portuguese, which is my native language. And I find that being a challenge now because I don’t speak Portuguese anymore in my everydayness. I removed myself from my own community in Canada for a while, because I wanted to master my English, especially when on the therapist chair”

Interestingly, Isabel used the metaphor of a dance to describe the blending of values in her cross-cultural work:

“I experience a constant dance with clients, where we are blending our values and our languages, as cultural beings. I believe that if a therapist has not questioned what are the ‘cultural tunes’ that they carry, they cannot do this sort of dance. So much can be missed out and end up in a sort of paraphony!”

The conversation moved to her experience of receiving supervision and she emphasised her need to choose supervisors who were also immigrants:

“I found supervisors who were not Canadian because they were in the position to understand and reassure me that it was ok for me to bring cultural responses to my working style which maybe were not compatible with some North American therapy rules”

A vivid example of how supervision has helped her identify some of the cultural challenges relating to the mixture of her original and host culture within her perspective, as well as that imposed by the adopted therapy culture, was when working with a male client. Isabel explained working with her supervisor in identifying cultural dynamics in relation to gender roles within her cultural values system. She said:

“I had this male client who started getting emotional, he didn’t really cry, but his eyes started watering. I told my supervisor that at that point, I was feeling uncomfortable both because I am a woman and in my culture men are more macho, if you like, but also because I was concerned about my own self-image in witnessing that. In realised that I had to challenge my cultural stereotypes, such experiences in supervision were an eye-opener”
Toward the end of the session, I encouraged Isabel to share her views in relation to what changes she would see as necessary in counselling and psychotherapy training, resulting from her personal experience. She said that the issues around culture are not mandatory for such courses and argued the necessity for that, through highlighting potential dangers in case of its absence:

“I took a course in multicultural counselling and diversity during my training, which is often an elective module. I feel annoyed that Psychologists think they don’t need to know about the diversity issues, as if they have all their categories and labels for people…but we know that in the therapeutic relationship, things are far more complex…a purely psychological approach is dangerous, so easy to pathologise something that is not ‘mainstream’”

When I asked her about looking for a metaphor that would capture her experience, she used that of a bird, as related to someone who has a wide perspective and a sense of freedom, as related to cross-cultural transitions:

“My metaphor would be a bird, it connects to flying, seeing the broader picture and having freedom. My mobility has been around that, feeding my thirst and curiosity for new things and having freedom, something that I found in my therapist role too”

Fig. 9: Flying bird metaphor - (Retrieved from Google images as a ‘flying bird’)

Overall, she concluded that she has experienced a sense of transformation and growth in her mobility and working as a therapist abroad, with all the challenges and opportunities that this entailed:

“Looking back and in how I feel now, I can see that I struggled with many things like managing boundaries and my own cultural assumptions, my
language problem and so on…but I have grown and transformed so much, I feel re-born and this is something that I can draw from to accompany my clients’ processes too”

On a final note, she expressed her gratitude towards being offered the opportunity to explore such a subtle and meaningful area of her experience. As described earlier, Isabel appears to have chosen to remain in Canada and not return to Brazil. However, some other therapists have chosen to return to their original culture, finding themselves in a whole new ‘territory’ of experience. An example is that of Anna, whose account is presented below.

b. ‘The Returnee Therapist’: ANNA

Anna is a 34-year old humanistic/integrative psychotherapist, born and raised in Greece. When finishing school, she moved to the UK where she completed her studies and gained professional experience. She spent 11 years in London and at the time of interview, it has been 2.5 years since she returned to Athens, where she set up a private practice.

Her overall experience in London was very positive; she referred to it as her second home and a sub-culture with its own uniqueness, due to its multiculturalism. In contrast to that, Anna held particular attitudes to parenting as related to culture, and thought that London was not the kind of environment she considered desirable for raising a family, which led to her decision of repatriation.

In describing her education, she shared that she originally moved abroad to study Psychology and Sociology and later completed a 4-year training programme in Counselling/Psychotherapy. When I asked her to comment on that experience of receiving counselling training abroad, she shared several insights. First of all, she found that receiving such training in a multicultural group in London challenged her in expanding her familiar boundaries:

“Being able to train and work with people from different countries, I felt like a citizen of the world, someone who learnt to appreciate both my own influences and others’ worldviews. I thankfully did not have problems with the language and I felt very welcomed, but I know that this is not the case for all
Anna shared that the experience of leaving Greece combined with the growth journey she embarked on through counselling training gave her a sense of freedom and awareness of her original culture:

"Leaving Greece and meeting other cultures there somehow released me from my identity of being Greek and thinking that anything that is Greek is the best or the that the Greek way is the only way - it gave me a kind of freedom. I revisited my perception on my return"

She made a link between the experience of mobility and the transition to adulthood, in the sense that:

"Being too close to home is imprisoning sometimes, it leads to some closed-mindedness... it happens in a way that is unconscious. I became more of an adult be moving and developing professionally abroad. The challenge has been to remain as such when coming back to my original family"

Her exposure to a different culture led to an original confusion which developed to a more spiritual perspective:

"You are not aware of who you are until you are exposed into something different. I ended up not knowing where my belonging is. This experience takes away your armour, your hard surface and it helps you grow more inwards to find who you really are. It's a transpersonal dimension that is with me wherever I am now"

She shared that when working abroad, she was confident due to language fluency and receiving appreciation of her personal qualities. The conversation then focused on her experience upon her return to Athens, in terms of both challenges and opportunities she has been facing. One aspect of that experience relates to the shock of returning to one's language and being unfamiliar with the professional language in the mother tongue:

"When I came back I felt as if I was de-skilled to practise because I had trained in English and all the expressions or therapeutic tools in my thinking were still in that language. When in a Greek context again, I suddenly found myself in a language that was not so familiar to me anymore, especially in the therapist role"
In discovering this challenge, Anna used both languages at the beginning, explaining to her clients about her situation, something that was received with patience on their behalf:

“It took me a long time to start figuring out how to talk or respond to a client. I warned them before the session that some words might come out in English first and it might take me some time to find words in Greek…this attitude and their acceptance helped me not to lose my confidence”

Besides the challenge of returning to her own language in a professional context that was alien to her, Anna also talked about the difficulties raised by feeling infantilised by some level of ‘regression’ to what she was when she originally moved away. She said:

“Coming back was an emotional shock too in the sense that I was re-visiting emotions that I had left behind; it was as if I became too young again and felt vulnerable for a long time, although I had new adult roles carrying with me, being a wife and a mother. It was a regression to an extent at a personal level and this affected my work, inevitably, and had to work it through”

Anna moved on into talking about her therapy work, reflecting on the different attitudes towards therapists when comparing her work in London and that in Greece. She mentioned difficulties around communicating clear boundaries to her Greek clients and dealing with attitudes related her authority and status, also linked to professional recognition. She said:

“In Greece there is this issue about people looking at your qualifications rather than whether you are good at your work, as if professional integrity is less important than the status you demonstrate. This is a cultural issue but is also an issue for us about feeling safe working within our profession when moving between countries”.

Anna explained that the expectations of Greek clients in relation to a counsellor do not match with the philosophy and nature of her work; she finds herself ‘educating’ them about the process, where they appear to respond positively:

“The Greek clients might treat me more like a doctor or expert, so I take time at the beginning to give an overview of what counselling is and how I operate within my philosophy; being respectful to the cultural characteristics too, given that I am aware of them”
She also mentioned several dynamics of different mannerism and professionalism that she had incorporated in her professional role when abroad, but which did not seem to work in another culture. For example, she attempted to offer a sliding-scale for fees, but encountered a sense of pride in Greek clients that was counter-productive. She said: “Greeks often express a pride; they can’t handle it if they cannot afford to pay the full amount. It is as if they feel devalued”. Anna drew upon the importance of the therapeutic relationship, which is core in her humanistic philosophy and argued that if handled sensitively, such cultural barriers can be overcome successfully.

Together with an attitude of resilience towards the challenges she has faced upon her return and a strong belief in her self and her work, Anna also highlighted the professional isolation a therapist can feel when returning to practise in a country where the counselling profession is not widely acknowledged. She also linked that to the lack of support and supervision available or the difference in handling dual relationships or inappropriate referrals when a therapist moves back to a country where the helping professions are not well networked and in rather separate and competitive positions. When I asked her how is she was supporting herself through that she replied by saying:

“I have felt very isolated when moving back to Greece and was left with the same supervisor that I had in London, doing telephone supervision. I could not find a supervisor here that would assist me in that transition or understand the issues am facing. Other support I get is by keeping up with the literature, occasionally getting in contact with some colleagues; not many though here who don’t see me as a threat due to competition because I bring knowledge and experience from abroad”

Anna reflected on the fact that when in London she had worked in demanding positions where she learnt to be self-reliant as a practitioner. That has prepared her in order to cope with the unknown she faced on her return. She made links also to the danger of professional burnout when a therapist is obliged to work alone, especially in a culture where professional structures or peer support is not easily available. She said:

“Thankfully, I learnt how to trust my inner resources as a therapist…when in England I could delegate and liaise professionally with other professions when necessary. But, here in Greece, I am not confident that colleagues are adequately informed or collaborative enough. That can be a huge tension and I shall be careful around not reaching burnout sometimes”
Anna shared that her inner conflicts around the two cultures living within her got resolved through her recent experience of motherhood; she described that as offering a sense of grounded-ness and becoming more containing, holding, nurturing. She also mentioned the significance of being married to a foreign husband and living together in Greece (she explained that being married to a foreigner in her own country allows space for the ‘foreign-ness’ within her that is now integrated in her whole being, even if perceived as different by others). When I asked her to think of a metaphor that would describe her as a therapist, she offered the image of an ancient Greek figurine (called *Cycladic Idol*) that symbolises fertility and mother earth (she described it as also connected to the return to mother-land):}

![Cycladic Idol metaphor](Retrieved from Google images as ‘Cycladic idol’: about 2400 BC, Marble, 16 In.)

Finally, I invited Anna to reflect on the significance of having taken part in this conversation. She responded very positively by saying:

“*Coming back to Greece after living and working abroad, helped me re-think and re-visit my own emotional issues and sense of identity. This is an ongoing process, something to go back to and explore at a regular basis. I am very happy I had this opportunity to talk about it here with you and was looking forward to that; I was never given the chance to reflect on that core experience of my life before*”

Her final words seem to capture something important about how her mobility has affected her as a person, at an existential and spiritual level:
“I feel as if am still after a treasure that I have left behind but I don’t want to see myself living in Greece for ever, it is right now but I also want to feel open. There is something existential in all that mobility, a necessity to leave, grow and revisit one’s roots in a new light, all linked to therapeutic processes. I want to keep myself open, transformation continues”

Anna seems to have reached a point of appreciating what each of her personal and professional life experiences in the two countries and cultures had to offer, remaining open to that existential calling which might take her to another place in the future. Prioritising the values and kind of environment where she wanted to ‘nest’ her family as a new mother seems to have determined her decision to settle in her country of origin, allowing flexibility for her current dominant maternal role. For others, the splitting between the two countries and cultures has not found resolution in such a way. For Astrid, whose account follows, commuting between the two countries on a weekly basis appeared to be the only way to compromise between her personal and professional needs.

c. “The Commuter Therapist”: ASTRID

Astrid is a humanistic counsellor in her early 50’s, of British origin who lives and works in Germany. She originally left the UK at the age of 15 due to her father’s overseas appointment and later went to Germany, following her German husband. At the time of our recorded conversation, it has been about 6 years that she has been practising privately in Germany, but she also travels to London weekly where she offers counselling and supervision too, being contracted with an agency.

Astrid decided to study in the UK, although living in Germany, for two main reasons: a. because she did not need a psychology degree to enrol in such training in the UK, unlike requirements in Germany and, b. due to finding it easier to study in her mother tongue. In her words:

“I did not feel I wanted to cope with doing academic writing in my German second language. So, I felt that to add the German language to the training aspect, besides all the personal work which is required, would be asking too much of myself”
Astrid described various practical difficulties she faced when qualifying as a therapist in the UK but wanting to practise in Germany. Those were related to the following aspects:

• Issues around having her UK professional qualifications recognised in another country

• Issues related to a different understanding of the terms ‘counsellor/counselling’ and ‘psychotherapist/psychotherapy’ between the two countries

• Issues around having her person-centred modality acknowledged in Germany and having access to insurance procedures from her clients

• Issues related to achieving registry with the German professional body for psychotherapists, given that regulation of the profession is different in Germany and the UK.

• Issues related to lack of professional contacts and networking in Germany due to doing her professional training in another country

Astrid was already immersed in her German host culture when she was to embark on her career as therapist, therefore she did not experience the relevant cultural shock at that time. However the different status of the profession between the two countries has significantly affected her sense of professional belonging and recognition and, as such, her confidence for a few years. This has led her to choose to be working in two countries on a weekly basis, an arrangement that required travelling, personal effort and exhaustion. Once she qualified in the UK, she got a lecturing job at a British University as well as seeing clients and was commuting back to her family home in Germany. However, when her husband retired, she decided that she would try setting up her private practice in Germany. She described the first experiences of that attempt as humiliating and disempowering, due to her professional status in a country that applied a different system. She talked about feeling very uncomfortable during job interviews and also feeling very isolated in relation to finding like-minded people at both social and professional level. In her words:

“When I first sought for work opportunities in Germany, it was dreadful; it proved to be humiliating. I remember feeling in despair about having spent so much time, money and effort to train and qualify and then seeing my qualifications being treated as worthless. Whenever I applied for a job, I felt like a beggar, I received so much doubt in relation to my competencies due to
missing that German piece of paper that would validate my status. So, I could never get a paid job in an agency in Germany, my work is totally freelance. That entails challenges about finding clients and them trusting that I am qualified enough, when the whole system is devaluing me because of my receiving training abroad, without holding a psychology degree. I have never had such problems in the UK!”

Astrid described the time-consuming bureaucracy she had to go through in order to eventually manage to get the ‘stamp’ of recognition she needed, having as consequence that:

“It took me a few years to feel half way comfortable work-wise in Germany; it was when I managed to take a particular title which had not changed anything around my competence. It was like having the stamp or the shield to protect me from all the suspicion I was receiving before”

She described the importance of having a professional network and how that proves difficult when one moves between countries:

“When you do your training in one country and you create a network, then it is easier to get work, it’s progressive. Whereas when you go to a new country and you have to make a fresh start, you literally get back to square one. You have the qualification but it’s not recognised, yet. So, you don’t have anything, actually, you could be obliged to work in a bar to survive. It’s very dispiriting”

In her attempt to find a compromise where she would feel professionally fulfilled, she created two different lives as a therapist, in two different countries and cultures, each of them provoking opposite feelings:

“I have been having two lives. I would come to England and feel confident and appreciated in my work and then back to Germany where I felt so undermined, a shivering mess. I don’t feel that split so much now because we’re a few years down the line and I’ve finally been successful in finding enough work in Germany. However, all could be up in the air. If suddenly the freelance work dried up for example due to health insurance payment difficulties, I would have to do training from scratch only in CBT or psychodynamic approach since those are the recognised modalities there”

Her person-centred approach is not being covered by insurance in Germany, something that added to her feeling of being marginalised:
“People can have psychotherapy in Germany through their health insurance; the person-centred humanistic integrative modality, it’s not recognised. So, I have felt marginalised, reinforcing my feeling a failure almost on every front”

Astrid used a powerful metaphor to demonstrate her feelings of being rejected, using ‘currency transfer’:

“Achieving successful completion of the psychotherapy training was very much tied up to my self-concept so when I went back to Germany with it and it was not acknowledged, it crushed me. I felt like I was carrying non-transferable currency. It is like trying to pay your bill in a restaurant in Germany and realising that you have Pounds and not Euros…this does not mean you are moneyless or that you are someone illegal, it is still money”

She also expressed her concern around the law and having to constantly be cautious:

“I constantly felt I had to be extra careful when seeing clients in Germany, as if I was a refugee that would be deported at any time and in the meantime as if I was tolerated cause I did not belong, I did not fit, I was seen as not being good enough”

After exploring the frustration around the threat to professional status, Astrid talked about her client work and how their level of cultural diversity creates a certain dynamic about how she sits within her own sense of cultural self too. She said:

“In terms of clients’ cultures, in London I see diverse clients but in Germany they are mainly Germans - where I live, all is white and middle class, although Germans avoid such terms to describe aspects of society… I think that me being a foreigner in Germany stands out more because of that”

At a certain point, we talked about Astrid’s operating in her mother tongue and in a second language, depending on the place where she is. As a therapist offering counselling in her German second language, she said:

“When in Germany, I offer counselling in German, and I have sometimes felt nervous around whether my accent would affect clients’ level of trust. I think that hasn’t been too much of a problem in individual counselling, I have been more anxious when working with groups and I am the only non-native speaker”

In terms of her reading therapy related material in a second language and how the therapeutic jargon rests with her in two languages, she recognised a certain split - she
trained in her English mother tongue but then works in German when and also reads in two languages:

“I trained in England in my mother tongue and as such I adopted a certain vocabulary when I am thinking as a therapist. I read books about therapy in German, but the terminology never quite fits for me. And mostly I can get away with the literal translation, if I need to talk about it. But there is definitely that split”

When asked how she perceived her cultural identity and her sense of where is home for her, she responded as follows, emphasising more a ‘European’ dimension. Also, she made a distinction between where her professional and personal life ‘fit’ the most:

“I would describe my cultural identity as European, someone who has two European cultures within, with different roles being more dominant in each. Coming to England 2 days per week to work, fulfils my professional needs that are not met in Germany. But in terms of my sense of home, that is where my house and my family are which is in Germany”

When asked to think of a metaphor that would describe her, Astrid came up with the image of a fragile jigsaw puzzle:

“My metaphor for myself would be a jigsaw puzzle that holds together but can dismantle at any time, with a slightest movement. I am the pieces of a puzzle but I feel it can all be broken up again. It’s fairly robust, when it’s all together but if you lift it, if you try and change anything, it can all go into pieces, until it finds its homeostasis again”

![Globe - Jigsaw puzzle metaphor](Retrieved from Microsoft Word Clip Art under ‘globe’ search)
Astrid talked about how important it has been for her to be receiving supervision from a supervisor who is also an immigrant and who speaks both her native and second language. She said:

“I have a supervisor, an American woman who lived in Germany for years, now living in London. She has been great because she’s understood what challenges am facing in terms of operating in two cultures and in two languages. I don’t think it would have worked for me if I had a supervisor who is not familiar themselves with such a process...cause a lot of what we talk about today, your topic, is not visible at a conscious level to many, even in our peer group”

As a British woman who has been living abroad for years, Astrid shared some insights about how she understands certain cultural attitudes of her original culture, having seen it and reflected upon it from afar. She said:

“English people are quite insular in their thinking and often arrogant as far as the language is concerned. It’s like an English native speaker can be very intolerant to somebody with an accent or somebody who doesn’t express themselves the same way. There is also still a colonial attitude that manifests itself in subtle ways, if not overtly at times”

She went on to reflect on the fact that this above attitude also affects the training and understanding amongst therapy professionals, making links with professional rivalries being generated. She talked about the need for multi-cultural encounters for therapy professionals, where there is ‘critical mass’ of diversity in order for culturally related dynamics to become acknowledged and explored.

Astrid shared how all this highly challenging and painful experience of mobility has also humbled her as a therapist and advanced her empathy. She became active in promoting change and raising awareness around the needs and challenges related to therapists who face mobility and seeking opportunities to influence the movements concerning sensitive and appropriate regulation of the profession in the future. She said:

“I now have a huge interest in mobility of professionals and the problems with having qualifications recognised; that’s why I’ve done so much committee work. I see that the profession and the bodies as a whole do not manifest the inherent humanistic values related to diversity and equality amongst modalities and professional routes and that needs to be addressed.
I am an example of having been through a lot of grief, loss of face, loss of faith - it’s made me humble as well as robust, bold and open-minded.”

Astrid finally expressed her gratitude of having been given the opportunity to reflect on her experience with an understanding, empathic and validating colleague.

**Illumination and Explication Reflections: Seeing the Self in the ‘Other’**

After writing the above portraits, I set them aside for a few months and returned to them when working on producing a draft of the thesis as a whole. For all this period, I have been feeling disturbed in relation to how I relate to those accounts and the rest of the voices in this research. However, I could not explain this reaction. In re-reading these accounts several times and being in intimate connection with my inner process, I wrote the following ‘confessional letter’, addressed to the Reader. My voice in it occurred naturally, giving permission to express what has been disturbing my awareness:

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Dear Reader,

When reading the individual portraits, I can see parts of my own experience or fantasies as a therapist who has moved to a different country. I have been an immigrant therapist for the past 9 years or so, I can see myself encountering the issues described by the returnee one or negotiating several ‘commutings’ in both my internal and external worlds, as a way of finding a balance between them. My urgency is around finding a way to remain authentic to all the parts of myself, the cultural influences that reside within. I struggle to marry the needs of the person and the therapist inside who speak different languages and have contradictory desires. Have I put myself in an impossible state of existence in that torturing, yet liberating, liminality?

As I proceed in my writing, I discover that the further I engage with the heuristic process, the closer I come to auto-ethnography. Therefore, I feel in conflict with the material shared by those that engaged in dialogue with me. Are the voices competing for space? Where is my voice in relation to those voices? What is the relationship between the voices? Shall I discard the participants’ material to remain authentic to the heuristic process? Moustakas appears to contradict himself. I would feel disrespectful to those that shared their experiences with me if I do not include them in this research. They are part of the process. But then, I feel frustrated with our dynamics...is there some profound insight of the tacit that is struggling to be articulated from within me?

I shall finally admit to myself and the reader that the reasons why I went out to
dialogue with others in this research are related to the following: Firstly, I needed a way of periodically ‘distracting’ myself from the pain involved in my own embodied experiencing of the topic and secondly, I was urged to break my isolation and seek a sense of normalising my experience through seeking others who may have felt something similar but were afraid to tell. This ‘confession’ makes me wonder whether it relates to my feeling that a lot remains unsaid in those dialogues. Is it so fundamentally challenging for a therapist to admit their own fragility? Are the positive sides of such an experience so overlooked that they are difficult to be articulated?

Maybe the participants’ role has been to support my challenging of the idea of ‘otherness’. We do not need to compete, nor necessarily to collude or collaborate. Each voice adds a different piece to the puzzle, each of us could be an instrument with its own tune in the whole of the orchestra, in this polyphony. Each can be a participant in a play, in that life drama of crossing cultures. Shall I listen to these voices like a conductor? How can I reach a state of harmony in tuning the thesis in a melodic whole?

I write those words in a letter addressed to the Reader as it makes me feel that I request a compassionate stance from those that I feel may ‘attack’ me for speaking up. Am I putting a torch upon something that prefers to remain hidden in that experience? Am I terrified by both the fear and awe that comes with what becomes visible in crossing cultures, especially in a therapist’s role? And shall I dare to do so?

The letter above demonstrates that in striving towards remaining faithful to the heuristic process as described by Moustakas (1990), I found that it is full of contradictions (Sela-Smith, 2001), particularly related to the inclusion of other voices in a methodological stance that focuses on self-search. These created an ambivalence that became particularly apparent at periods of explication. I have felt betrayed and frustrated by getting caught in that confusion. But I also realised that I have actually engaged in my personal self-search, to the extent that I often felt ill, followed by some periods of peace resulting from the acceptance of my realisations. Moustakas (1990) warns against that by stating that “the dawning of awareness may be refreshing and peaceful, or it may be disturbing and even jarring” (p.13)

In critiquing the use of participants in heuristic inquiry, Sela-Smith (2001) draws attention to them serving the purpose of “reflectors of possible areas of resistance that may be out of conscious awareness in the form of denial, projection or incomplete search” (p. 112) in the researcher’s self who is the ‘data’. She suggests that the heuristic researcher always returns to self and reflects on any such other voices in terms of expanding the search for meaning. She also highlights that the presence of resistance
in heuristic research can be either a limitation or a useful parameter, depending on whether that is ignored or acknowledged. This letter to the Reader is what I consider my inner data at that heuristic stage of illumination and explication, phases that are intertwined and non-linear. The resistance and ambivalence I came to realise is owned but also leaves me wondering whether is it experienced by others, though not openly shared. In dialoguing with the reader, I dialogue with myself and shift in embracing those feelings as part of the research process and the topic itself.

5.3 MAIN THEMES

Introduction

Following the above, in reading the transcripts and observing the thinking and feeling processes that occurred, I paid careful attention to my embodied reactions that led me to elicit the meanings, patterns and layers of experience. Heron (1992) warns that, “the ordinary use of language creates a split world, with an arbitrary separation between object and subject” (p.9). In order to overcome that kind of split, I found it useful to acquire Gendlin’s (2003: 32) ‘felt sense’ approach, described as a form of awareness that is held in the body in a sensory way. The phases of heuristic illumination, explication and creative synthesis have been my compass for this section, which followed periods and intervals of incubation that would provide the space for the tacit dimensions to emerge.

As a reminder of how I approached the heuristic analysis, my immersion in the transcripts as raw material was in a way towards identifying themes as patterns which either described possible observations or interpreted aspects of the phenomenon at either a ‘manifest’ or ‘latent’ level (Boyantzis, 1998), providing ‘a way of seeing’ (p.1). The themes were viewed as relevant to different questions, without this meaning that they are not also relevant to another question, given that the personal, the professional and other areas of experience are often intertwined together. I chose to present them in that way for reasons of coherence and continuity, to facilitate the reader’s understanding. I have also approached the data more as a whole, given its size and aiming at capturing the essence of it rather than scrutinise it to a level that extreme detail would not allow space for emphasising the subtleties of an exploratory approach.
I will begin by ‘setting the scene’ of the therapists’ mobility, describing their reasons/motives for moving to another country.

1. Setting the Scene: Reason(s) for moving abroad

- Q.: What were the circumstances that led you move abroad?

To clarify the factors that led to the move is important as it gives a background context of the experiences that took place in the new country. My posing this question at the beginning of each encounter also allowed space for us to get comfortable, whilst inviting the participant to take a journey in the past, when the experience began. The reasons presented by participants are described below:

- To undertake counselling or psychotherapy training
  As in my experience, many of the participants decided to move abroad in order to undertake a course in counselling or psychotherapy, particularly when this was not available or less developed in their own country.

- To seek better career opportunities
  For some participants, the need to find better career opportunities as therapists in a country where there was employment available in that field was a strong motivator for their move.

- To follow a spouse
  A couple of participants mentioned that they originally moved abroad following their partner’s overseas appointment. They mentioned that deciding later on to become professional therapists, was not irrelevant to the identity shifts that took place within due to a new life abroad.

- To find an opportunity to ‘grow’ away from family and original culture
  A few participants mentioned that they felt the need to move and do such training abroad, as a way of discovering themselves outside the expectations of family or value embedded in their culture of origin. For example, Vivien, of Indian
background shared that: “I chose to study psychology and counselling abroad because I needed to find my identity and independence, away from a culture emphasising strong family bonds. That offered me a sense of maturity and greater achievement; I don’t think I would have processed the transformation that such training triggers if I had stayed in my country”

- To respond to an existential or spiritual quest
Both the decision to move abroad and to become a therapist in a foreign country may be a response to an existential or spiritual calling. For example, Ahmad who moved from UK to Canada shared that: “there was a time that I could recognise an awakening inside that needed to find expression in a new land; I needed to offer my therapeutic work in an environment that I sensed it was calling me. A number of synchronistic events assisted me on the way”

In reading the above, I can see that those reasons can be interconnected with each other, in similar ways that a therapist’s personal and professional life are not without effect on each other. In my personal story, I recognise that there were elements of the above triggers that found ‘home’ in becoming a therapist in a foreign country. In that space, I could see my origins from afar as well as immersing myself in a different culture which triggered my awareness in profound ways. The gateways for that were various, one of which was embarking on a therapy course.

2. TRAINING as a therapist abroad

- Q.: How would you describe your experience of training as a therapist abroad?

The experience of training as a therapist abroad is one of the main threads of the experience. All participants had the experience of receiving part or all of their training in a host culture. This presented both challenges as well as opportunities for growth. In the following paragraphs, I intend to offer vivid examples:

Examples of the Challenges

The challenges appear to depend on the contrast of values and attitudes between original and host culture; also related to the potential differences in educational
systems and cultural attitudes towards learning as well as the element of operating in a second language when undertaking such courses, which in addition to theory, often involve highly experiential components.

An example is the statement by a participant who moved from Mexico to the UK to undertake a 3-year counselling programme. She said:

“For me, training as a counsellor abroad was quite hard. I had difficulties with the second language and my biggest struggle was to cope with the self-directed learning that takes place in the UK. In Mexico, I was used to receive help without having to ask. Here in the UK, I felt very alone. And let's not forget that studying counselling is not about learning at intellectual level, it includes so much of yourself, your values, your worldviews and so on that were deeply in flux within me due to my migrating. Relationships in my country of origin are much based on family and collective values, whereas in the UK, I found everybody talking about the individual in a strong way”

(Alicia)

Mina, a Greek who studied in London, shared that she was the only foreigner and of younger age in her training group which raised cross-cultural power dynamics. She said:

“In my therapy training group, I was the only foreigner; it was such a white, middle class British setting. I experienced some hostility cause there was so much competition; I think that linked to with me having been a foreigner and having done well, I was quick learner and quite mature for my age, which did not match with the stereotype of who would be a good therapist, maybe. I felt that I would either be rejected or glorified, all triggered by the exoticism of being the foreigner”

Another issue related to obtaining professional qualifications abroad is that of credential recognition and employability concerns, especially when a therapist later decided to move to another country. Although this applies to many professions, in the case of counselling and psychotherapy this is even more problematic. That provokes a series of practical problems for therapists who move abroad, inevitably followed by emotional consequences. A vivid example was offered by Anthony:

“I went through a lot of hassles in having my British degrees recognised in Greece. The bureaucracy is irrational and the procedure is not always successful, depending on what was your first degree and so on. In the UK,
there are people from many disciplines that train as therapists and that is ok. In many countries, that is not the case”

Also, a more vivid account of this issue is presented in my previous writing about Astrid as an exemplar of the ‘commuter therapist’. That choice resulted mainly from the very situation of having her professional status threatened when she moved to another country, having obtained her qualifications and accreditation in another one.

Examples of the Opportunities

A number of participants mentioned the usefulness of undertaking an experiential counselling or psychotherapy programme away from the original culture. They explained a parallel of the cross-cultural transition and the transition to adulthood and maturity as a person during this training process abroad. An example from Mary:

“Relationships are ‘enmeshed’ in Greece and I think that if I hadn’t studied counselling away from my family and my culture, I wouldn’t be able to do the inner work required in such a way of developing maturity. I needed to have this sort of distance from all the ‘conditioning’ to truly find myself …there is something around ‘looking from far’, I could reflect on my past and present that way”

Amanda, like other participants who did their training in a multicultural society, talked about the enriching experience of finding themselves in culturally diverse training groups where diversity was explored and dominant discourses were questioned:

“I know that this is maybe relevant to undertaking training in cities like London which are very diverse but I found that having students of different cultural backgrounds in the class was something that was inevitably exposing us to different worldviews, something so important in such training. I was lucky to be in a group who was incorporating diversity; our interaction and was robust enough to challenge the western dominant views”

Inevitably, therapists who received such training went into practice, initially on placement and then in paid employment. Some expressed difficulties around being selected for such positions, due to their foreign background. Others found that they had expanded opportunities. When recalling my own training and transition to professional practice, I hold positive experiences of having been in a training group, where although
it was predominantly British, my difference was seen as an asset to the dialogues taking place. Similarly, when I went to seek professional positions, my foreign background, combined with my fluency in foreign languages were seen as additional skills in working with clients. Below, I present more issues related to practice.

3. PRACTISING as a therapist abroad

- Q.: how would you describe your experience of working as a therapist abroad?

The main areas of experience in that section could be summarised as related to:

- Therapeutic relationship dynamics (clients’ perceptions towards a foreign therapist, issues around building trust, professional boundaries and so on)

- Cultural mannerism/values as related to professional mannerism/values during therapy

- The use of second language in therapy (I will present that separately)

These were often presented as inter-twined with each other. I am choosing some verbatim accounts that show such connections. A person-centred counsellor from Belgium, living and working in Athens talked about the initial mistrust that clients may feel in relation to going to see a therapist of a different cultural background and working in a second language. She also highlighted how her very foreignness which may be initially a barrier may also give her clients a sense of freedom, when talking to someone who is outside the expected cultural norms or expectations. In her words:

"When a prospective client hears that I’m a foreigner, they may have doubts whether I’ll be able to understand them. On the other hand, I see that from the moment people have crossed the border… and they enter here in the counselling room and we start talking, then it seems very easy somehow to trust me, because I believe I am freer from the cultural stereotypes they may struggle with. They feel they don’t have to fit in a particular, culturally acceptable or expected role" (Paula)

A Greek counsellor who has worked in Scotland for a few years, talked about overcoming the barriers of the local accent and about her clients being attracted to both her natural warmth and her being an outsider or on the ‘edge’ as non-fitting in the dominant cultural group, something that enhanced her counselling work. She said:
I never learnt the Glaswegian dialect but this was not a problem at all…empathy was there beyond those barriers… I always had the impression that my immediacy and warmth were due to my cultural background…also, I was being different and in a margin which made me feel close to those local people there who were also feeling in the margins …so that made me more approachable, I was on the edge of experience and this linked to this ‘edginess’ that clients often feel themselves” (Tatiana)

Tanya (migrated from Austria to UK) shared her anxiety around whether clients would even choose to contact her and request an initial appointment:

“When it was to advertise my counselling practice with a foreign name on a leaflet or website, I felt anxious about how potential clients would respond. I know that this would potentially not be a problem if I was working in London let’s say, which is such a multicultural setting. But in my area, which is so middle-class British, I did feel that people would not trust me being their counsellor or that it would limit those approaching me” (Tanya)

Another example of people’s cultural projection on the therapist, in relation to their name or appearance when they are of different background comes from Ahmad who migrated from UK to Canada, as follows:

“I am mixed race, of African descent with a Muslim name. Although I see myself more of a citizen of the world, people, including clients, make a lot of assumptions about me when they meet me drawing from my name, my appearance and so on, they can easily attach labels that would determine what they reveal to me and the dynamics of our relationship” (Ahmad)

Catherine highlighted the importance of openness towards diversity and the role of curiosity as an asset and tool for broadening cross-cultural understanding. She said:

“When I was working in London as a foreign therapist, I was more aware of cultural issues and it was easier for me to bring it up with a client, if necessary, because they were also exposed to diversity in everyday life. I was open to learn and understand, an owned and reflexive curiosity was the key attitude”

Similarly, Melissa, a counsellor from Holland who works in Scotland said about the quality of humility around the unknown:

“Being a foreign therapist has also made me more humble, I can more easily accept the ‘not knowing’, have ‘healthy curiosity’ and admit it to the clients
when necessary or invite clarifications which is so empowering for the counselling relationship” (Melissa)

Tina talked about the importance of acknowledging differences but also transcending them to appreciate the level of universality in understandings of human nature and relating. She said:

“Practising in a different culture as a foreigner triggers understanding of different perspectives and worldviews. In the beginning of my practice, I was stuck focusing on the differences and trying to adjust my mannerism, my level of expressing warmth if you like, as a Mediterranean. As time passed, I found myself handling values and mentalities in a more balanced way. Some sort of transcendence took place, if you like, I can now see the universal dimensions too, and I have integrated various cultural influences and can see the broader picture without dismissing the distinctive details” (Tina)

Mina, a Greek analyst working in London used the terms positive and negative cultural transference and counter-transference to describe relationship dynamics provoked by her being of foreign background. Here is a positive example:

“Depending on what sort of transference a client may have, they may perceive me accordingly. For example, a lot of people seek therapy because they feel they don’t really fit in their family, in their culture themselves, so they identified positively with my being different and not fitting too, and I can notice that…or there are people who come from very conservative families where differences are not allowed, and find freedom in talking to me cause they feel that I’m on their side because I know about difference, I know about not fitting in”

Mina gave an example of working with a client who seemed to have projected negative transference, as she saw it, in relation to her being a foreign therapist. In her words:

“I remember working with a client who had fantasies about going somewhere exotic; I was aware that I was exotic in a way in her eyes being from a different background. This idea was about escape… if she could just get hold of an exotic place or somewhere to go, then everything would be all right. But then she was ‘attacking’ me in some ways. I needed to be aware of my own responses in relation to our cultures and being different culturally speaking. As well as of the fact that our common ground was that we were both immigrants”
Bethan highlighted that the shared experience of migration between herself and her clients advanced their level of **mutuality in understanding life as a foreigner**. In her words:

“The major common thread between my clients and me in my practice in Geneva was that we were both in a host culture and we both had disruptions in our life due to mobility, mixture of languages and knowing what it means to have a life as a foreigner …our counselling room was that third space which was ours”

This may relate to the issue of **the therapist’s self-disclosure regarding their cultural background**. Mary associated that also with whether clients would overtly seek such information or not, depending on the attitudes in their culture:

“I never say to my clients here that I am Greek, unless they ask me. They often don’t ask here in the UK (cultural thing) and if they do, I try to use this therapeutically…but if I operated as a therapist like that in Greece, this would be weird. The Greeks do ask a lot of questions, they want to know everything…they can’t see that these attitudes are inherent in their ways of relating”

A few participants have recognised a parallel between the processes they have been through due to their own journeys and mobility and the ‘**journeying to the unknown**’ taking place in therapy with clients. As expressed by Tanya:

“My own travelling and the processes and changes that I have been through allow me to ‘travel’ alongside the clients’ own journey towards understanding themselves. There is a parallel process around stepping into the unknown, similar to when you move to a different country and containing the unknown or the therapeutic process”

The ways that a therapist develops and acquires robust skills in relation to their work, as a result of moving between countries and being exposed to or living in different cultures, was expressed by various participants. An example is the level of **advanced empathy for different worldviews or diversity and the challenging towards stereotyping**, as vividly expressed by Ahmad:

“I think having moved between cultures makes a therapist more competent, not just around having a broader spectrum of empathy reference points and challenging stereotypes but also due to the sensitivity a therapist inevitably
develops in relation to issues of identity. Counselling and psychotherapy practice has a lot to do with the question of self; crossing one's boundaries at many levels is such a powerful gateway towards awareness of those dynamics that usually are invisible”

The area that was given significant attention in the experience of a therapist who works abroad is the use of second language, which I present separately below.

4. The role of second language

- Q.: How would you describe your experience of practising in a second language?

Most therapists have been using a second language in their practice abroad. A level of bilingualism was developed, at least as an internal process, sometimes also expressed in the actual client work, when relevant. A counsellor from Austria, working in the UK, talked about her lack of emotional vocabulary when counselling in a second language, especially at the beginning stages of her professional life as a counsellor. She said:

“When I went into counselling, I realised that I was lacking of the emotional vocabulary in English. I approached a tutor who brought me a list of about a hundred emotional adjectives in English. I initially translated them in German as I wasn’t sure of the variations of meaning. This changed through time, through gaining experience and engaging with relevant literature and professional circles in English” (Tanya)

Paula talked about having 3 languages within, which she used in different contexts. She found that using images/metaphors or creative ways of expression is a way to overcome such language difficulties. :

“I actually have 3 languages within me: my Flemish mother tongue that I speak with relatives on the phone, English language that I use with my husband or studying counselling-related literature and Greek language that I use with my kids and in all social interactions here in Greece - Greek is also the language I trained in and what I use with clients. I find myself using metaphors or images when I get stuck”

Melina talked about the difficulty around adjusting to certain dialects within the use of a second language in therapy, she said:
“I feel fluent and competent counselling in English. I started studying English when I was 7. But of course this was ‘queen English’, when I arrived in Liverpool for the first time and had to adjust to the dialects, it took me some time”

The issue of having a foreign accent and the anxiety around how that may be perceived in a professional context by clients or colleagues came up in various conversations, also contrasted to how it would be responded to if in a different cultural context. Melissa said:

“If someone was counselling back in Holland and the client has heard a different accent, I think they would have directly asked the counsellor about it. But, here in the UK, I am very rarely asked about my accent. I wonder if this is has something to do with English politeness and whether such a question would be considered a bit intrusive or inappropriate in this culture”

Vivian is aware of her Indian English accent and that linking to dynamics related to colonisation history:

“Counselling in English as an Indian feels comfortable. Due to colonisation, all the education I received in India was in English. The only difference is my accent, and sometimes I do wonder how I am perceived by clients due to that, whether the colonisation dynamics play a role, either from my part, unconsciously or from their position”

Mary reflects on her being immersed in the British culture and language to such an extent that she is not often aware of her own foreign accent, although she is drawing attention to her ‘foreignness’:

“I think that I have now immersed into the British culture so much that although I am a ‘foreigner’ here, I often don’t perceive myself as one, I cant even hear my own accent…clients often highlight it to me”

Monica makes a clear distinction about the use of language in different roles: as a professional, she feels more comfortable in using the second language that she operated in when completing her training, in contrast to using her mother tongue in social situations, something that was mentioned by others too:

“It is a lot easier for me to do my job in the language I was trained in, which is English…although I am definitely speaking much better Greek than English...
in general...it is about the role...in a social situation I express easier in Greek but in the professional role, it is better in English...I guess it is about a personal-cultural-professional mix that related to how you approach and connect with a client”

During the interview conversations, a feeling around using the mother tongue, when relevant, was raised. This may be the preferred choice of a client who shares the same mother tongue when residing in the same host country or when the therapist is choosing to return to his/her country of origin and is to work with native speakers of his own language. Although it may sound paradoxical, most therapists reported that it is more difficult for them to offer therapy in their mother tongue, after having been offering it in a second language and especially when their training and development of the therapist role took place in a second language. Some of these accounts are below.

- Q: How would you describe your experience of practising in your mother tongue, after having practised in a second language?

Monica, a Greek CBT therapist who has trained and worked in the US before returning to work in Greece, described how her coming back to practise in her mother tongue challenged her ability to maintain boundaries and her sense of professional role:

“It’s harder for me to come back and offer counselling in my own language. When counselling in English, I find it easier to express myself in that role. When working in Greek again, it feels as if the language creates a different dynamic in relation to boundaries, not sure if that is because Greek language feels to me now as over-emotional or what”.

Melissa talked about her lack of professional vocabulary in her mother tongue, having trained in a second language, something shared by other participants too:

“I do not know the therapeutic language in my mother tongue because I trained in a second language. I imagine that the concepts and ideas would be similar at least in both languages but I wouldn’t recognise them. It is as if I am ‘conditioned’ almost in English as a counsellor – this is interesting”.

Mary talked about a ‘sense of forgetfulness’ around her mother tongue:

“If it was to work in Greek, I would need to do a lot of reading…it feels like I have forgotten Greek somehow, I need to translate some meanings…it is a
Talking about the ‘return’ to the mother tongue for those therapists that have been predominantly using a second language in their practice abroad, brought up the issue around a ‘fantasy’ of return to the country of origin or the actual return itself, for those therapists that actually made that decision.

5. The fantasy or experience of REPATRIATION

| Q: Are you planning to return to your original culture? (Explore ‘fantasies’)
| Q.: how would you describe your experience of returning to work in your original culture?
| Q.: Did you have to work any differently as a therapist upon your return? |

The meaning thread related to repatriation, either as a fantasy for those that have settled in another country or as a fact for those who did return was included in the conversations, in an attempt to capture the whole spectrum of the mobility experience for therapists. I am aware from personal experience, that this side of the story has always been a dilemma in my mind, affecting my decisions around current and future personal and professional life. Below I offer some examples from individual depictions related to the matter.

Tina, still in the UK host culture, expressed her anxiety around that fantasy:

“I feel that I could not easily adjust to my original culture now, not just professionally due to the limited opportunities there in our field but also at a personal level. I feel I would not fit anymore, I left everything behind, changed so much and whenever I go back all seems the same or alien, so I sense a huge gap”

Another therapist talked about the fantasy of finding herself in a position of ‘professional exile’, knowing that her training wouldn’t be recognised if she returned to her country, where the profession has no well-established status:

“I don’t think I would be allowed to work as a counsellor if I was to return to my country, even though I am fully qualified and accredited in the UK. That makes me feel angry and puts me in a state of ‘professional exile’ if you like”
Indian therapist Vivian explained that the concept of counselling is not understood in her country, not only by the public but also by relevant professions, something that provokes anxiety, as for other participants too:

“I am very anxious about returning to work in India. There are not structures there, not even supervision in place. People don’t really understand what counselling is, I will have to do so much explaining, not only to potential clients but even to related professionals, like psychiatrists”

Tatiana expressed her frustration around unemployment when she returned to her country where counselling is still developing and also not finding support or networking from her peer group which appeared very competitive due to the ‘narrower market’. She also highlighted a process of personal and professional grief, also expressed by other participants:

“I have maximum 6 clients a week here, when abroad I had this number of clients per day. Also, the peer group of those practising my model here in Greece saw me very competitively so I never felt welcomed. I had about 3,500 hrs of counselling practice and yet, I felt depreciated. It looks like things are a bit ‘incestuous’ here, am wondering if that is part of our culture or else. When I first returned and for long time, I was grieving both personally and professionally” (Tatiana)

Monica explained that she felt that her professional status was threatened when she returned due to cultural projections around the persona of the therapist. Her young age was not an issue when she was practising in the US, but it has been on her return to Greece where the expectation is that the person in such a role may be much older:

“People in the US were more informal and easy going…here in Greece the expectation for most people towards such a professional is more formal and attached to a certain persona. I find it hard here because I look young and my voice sounds a lot younger than I am and this may affect establishing trust. I remember having a client in the US who was my mum’s age and this wasn’t a problem - but in Greece, this is often a barrier”

Therapists who have returned talked about needing to adjust their work in different mannerisms and expectations, often not even compatible with their modality. Examples of such adjustments include issues around negotiating contracts, maintaining professional boundaries and acquiring a manner that is culturally
specific but not necessarily what they have developed when practising abroad. An example comes from Amanda’s account:

“When I came back, I found myself needing to develop a new working style. For example, Greek clients have a general difficulty with rules and making a contract sometimes felt alien with them. My manner has also changed in terms of greetings in the beginning of a session, the issue of touch and level of self-disclosure and so on”

Anita draws from her own awareness of the impact of mobility to manage this:

“I find myself working differently with clients from northern countries and those from southern ones, they express emotions differently and I need to be aware of those variations, something that was possible due to having to find new cultural mannerisms and understanding within myself due to my own moves”

Catherine talked about perceptions and applications of ethical practice which she experienced as non-existent on her return, given that the profession is not clearly defined and regulated or protected by an official professional body in her country; such a contrast to how it was in the UK, where she developed and spent years of practising:

“we valued each other as colleagues when abroad, we had mutual support and respect…and people could understand what is the kind of work we did but, here in Greece, like in other European countries that I have heard similar stories from colleagues, this profession is so new and so misunderstood…many professionals here practise unethically and that is not easy to tolerate…so, I end up feeling I don’t fit”

Anthony considered the contrasts in the way he had worked in the two different countries and his response was around the dynamics of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ as related to a given cultural context:

“When working with the multinational group of London, I was more defined by my analytic psychotherapist persona; I did not self-disclose and asked more questions. When I work with the Greek client group, sometimes I may be slipping into being less curious, too much may be assumed as common ground. I see my work being different here although my ethical approach and model are the same, maybe expressed in different manner”
The issues discussed so far brought up the importance of finding support and the role of supervision, which I present in the following section.

6. Support systems and Supervision

**Q.: What kind(s) of support do you receive to manage/reflect upon those experiences? What is your experience of supervision?**

The issue of personal support and supervision was discussed during the interview conversations. Many participants talked about finding support in family relationships, friendships and partnerships, whenever those were stable enough to survive the impact of their moving away. Others mentioned some positive experiences in personal therapy whereas others often felt misunderstood, even by therapists, due to them not being able to be empathic enough towards the complex issues arising for somebody who is facing cross-cultural transitions. Those who could have therapy with a therapist who was also a foreigner shared that the relationship was effective. Similarly, when referring to supervision, the relationship appeared to be more effective, when the supervisor was also in touch with this experience in their lives (like for example, mentioned by Astrid who chose to have an American supervisor in London for her work in the UK and in Germany).

Frustration was expressed when a therapist moved from one country where supervision was a routine requirement for their work to a country where this practice was not seen as necessary. Also, supervision takes different forms in different countries. For example, Ahmad shared his experience about receiving supervision in Canada, after moving there from the UK:

“Supervision in Canada is understood more around administration and case management, not around the therapeutic process and the dynamics of the relationship. When moving to work there, I had to adjust to this mentality and I felt scared that I would lose my sharpness. Let alone that I did not have a space to reflect on how the changes of settings, cultures and the worldviews I was operating from, were actually affecting my work, I was seen as expert and therefore any reporting of ‘confusion’ would threaten my status”

Mina talked about her experiences in supervision, as related to understandings of her own cultural background and the relevant dynamics in her cross-cultural work with
clients. She felt **misunderstood**, not just due to her supervisor not being empathic towards those dynamics in her work but also due to the model adopted, as another conflicting 'culture':

> “I felt that my particular cultural and professional identity was not acknowledged at all. So, when I mentioned my Greek patients, there was no reaction, not even curiosity about what our culture would bring in the relationship and I was so much trying to put him in the picture. I felt quite unwelcomed in that, I felt like I was not being seen at all”

Tina drew attention to the importance of avoiding the danger of over-emphasising difference in general in such cross-cultural dialogue in supervision but finding ways of cultivating sensitivity towards them instead:

> “The point is not to focus too much on the cultural differences and reinforce the stereotyping but I think it is a matter of having the sensitivity to handle the whole matter when it comes up, and I don’t think a therapist can actually be in such a position if not having reflected on all that we have discussed here today. There are so many layers beyond the surface, all this needs to be discussed in supervision more”

Bethan spoke at length about the support she has found in her family members and her spiritual faith, parallel to receiving supervision by a culturally sensitive colleague who was aware of the impact of migration himself. She said:

> “I needed anchors to manage all that the move between cultures has provoked. My husband and children, my own nest has been a big one. My faith has been another. Then, finding like minded professionals, a supervisor and peers that would understand, mostly immigrants themselves”

So far, I have presented some issues that were brought in conversation as result of a prompting question of mine. In the flow of the dialogue and as the experience started unfolding, a number of other threads of the experience emerged, not through a prompt but in the flow of what was being revealed in the narratives, as significant angles tied up to the issues already discussed.
7. Broader Perspectives

In this section, I am presenting themes that emerged in the dialogues, offering some broader perspectives of the experience. Those relate to issues of cultural identity, home and belonging; the ‘culture of therapy’ becoming more visible in the lives of mobile practitioners; cultural attitudes to help-seeking; historical - political dimensions and philosophical – spiritual dimensions.

I. Issues of Cultural Identity, Home and Belonging

A theme that was addressed often spontaneously was participants discussing the relationship between their experience of mobility and their sense of home. Different attitudes across the spectrum between resistance and integration where expressed and references were made in relation to how that linked to how they perceived their cultural identity or sense of self and belonging, dimensions that are important in the life of a therapist.

Some participants expressed resistance in integrating the host culture within their perception of where they consider ‘home’ to be. Anthony, for example, talked about his experience of moving to work in London as a smooth transition, where he felt that he fitted in as a foreign professional amongst other foreigners:

“In a purely professional context, I’ve never experienced the UK to be host culture. The transition was... so smooth. London especially is such a multicultural place, as a professional of foreign background, I felt at home amongst so many others just like me”

Mary drew attention to the level of resistance to integrating in the new culture, in relation to time. During her first years in the UK, she felt that it would be a betrayal if she has allowed that to happen; she makes links to inherited cultural attitudes in relation to home as place:

“I didn’t allow myself to integrate in the new culture during the first few years. It would feel like ‘selling myself to the devil’ almost if I had done that! I always felt as if I have to defend my culture like we defended our land during war. This cannot disappear from the Greek soul. It leaves me wonder how
does this affect my work at an unconscious level, haven’t thought that way before”

Others, like Paula, embraced the host culture more, allowing her two cultures blend together and make home where they are with elements of both. She said:

“What I mean is that by embracing the new culture, it does not mean that you forget your own; I do believe in integrating in your host culture and learn to live harmoniously by its rules and regulations and not resist...that is why my home is my home here and this is why I think I can be more present to my clients’ material, cause I can step in and out of a certain framework but also embrace an ‘unknown’ process more fully”

In Bethan’s account, she made the link between her process of mobility and that subliminal space that clients often find themselves into much clearer when she said:

“I have learnt to ‘marry’ my two worlds within. Being away from my original culture, took me to places where I don’t fit, I don’t belong or I don’t make sense. In counselling, this is how clients tend to feel often, even if in familiar surroundings...this subliminal space. I am at ease with that state of being so I can contain and manage it with clients”

Paula talked about going through different phases in terms of resisting vs. integrating or accepting the two cultures and the link to her sense of home; her family and ‘nesting’ has helped her embrace the conflict:

“In earlier days, I used to feel that I had to win a battle between the two cultures. This was exhausting, I am not like that now, and I feel at home here although I say that I am a Belgian living in Greece. I am not giving up on my roots but I am not resisting Greece either anymore so that I am not cultivating the split. Maybe the fact that I have made my ‘nest’ here, in another country, helped with that...my children are linking me strongly to this land, which is not as foreign anymore”

Tina talked about actively creating her ‘home’ wherever she is in order to ground herself and avoid the emotional turmoil of up-rootedness:

“I have reached a point now that wherever I am going, I make it home. I don’t resist putting my roots down. I think I need that grounded-ness for myself and my therapeutic work too, otherwise I could easily reach burnout”
Mary refers to the use of language around ‘home’ and the idea of having no home or many homes when one has gone through the experience of migration, depending on how they related to it:

“I used to refer to my home country as ‘back home’ but not any more. It’s maybe like having ‘two homes’ or ‘no home.’”

Melissa talked more of a ‘symbolic home’, also connected to an actual house:

“I relocated to so many countries that I consider as ‘home’ where my house is each time, carrying all my furniture and belongings in boxes and looking for familiar ‘symbols’. My parents’ house back in Holland is also ‘home’ but this is more of a fantasy now. My home is my house, no matter where it is. In that house, I make home ‘within’”

Referring to the concept of home as an archetype that expresses a sense of being attuned with one’s inner world, Melissa sees the benefit of such a perspective with her client work is the sense that:

“then, there is the home as an archetype if you like, it is not necessarily a building, it is internal home, it is feeling comfortable within yourself, no matter where you are at or who with… I see now how this affects my practice; I can actually offer that sense to my clients or work with it in a deeply attuned way”

Similarly, for Ahmad, home is not a physical location but more of an attitude that goes beyond attachments:

“Home for me is no longer a physical location; I have lost this comfort by moving abroad. I am prepared for loss and gain and this is what makes me feel at home inside, the acceptance of that rather than attachment. That ‘freedom’ makes me empathise with clients who feel ‘misplaced’ or ‘misunderstood’ and I think somehow they choose to work with me due to that, at an intuitive level”

Drawing from personal insights in relation to my own story and my work with certain foreign clients, I was sensing some connections between one’s attachment style at early childhood and the way one responds to the experience of migration. This intuitive knowing was later confirmed by some participants who also made such links, in their
own experiences. Melissa explained clearly how she sees her relationship with her mother having affected the way she responded to the effects of her mobility:

“I think that my strong relationship with my mother enabled me to adjust to life and work in another culture. There must be a link between having had a secure attachment style in that primal relationship and the way we relate to a new culture or sense of home and belonging in general. I notice that helping me when working with immigrant clients”

II. The ‘Culture’ of Therapy

Another issue that emerged in the conversations is the ‘culture of therapy’ itself. This refers to both how counselling or psychotherapy are understood by the general public or even the professionals in different countries and the ‘cultural fit or misfit’ of modalities, as therapists move from one country to another, carrying their philosophy and working style with them, in another context.

As shared by a Spanish speaking counsellor:

“Counselling’ or ‘counsellor’ are terms that do not really exist in my language or the equivalent of those has different meaning. Therefore, there is a whole Babel when trying to explain what my job really is, when in a country where the field is not developed yet”

Mary emphasised the dominance of ‘western thought’ in therapy that is not compatible to all cultural contexts. That became more visible to her on her return:

“There are many Western ways of thinking in counselling that don’t fit in a Greek context. I trained in those ways when in the UK and then discovered the cultural misfits, when I moved back here. I believe that the ‘western rules of counselling’ need revisiting and we are not supported when facing such a challenge”

Alicia, in comparing the perception of what counselling is back in Mexico in contrast to what she developed through studying in the UK, highlights the ways it is devalued by other professions or divisions:

“In my country, they don’t quite understand that therapeutic counselling exists in the way we see it in the UK. They know psychotherapy and this is in the hands of psychologists or psychiatrists. There are people like me, who are trained in counselling but without a psychology background and have
extensive experience of working with people at different settings, more interdisciplinary ones, but are not that valued due to all these divisions in the related professions. I know that some qualified professionals like me had to do training from scratch, to get a job.”

The values underpinning a certain modality may be incompatible to certain attitudes towards the therapist’s persona in a given culture. Tatiana, for example, shared her struggle to remain congruent in her person-centred philosophy when she returned to work in Greece, where most professionals are respected when demonstrating authority:

“When I came back to practice is Greece, I experienced a conflict of values…I always have to defend my humanistic identity and am asked to do many compromises that I don’t want to…the costs are great though at a personal level, in terms of remaining congruent, maintaining confidence. Here in Greece it is the status that matters, and this is so opposite to my humanistic philosophy”

A more positive example comes from Chris who referred to the matter in terms of ‘psychotherapy sub-cultures’ as follows:

“People working in psychotherapy have their own sub-cultures, depending on the model you acquire or other perspectives such as gender or sexuality related influences in one’s work. My working in a culture different than my own has made me more comfortable to even challenge the cultures of therapy that I found myself into…as if I learnt to migrate from one theory to another, within an integrative framework”

An interesting observation has been that with certain participants, where our professional backgrounds differed in orientation or area where each of us had completed training, we used different vocabulary, as related to our particular ‘professional culture’ to refer to the same concept. For example, in the recording I conducted with Monica, the contrast between my humanistic background as a counsellor and her CBT/psychodynamic background as a clinical psychologist was evident. Here is an example of our dialogue, where I highlight the terms in question:

Myself: - “I can see that your perception of your cultural identity when referring to your work with foreign clients in the US is different to when you refer to your work in Greece now, where the cultural background is shared”
Monica: “I see what you mean but the word ‘identity’ you use sounds to me too radical, I would use different words, I guess cause I draw from a different modality than yours. I do refer to my work with patients here differently; I am in a process of my own cause the cultures of the two countries are still in some conflict inside although the culture of my modality remained more intact”

III. Cultural attitudes to psychological help-seeking

Relevant to the above is the challenge that a therapist faces when moving to a different country and encounters different attitudes towards psychological help-seeking than those he/she may be familiar with.

Vivian referred to the contrast of such attitudes when comparing India to UK. She explained the impact of spiritual perspectives:

“People in India are not psychologically minded as understood in Western countries. Spirituality is very strong and people see everything as Karma. Also, if they are in distress, they rather believe in that God will take care of them, rather than talk about their problems. Someone recently told me in India: ‘We don’t need psychologists, we have God here! So, immediately, I felt that my professional role loses its value, although I have spiritual beliefs too and they are connected to my work”

The role of family relationships in a certain country may also affect the attitudes towards seeking help from a professional:

“The importance of family in Indian society dominates everything; it would maybe be disrespectful or disloyal if one seeks help from a professional rather than from a family member or close friend”

Another vivid example was offered from Tina, who also emphasised the lack of help available in certain countries around certain taboo or stigmatised issues, which makes the possibility of seeking help even impossible. This raises a challenge for a therapist who may be carrying certain attitudes from their own background but work in a different culture. She said:

“There are issues related to stigma as linked to culture and help seeking. For example, a teenage single mum in my country would have to face a bigger
social stigma. Here in the UK, such a situation is not only widely accepted but there are numerous supporting structures in place. I remember when I first counselled a young pregnant teenager here in UK, I was also carrying those echoes of a taboo issue in my own script and had to shift my beliefs in relation to the cultural context I found myself working into, if it was to be effective.”

Mary made reference to her understanding of how her own national group related to help-seeking as linked to its ‘attachment style’ at a more collective, national level, something that was revealed to her awareness through seeing her culture from far:

“Having lived and worked abroad, I can understand the patterns of my original culture at a more collective level. If I use the theory of attachment to examine my own nation and culture, I can see Greece operating though ‘insecure attachment’ and a lot of ambivalence. But if one steps into that culture, that is perceived as ‘normal’ so, there is no need to seek for help, although many suffer from that, it is part of the known ‘drama’. On the other hand, certain Greek behaviours could be seen as ‘pathological’ in English eyes, and the same way the other way around. We don’t respect as much individual autonomy; this would be seen as pathological from a British perspective. I need to hold those things in awareness when I counsel, it is not just about what the client brings”

IV. Political-Historical dimensions

The above indicates that the therapist in a foreign country and culture comes in touch with otherwise less visible and complex dynamics that are relevant to their professional role. A more subtle thread of meaning in the dialogues with participants has been some political or historical dimensions that may be present at an unconscious level especially when the two or more cultures in the counselling room have some history of conflict. When the therapist is a migrant in a country whose past or present political or historical situation has links to their country of origin, certain dynamics may be triggered. For example, Tanya talked about how her Austrian origin may be an issue (of guilt on her behalf) when working with a Jewish client, due to the events of the Second World War, in the sense that:

“being Austrian, I sometimes sense carrying some guilt when working, let’s say with a Jewish client, I am concerned whether all that we carry in our histories may affect the trust or any projections. I think it is important to carry that sort of thing in awareness because it may affect trust”
Vivian talked about being aware of the colonising history of Britain in her Indian country of origin and how this affects her worldview in relation to herself and her work in subtle ways:

“We know that India was colonised by Britain and we have a lot of influences from that in India today. When I work with British clients here, there are times that some of these cultural influences slap me in the face and I either accept them or resist them, something that needs to be monitored to avoid any resistance to the client, as a result”

Ahmad reflects on how potential issues of power dynamics may be silenced, even in the therapy world, as a result of wanting to maintain privacy or a peaceful atmosphere in the culture he migrated to. Referring to himself as a foreign therapist in Canada with a British accent and a mixed-race background, he said:

“There is the colonial background in Canada and I have noticed that my British accent adds to my prestige in the eyes of those that come for therapy to me. I somehow often feel that this is paradoxical, because it is what is imposed and part of me wants to challenge it; probably because I am not purely British, I also have the African in me, bringing me in touch with such power dynamics”

Having said that, he added that he often feels inhibited to raise such matters, even in a professional context, out of respecting the local tendency to protect privacy and avoid conflict or debate around such dynamics. He explained:

“Canada poses a great sense of value on privacy and it’s a culture that has the self image of being law abiding, friendly, peace keeping. The issue of Canadian history is a sensitive matter because there is shame in white Canadian culture about the native. I don’t think that these underlying issues do not operate in our professional dialogues or in the work with clients. There are cultural, political and historical threads that operate, maybe in an unconscious way. My being a non-native therapist makes things easier for clients, I think”

V. Philosophical - Spiritual dimensions

In several interviews, there were overt or rather subtly implied references to spiritual transformation or deepening in philosophical understandings in relation to self and life
experiences as a result of the experience of mobility. This was also linked to recognition that this experience has deepened their level of psychological resilience; depending on each individual’s use or understanding of such terms, they referred to that as ‘spiritual’ or ‘philosophical’ sense of expanding. To mention some examples:

Stella expresses her sense of developing a spiritual perspective, in her understanding of her life, human nature and her professional role. In her words:

“I believe that this experience of mobility has changed my whole philosophy in life and also as a professional, towards my understanding of my role as therapist, my attitude towards human suffering and the whole world of therapy. It is almost a spiritual journey, where I encountered areas of myself and those of my clients that probably would not be visible to me if I hadn’t been immersed and exposed in another culture. I came in touch with both uniqueness and universality and experienced an awakening, a connection with the broader picture”

Ahmad shared his spiritual perspective being connected with the environment; the processes of his move, brought up further spiritual awakening:

“When I moved from the UK to work in Canada, I found myself in an environment that was far vaster. I think it is the opening to a new territory of a different culture but also the indigenous-ness and connection to the wildlife in Canada. I came closer to my spiritual world, as if I could step out not just from the familiar of culture bit also finding myself in a space where I could more easily fit in, despite my foreignness, in a spiritual way. I think that the move to a new culture in combination with practising therapeutic work has the potential of provoking such spiritual awakening and transformation”

I shall say that this is a dimension that has been particularly significant in my own journey, personally and professionally. My personal development has involved spiritual practices before deciding to become a professional counsellor. However, I acknowledge that my immersion in a culture of a different country and the processes resulting from my immigration and my work as a therapist abroad have opened new areas of awareness that I often describe as spiritual. This is something I discuss elsewhere (see Christodoulidi, 2002).

Towards the end of the dialogues, I offered a question about using an image or metaphor that would describe themselves in the experience discussed, as a way of
bringing up a more intuitive feeling as well as offering a way of containing the processes that occurred in our discussion. Those included:

- An umbrella with different colours, representing my cultural influences
- A chameleon who changes colours according to the environment
- A train on a journey
- A figure of a wanderer, a sitter on the edge
- A leopard – it is flexible to move fast from one corner to another with confidence but also remain still by choice
- A jigsaw puzzle
- A bird who flies and sees the broad picture
- A motivated facilitator
- A transparent looking glass

I have identified with several of those metaphors and felt surprised realising that I have often used the same ones to describe myself when in dialogue with others, at different stages of the research journey.

5.4 Further Layers in Heuristics

On completion of the first draft of the above themes in this chapter, I set it aside and re-read it a week later. In this fresh reading, I recorded the following observations in my reflexive diary:

**Dear Reader,**

My meaning making process remains embodied at a visceral and emotional level as the pivotal point in my research. I sense a strong undercurrent to those themes I just presented. I have read this draft a couple of times. The first time, I paid attention to the meanings and coherence of text at an intellectual level. This allowed me to ‘see’ more clearly that the therapist’s world when abroad is embedded in the broader context of the culture of the profession; the even broader dimension is that raising the question of seeking home personally and professionally or finding it in the state of liminality, which in turn is a state that is relevant to the contemporary global culture. When I read it for a second time, I entered a meditative state where I saw different echoes of my own voice and the voices of participants. I feel that I connected to the ‘tacit awareness’; in that, the following words appeared on my screen of...

The connection between the ‘world’ of the foreign therapist and the broader contexts emerged within as the following image:

![Diagram](image)

**Fig 12: the ‘foreign therapist’ in the broader context (Christodoulidi, 2010)**

This image allowed me to see the ‘microcosm’ and ‘macrocosm’ dimensions of the experience explored, where I acknowledged the notions mentioned above as the undercurrent meanings. Below, I make reference to those, as follows:
a. On Liminality

Liminality\(^\text{15}\) appears to be a mostly powerful state of being in this research. I perceive different levels of being liminal that apply to the phenomenon explored, the research participants’ experience and that of myself. Those are:

- There seems to be an experiencing of liminality (not fitting in fixed positions of identity) at a personal/existential level that acts as motivator or force for one to decide to move abroad (before departure)
- One becomes liminal by making oneself a foreigner/ a migrant in a different country (after departure and arrival)
- there is a liminal dimension in the research process itself, the methodological choices made and the positioning of the researcher in relation to the research
- Therapists seem liminal figures, professionals that ‘hold’ paradoxes and confusions of their clients; there is the liminality of the profession itself

McLeod (1999) in his paper discussing counselling as a social process rather than a psychological one, makes vivid reference to the idea of *counsellors as liminal figures* who stand ‘on the edge’ of society and social groups and assist clients ‘re-enter’ everyday life from a position of expressing a more authentic self, despite exclusions or alienations. He describes this liminal counsellor as:

> “...a person who at the same time presents or embodies the values and beliefs of the culture, but also can be seen as someone who is able to transcend these norms, who is comfortable with the chaos or despair of being at or beyond the edge of the social” (p. 218).

Stein (2003) uses the term ‘psychological liminality’ when the ‘I’ (a person’s sense of identity) is at a standpoint that is not fixed, it is in a state of flux. In Jungian terms, he connects that state with the presence of the Greek God Hermes, representing the archetypal self that takes the form of messenger and guide, especially when one exists in that passage threshold between conscious and unconscious experiencing. Such a liminal figure is also comfortable with entering and/or staying with the unknown. This

\(^{15}\) ‘Liminality’ is a concept describing the space in the borders between worlds (La Shure, 2005), described by anthropologist Turner (1967) as *betwixt and between* and by Winnicott (1951) as *transitional space.*
links with this ability to overcome the fear that one encounters when moving to another country, finding oneself in another culture, in a second language and having any sense of personal power in question. I am reminded of Bottingolo’s (1985) observation that:

“Migration is not only a passage from one society to another, it is also a journey in which one goes out of a society and the practice of associated life, to find himself living in a situation of liminality” (p. 51)

Here is an excerpt from my journal, where I reflect on this liminal experiencing within:

“Have I lost something in all this migrant life? Am I gaining something due to the loss of the familiar? I know I have become more of a liminal person. I am more tolerant with the unknown and more able to understand what this state of being one thing but also another is, all at the same time”.

b. On Transition

Those that experience mobility in relation to place also experience a parallel process of psychological transition. This is another state of liminality which affects relationships, world-view and sense of cultural identity for those on the move (Schaetti and Ramsey, 1999). The impact of transition is tied up with the notions of time (when did the move happen, how much time is considered enough for a person to recover from the initial impact of change?) and space (where does one move from to?). A person who moves to a different country and decides to train and/or work as a therapist finds himself/herself in the process of transition in various ways, some of which are:

• as a person in a new culture
• as a person/professional in the culture of a new language
• as a trainee in the context of the culture of the training group and institution
• as a professional in the culture of the specific discipline, i.e. therapy
• as a professional in the context of the culture of a certain modality
• as a professional in the context of the culture of the work setting
• as a professional in the context of the culture of the client group

Transitional experiences bring a sense of loss and grief, even when they are planned and chosen for positive reasons. There are multiple ways of disequilibrium due to the
lack of familiarity that can last for a long time, even if one is immersed in a new culture for years. In contrast, the experience of cross-cultural transitions can result in profound personal learning that prompts an examination of values. Exposure to cultural contrasts may lead to a clearer grasp of personal values or lead to a sense of dissonance through which individuals feel conflicted about their values.

c. On Dynamics of Power

The courage for mobility, overcoming fear and stepping out of one’s comfort zone, is tied up in dynamics of power that exist at different levels in my research. According to Proctor (2002) a therapist embodies three components of power: role power (in dealing with clients who are ‘psychologically’ fragile or ‘weaker’), social power (in relation to their position within society) and historical power (related to the impact of their history upon the sense of personal power). When a therapist moves from one country to another, all these dimensions of power have the potential to be either paralysed or intensified in a variety of ways. For example, therapists who move to a country where credentials are not recognised, and thus face unemployment, automatically lose their role power which impact upon the rest. Similarly, when a migrant therapist moves to practice in a country or culture where there may be a colonial history of conflict between original and host cultures, the sense of social and historical power is also affected; this may lead to taboo reactions or silencing within the therapeutic relationship. Trans-generational echoes of the ‘victim or perpetrator’ position may emerge, inhibiting the healing power of a therapist as an ‘authentic, compassionate witness’ (Lee, 2005).

The whole notion of empowerment involves the contradiction of someone or something doing or carrying or owning the empowering upon another with the vision of a ‘desired end state’ (Gore, 1993). Therefore, a notion of ‘finding voice’ instead as a way of self-empowerment appears more accurate, talking from personal experience that also motivated me to conduct this research and offer such a platform of ‘voicing’ to those involved.
d.On Sameness and Difference

In the whole of this thesis, and especially in this chapter, there is a strong presence of the binary of sameness and difference. According to McFarlane (2009: 158), “therapy could be described as an inquiry into the power interplay between difference and sameness – personally, socially, culturally, politically”. There is a paradox, in that sameness and difference exist simultaneously in the sense that we are the same and different to certain groups at all times (McFarlane, 2009).

There are differences within cultures and differences between cultures. In that sense it is evident that “all therapeutic and supervisory work is subject to cultural variability, even if both participants have the same ethnic origin, the same gender, and speak the same language” (Rapp, 2000: 98). Misconceptions can occur due to but also beyond the continuum of sameness and differences. The question lies more in whether various ‘dynamics of difference’ (Wetzel, 1988) are visible or invisible, included or excluded, silenced or discussed openly.

There is also the debate around distinctiveness versus universality. This dilemma is possibly paradoxical if one attempts to adopt an ‘either – or’ position. A congruent approach to the question possibly lies again in the between, in the liminal place of finding a balance. As stated by McGoldrick (1998):

“Dealing with the subject of cultural diversity is...a matter of balance between validating the differences among us and appreciating the forces of our common humanity” (p.8).

I guess emphasis on difference has been due to the fact that through contrast it is easier to see or perceive something. With that, also comes the fact that power imbalance is emphasised by making distinctions. A way to avoid marginalisation of certain parts or people is to examine them in a continuum rather than through dichotomous thinking (Oliver, 1990). Those dilemmas also link to splitting and attachment.
e. On Splitting and Attachment

The theme of **splitting** is common in mobility accounts where there are different phases between the spectrum of idealisation and devaluation in relation to original and host country; it often begins by overvaluing the country which was left behind and devaluing the new one (Lijtmaer, 2001; Akhtar, 1999a). Fortier (2000) described three main dualities associated with mobile or diasporic identities: *here* and *there*; *homeland* and *hostland*; *indigenousness* and *dispersal*. He argues that these dualities “emerge from understandings of culture that remain deeply connected to territoriality” (p. 160). Beyond that, therapists, who are migrants, also face a split in terms of their therapeutic style and worldview when they move to new cultural environments (Thorpe & Thorpe, 2008). Walsh and Shuman (2007) see such splits of self resulting from immigration, as a healthy adaptive response, where the individual takes time to adjust to the new reality.

In psychoanalytic literature in particular, the concept of splitting is intertwined with early **attachment** styles. Klein (1937) was amongst the first psychoanalysts to link the immigrant’s relationship with the country of origin and the lost maternal object:

> “Thus we speak of our own country as the ‘motherland’ because in the unconscious mind our country may come to stand for our mother...In the explorer’s unconscious mind, a new territory stands for the new mother” (p.333).

Immigration has to do with loss, attachment, separation and re-attachment. The way in which the immigrant responds to the host country may be similar to how they relate to close relationships. The separation from the motherland may activate the early attachment issues and affect the ability to settle in the new country or the decision to return to the original one at some point. For an immigrant therapist, their early attachment style may be connected to both their decision to do such work abroad and their ability to work effectively in the new country (Thorpe & Thorpe, 2008). The other side of the coin is becoming more resilient, practically and spiritually.
f. On Resilience and Transcendence

What is particularly humbling in relation to the impact the experience explored may have on individuals, is that there are states of being that may enable one to go beyond the challenges and difficulties. Something that has inspired me in both my own experience and that of those with whom we have ‘travelled’ together in this research is the psychological resilience shown alongside a sense of spiritual awakening and development, for those who would describe it that way. I am offering an extract from my research diary that demonstrates those dimensions in the experience:

“I sense that there is an opportunity for transformation, as if one learns to transcend the need for comfort zones and routines to enter ways of being that lead to further growth. And although challenging, how enriching and facilitative that can be in terms of the counsellor’s role and practice…when I am learning to exist in balance in that ‘liminal’, out of comfort zone of my surroundings and as a result my internal space, I feel that I can be stronger, resilient and more able to accompany a client in their own zones of discomfort and sense of ‘dislocation’. I find that clients come in touch with their own resilience, some also describe the process as triggering a spiritual awakening in themselves” (February, 2008).

Resilience is a quality that refers to the capacity to “cope with, and bounce back after, the ongoing demands and challenges of life, and to learn from them in a positive way” (Joubert & Raeburn, 1998). It allows for vulnerability but from a positive perspective (Waller, 2001) and includes phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001). Clauss-Ehlers (2004) expands the definition of resilience to include “cultural resilience”— how the person’s cultural background supports, values, and environmental experience help facilitate the process of overcoming adversity” (p. 28). I prefer the term ‘cultural resilience’ in emphasizing resourcefulness rather than adaptation or adjustment.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to present the ‘findings’ of my research, more understood as insights that emerged through a process of midwifery in my relationship with the research itself and the inter-views with the fellow travellers in this journey of exploration, sharing and discovery.
There are several observations that I make at this point, seeking what has been expected and what is rather surprising. The ‘acculturation process’ and relationship with both host and original culture, resulting from the mobility of therapists is affected by space and time and there are different reactions to it. There also seems to be something beyond space and time that I understand as related to the state of flux within the self as we are constantly changing. In following the participants’ stories, I see that for some there is a transition from sojourner to settler and for some, at some stage of their lives, another transition from settled to returnee. But, drawing also from personal experience, it seems that this state is constant and any sense of stability of centred-ness is rather to be found within.

These accounts offer vivid examples of both challenges as well as opportunities –often being the two sides of the same coin - for the therapists that move to train and/or practise abroad, finding themselves in different cultures and for some, choosing to return. I see what I call an advanced resilience as a quality that manifests itself in profound ways. What leaves me with a sense of anger and awe is sensing that there are dimensions to the experience that are not talked about, as if there is an underlying fear of being scapegoated, given that one’s mobility and exposure to different cultures is potentially bringing to the surface difficult dynamics of power. Furthermore, a therapist who moves abroad is not just being exposed to those dynamics but is actually to work in or with them, if aware and courageous enough, if one accepts that therapy is not just a provision of service but also a ‘political act’ in the sense that inherent in its philosophy is the idea and act of promoting humanitarian values.

Vickers (2002) argues for the power of authentic writing which may challenge both research process taboos as well as content related ones; through her own example, she encourages writers and readers to create such a space for authentic text which shows empathy towards ‘reading between the lines’ and voicing what may intuitively be sensed as not being said. In her words:

“Academics may be those best equipped to speak out, to share, to de-victimise the victim, to resilience the wrongdoing, to lift the veil on the unspeakable and the un-discussed” (p. 619)

In this light, my hope is that I have allowed and attempted to voice what is less distinctively visible to someone who has not taken my journey. One of the participants,
the only mixed-race person of African descent has confirmed my intuitive response about this issue. He drew my attention to acknowledging the courage of conducting this research, which can activate at an unconscious level the ‘black sheep’ figure. I am reminded of Nigel Harris’s sentence, in Thinking the Unthinkable (2002: 74) where he says: “...if immigrants did not exist, it would be necessary to invent them, to create scapegoats”. Towards the end of our dialogue he asked some of my background and shared an empathic response, drawing also from his experience of being a black man living in predominantly white societies:

“you seem to be the black sheep of your family, being the youngest, female, moving abroad and becoming a counsellor – I see that you connect with my blackness in a symbolic way, if you see what I mean – you have been talking all this time to another black sheep. Choosing such a research project requires a lot of courage. Because you potentially give space for issues that are silenced, I can feel empowered in the interaction with you. I also know that certain audiences may easily find such a position of yours as an easy scapegoat; you can easily be attacked due to challenging views that are more collective and non-admitted. I admire you for that”

I have often been called ‘black’ in the UK although my skin is not black. I have dark hair and Mediterranean complexion. But, my being called black shows the emphasis of being different, of being the ‘other’ for the native people of the host land I chose to inhabit. So the term is rather ‘political’ and reminds me of Van Deurzen’s (1998) observation that “…you do not have to have a black skin in a white society in order to feel like an outcast.” (p. 54). I often feel black and that is symbolic, I feel I associate with the resilience of the inspiring black people I came to meet, including therapists. On that note, and with the hope that the readers will attune with both the individual and the collective and make fair decisions around welcoming the whole of what this research involves, I will move into the Discussion chapter, as a continuation of the present one.
Chapter Six (6): Discussion

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Discussion of Main Themes

1. The experience of training as a therapist abroad
2. The experience of practising as a therapist abroad
3. The use of second language and relationship with mother tongue
4. To return or not to return?
5. Identity, Home and Belonging
6. Therapists’ experiences of Supervision
7. The ‘Culture of Therapy’

6.3 The Methodology: Implications and Limitations

6.3 Final remarks
6.1 Introduction

“The paradox is that if we forget our own culture we become a rootless thing, but if we take it for granted we become a danger to others. Holding both sides of this paradox is very important for any therapist” (Rowan, 2005).

The statement above highlights a central paradox that is inherent in the experience explored. Coming to this stage of my writing, and bearing the above in mind, I am grounding the reader by reiterating the structure of the thesis so far: The thesis has unfolded as a journey of setting the scene of the research context, introducing myself as the researcher and main source of ‘data’, presenting the methodological perspectives, emphasising researcher reflexivity, discussing relevant literature critically and presenting the heuristic illumination and explication phases through blending the voices of participants and myself in a ‘live’ way. I will now move to discussing the main themes.

6.2 Discussion of main Themes

What I discuss in this chapter is not summative; it is what I selected as central depictions that occurred from a dialogic process with self and others within an exploratory territory. I found an overlap of meanings and ideas between and within themes; therefore I chose to approach the discussion holding the ‘findings’ as a whole. I find this echoing also the sense of each part of the experience being connected to each other - personal and professional lives of therapists are interconnected; what goes on in the therapist’s life inevitably affects his/her work as it is influencing his/her emotional and intellectual state and worldview.

During writing this section, I am aware of operating from different states of embodied experiencing. On one hand, I remain connected to the topic and its process from the state of the “I-who-feels” (Sela-Smith, 2001); on the other, I see the need of acquiring an intellectual perspective to actually gain clear vision and also trust my ability for rhetoric to communicate it. Again, this is another liminal space between two positions, holding the two equally necessary states at the same time.
I now notice a fundamental shift in my process, related to my sense of personal power and the power dynamics in my relationship with my research and my thesis, as a material product of my journey. During supervision, I became aware that so far, it has been the research that has been ‘doing things to me’; now that I come to discuss it, I feel the calling for me to take a role of proactive agent; that is to ground the knowledge and ‘lift the level of understanding to a new plateau’ (Krueger, 1998:13), through the process of heuristic explication.

In re-visiting the Findings chapter, I am choosing to discuss the following 7 themes, followed by reflections on the research methodology journey:

1. The experience of training as a therapist abroad
2. The experience of practising as a therapist abroad
3. The use of second language and relationship with mother tongue
4. To return or not to return?
5. Identity, Home and Belonging
6. Therapists’ experiences of Supervision
7. The Culture of Therapy

1. The experience of training as a therapist abroad

The literature mentioned in another chapter concerning international trainees is relevant to trainees in counselling and psychotherapy that choose to undertake their education abroad. However, there are areas that are particularly relevant to the migrant trainee group in this specific field, due to the engagement of self and worldview in that kind of educational experience and professional development (Killian, 2001; Nilsson and Anderson, 2004). I presented that section in terms of challenges and opportunities. Some of the challenges are related to the following parameters:

a. Contrast of values and attitudes:

Every person carries a certain values system that is embedded within their culture of origin. When someone moves to a different country, it is highly possible that there will be a contrast or difference in relation to the values system of the host culture. A trainee in another culture faces the challenge of this contrast. Additionally, counselling and psychotherapy operate within values systems that are diversified by the different
theoretical approaches. Therefore, a trainee in a different culture needs to manage those contrasting values in a rigorous ways, something that highlights Christopher and Smith’s (2006) belief that “pursuing counselling training in a different culture is one of the most personally challenging tasks conceivable” (p. 275). A significant debate around that, which is crucial to learning in counselling and psychotherapy is the ideas and classification regarding what is considered as acceptable and ‘normal’ versus pathological and dysfunctional from one culture to another.

b. Differences in educational systems, cultural attitudes to learning and the trainee-tutor relationship:

A few participants expressed some difficulties in facing a different educational system particularly in relation to personal initiative. The contrast of attitudes embedded in educational systems is also manifested in the relationship dynamics between trainees and tutors, when one moves to study in another country. For example, a couple of participants who came to the UK from countries with more family oriented and collective attitudes, found it difficult to assert their learning needs to their tutors, this being a way of showing respect to their tutors’ status. Studying in Higher Education or in a professional training course presents challenges when a different culture becomes relevant to the approach towards learning (Richardson, 1994). Therefore, debates around learning styles (Coffield et al., 2004) appear certainly important not just in relation to the individual differences of the learner but also in relation to their cultural background.

c. Learning counselling/psychotherapy in a second language:

The use of second language is also a factor that, depending on the level of fluency of a trainee, presents challenges for learning (an example in family therapy context is discussed in Morris and Lee, 2004). Counselling and psychotherapy introduce complex and subtle concepts to trainees and a wide range of highly nuanced vocabulary and idioms is required. Some participants mentioned that as being a barrier, especially related to writing assignments. Others found it difficult to express themselves in a second language, in relation to the experiential component of their PD work, where due to entering deeper emotional experiences, they could not easily handle sharing those
subtle feelings in a language different from their own. Some other participants experienced the use of a second language as facilitative to their learning. In my personal experience, the use of second language in my training was not an obstacle in terms of academic performance, as my thinking as a counsellor was shaped by the use of English as my second language. The challenge for me is more related to reading or writing or communicating with any Greek peers in my native Greek language, as the therapy terminology in Greek is unfamiliar to me, something that was also reported by others.

d. Cross-cultural dynamics within a training group:

Some participants found themselves in a culturally diverse training group when studying abroad. Others reported that they were often the only foreign student or amongst very few in a larger group. Such group compositions raise interesting dynamics, ranging from academic tolerance to competition or rejection. It seems to me that there is spectrum that lies between tendencies towards glorifying the foreign student within the training group or seeing them as a scapegoat. Such group dynamics can occur within any group, regardless of cultural diversity, based on differences in characters and personalities and the relationships amongst them. In my view, the issue here is whether such attitudes are actually seen as opportunities for learning, explored by both students and tutors or whether they are being silenced instead due to fear of consequent reactions. In my personal experience as a foreign student in counselling in the UK, I found that often such dynamics were not raised by fellow students or tutors who were White British, unless I or another foreign student found the courage to initiate dialogue. This coincides with the statement that “During the multicultural counselling course, it is not unusual for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant students to be the last to acknowledge that racism, bigotry, and discrimination still exist, in part because these are experiences they tend not to have” (Thomas & Schwarzbaum, 2006: 75). In my opinion, it is an attitude of non-defensiveness and an emphasis on viewing such anticipated unease as an opportunity for growth or expression of congruence that can provide a safe atmosphere for such dynamics, something that should be tentatively introduced by tutors in such training settings.
e. Difficulties around trainee placements and employability concerns:

Some participants expressed their difficulties in being accepted for placements during their training, something that they perceived as related to their being of foreign background; similar concerns were expressed in relation to finding employment post-qualification. Some service leaders might harbour doubt regarding a foreign trainee. However, in my experience, I found that my being foreign and competent in a second language has made me a more attractive candidate, both when seeking placements and employment. I believe that this is related to the diversity of client groups seeking counselling where having staff of a different background was seen as an asset to a given counselling team. A service can benefit from employing staff of diverse backgrounds, especially in multicultural cities or communities. The anxiety a trainee may have during training abroad around future employment appears more related to transferring their qualifications and experience in another country, if they decide to move post qualification. This is due to the fact that “many counselling qualifications are not valid currency in countries other than that in which the award was made” (Pattison, 2003: 107). Many therapists who obtain professional qualifications abroad face uncertainty about employment options in their home countries where professional counselling is likely to be nonexistent or a relatively new profession.

In the dialogues there were also a number of positive aspects to the experience that offered opportunities for development. Those are discussed below:

a. Developmental transitional processes:

Counselling and psychotherapy training trigger developmental processes in the trainee, especially through the experiential components. A few of the participants mentioned that entering such a process in a country away from their family of origin has been facilitative as there was a parallel between the cross-cultural transition and a further transition to a mature, adult psychological state when undertaking such training. In my personal experience, I can see that this has been a fundamental aspect of my personal growth, especially due to unresolved conflicts in my relationship with my family; through my training and personal therapy I discovered that those were related to early attachment-related issues that had unconsciously motivated me both to move abroad
and choose such a profession. I feel this would have been difficult to address had I remained in my home country, close to my family and culture. I found that completing my counselling education abroad and in a multicultural setting has enabled me to have the necessary distanced space to work on such issues, within the safe environment of a training group that operated within a humanistic, relational philosophy. Such descriptions were also reported by a few participants, especially those whose original culture was more collective and family-oriented.

b. the enriching experience of training in a multicultural group:

Some participants who moved from more mono-cultural educational environments in their original culture to find themselves in a multicultural educational setting found that facilitative to their opening of horizons and questioning set worldviews. Reynolds (1995) discusses both the challenges and opportunities occurring in offering multicultural courses in counselling but this area, although acknowledged, it is not given enough attention. Pattison (2003) conducted an exploratory study with international students on a counselling course in the north of the UK and concluded that despite certain expected challenges, “international counselling students come with varying perceptions of what counselling is and therefore what sort of improvements they wish to make in their practice. It may be necessary to spend more time at the beginning of each course defining counselling and exploring cultural variations” (p. 113).

c. opportunities for encouraging pluralism and challenging Western dominant discourses in training

Western culture - predominantly North American and Anglo-Saxon - dominates the therapy milieu in the following ways: a. there are deep historical and philosophical roots of counselling within the western culture b. the dominant theories, practices and approaches make the assumption that counselling will take place within a western culture c. even if counselling develops in non-western cultures, there is a profound emulation of western approaches and adoption of western curricula by those non-western contexts and d. the bulk of research and literature has concentrated on counselling taking place in western settings. Things have moved on recently with
research that is de-colonising such approaches (for example see Moodley and West, 2005) and considering different settings but this is often written by ‘westerners’ who refer to ‘non-western’ settings. In cases where there are migrant trainees in training programmes that are underpinned by the above parameters, there is an opportunity for local faculty and supervisors to increase their knowledge and awareness around inherent Western biases; they can then model to their domestic and international trainees how to learn and grow beyond one’s own cultural encapsulation.

2. The experience of practising as a therapist abroad

“To me the most important thing that came up during the interview was that of the therapist as an outsider, and as somebody who understands about not fitting in. Unless a therapist challenges what they carry from family, culture and familiarity, they cannot possibly be open enough to their clients’ experience. That is why the issue of culture is so important, both literally and as a metaphor”. (Mina, Greek psychotherapist in London)

The above statement is a vivid example of the migrant therapist’s sense of being an ‘outsider’ and identifying the parallel processes in their practice with clients.

As mentioned earlier, the effect of transition and change may bring feelings of loss and anxiety, interruption of lifestyle, a sense of lack of control, a negotiation between old and new roles – to mention just a few. These changes have different effects over time and are usually intense during the beginning months of someone moving to a new country and culture, depending on personal, situational and idiosyncratic circumstances. The participants I dialogued with started therapy work after having gone through those initial responses, most of them a few years post migrating and some just a few months after moving abroad, when starting a placement. In my case, I moved to the UK for the purpose of study and started seeing the first clients, in a voluntary capacity, about 7 months after my move. My levels of anxiety were relatively manageable due to prior experience and also confidence with the use of the second language; however that is not always the case.

When participants were asked to describe their experiences of practising abroad, there were a number of different dimensions discussed. Those could be summarised as relevant to the anxieties of therapists themselves, the client’s attitudes towards a foreign practitioner and links to the therapist’s anxieties, issues related to mannerisms and
professional boundaries, the role of the use of a second language and so on. Additionally, participants have reflected upon the skills and qualities they have gained, resulting from their move. In the following paragraphs, I will reflect on some dimensions that are relevant to the relationship dynamics that appear to operate in migrant therapists’ work. I will then discuss the suggested skills and qualities developed as a result of this experience, before drawing relevant conclusions.

**THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS**

**a. Interplay between client and therapist’s initial anxieties**

There seems to be interplay between possible clients’ attitudes towards approaching and embarking on therapy - ranging from initial mistrust to an advanced sense of freedom and openness - with a therapist of foreign background and the relevant anxieties of such therapists themselves. There are conscious and unconscious fantasies that both client and therapist acquire for each other and the therapy before and during the first encounter (Suman and Brignone, 2001). From the therapist’s perspective, the anxieties may be relevant to how they may be perceived by clients, depending on the context they work in. For example, having a foreign name indicates the foreign background of a therapist prior to being contacted or seen. Once a client gets to speak with that therapist, a foreign accent is also seen as a factor of potential concern; the appearance of a therapist may also trigger certain assumptions.

Those factors may have a positive or a negative effect regarding relational dynamics, establishing trust and managing attitudes and perceptions. For example, a migrant client or a client of a foreign or mixed cultural background living in London may be more at ease or less surprised when being referred to a therapist of foreign background, or may seek actively for one. In contrast, a client in a more rural and predominantly white-British area of the UK may feel less comfortable with or more suspicious of the level of rapport they may have with a therapist of different background. I am reminded of Tanya’s account when referring to responses by clients in relation to her foreign surname, indicating that she was not British. She said that some clients who contacted her through her website often mentioned that they chose her because of her foreign background, indicated by her name and that was important to them for several reasons.
Broadly speaking, the issue of cultural difference or similarity between therapist and client may influence the projections in various ways (Lago, 2006): for some clients, similarity may be a threat to the sense of self, for others a source of comfort. Perceived differences can become for some a reassurance that the client-therapist boundary is secure; there is a continuum of how such influences are conceived (Lijtmaer, 2007).

b. **Expression of emotion, mannerism and maintaining professional boundaries**

The expression of emotion on behalf of a foreign therapist, the management of mannerism such as greetings, the amount of eye contact, physical distance and other issues related to maintaining boundaries were reported as important to the participants’ experiences. This can be of course relevant to the theoretical approach that a therapist may be acquiring that determines certain norms and behaviours in relation to those too. For example, do we assume that an analyst trained and working in the UK may have similar perceptions around issues like touch, self-disclosure, greetings and so on as an analyst who may have trained and working in Japan? And what happens when such an analyst moves to work in a different country and culture? What is the relationship between cultural norms determined by a certain society or culture and the cultural norms determined by modalities themselves? These are not easily answered questions.

For example, Isabel, when reflecting on that issue, compared the interaction between therapist and client in Brazil and Canada. She shared that therapists in Brazil “would hug or kiss a client in certain situations and that is ok, we are tactile people” – something that also came up in accounts of Greek therapists comparing what would happen in Greece and UK in such situations. Isabel also said that she would allow herself to have watery eyes or tears when counselling in Brazil, whereas in Canada, such a reaction would be perceived as rather inappropriate. Issues related to handling of silences, use of humour, attitudes towards the therapist’s behaviour in the case of meeting a client at a social setting, or levels of allowing spontaneity would be relevant to that dimension. A therapist may experience conflict, depending on the given cultural context of work and the modality followed.
Some participants talked about the challenges around self-disclosure by the therapist, when certain of their characteristics may be overtly obvious. Lijtmaer (2007) discusses this from the perspective of being an immigrant analyst. In psychoanalysis, for example, the issue of self-disclosure - related to answering specific questions, revealing personal emotions of the analyst, expressing counter-transference, or dealing with real personal factors in the analyst's life (Meissner, 2002) - is at the core of the work. For an immigrant therapist, a client’s question in relation to their background may be traditionally considered as breaking the rules of psychoanalysis. There is also the debate that the disclosure of something significant for the client, in relation to the analyst, at a particular time may convey a willingness to enter into something emotionally meaningful in that relationship (Miletic, 1998). Modality ‘culture’ of a therapist may be incompatible to what is accepted in the original or host culture and between the two. There are cultures and modalities that may emphasise neutrality, anonymity and privacy and others that may give precedence to genuineness, responsiveness and openness. In my practice, and coming from a humanistic perspective, I have been open in exploring the reasons that questions around my cultural background may be important to a client. I see those matters as relevant to the therapeutic relationship, whilst monitoring my own responses, with the help of a supervisor, sensitive to such cross-cultural concerns.

c. Handling values systems and worldviews

Similarly to training, the area that appears more significant in that experience is the migrant therapist facing different values systems. There are the values of the broader culture (original and host), the values of the particular subcultures that one is in and the personal values of the individual, some being consciously chosen and some operating within at an unconscious level. The classic piece of research on the differentiation between individualist and collectivist cultures is that by Geert Hofstede (1980). These constructs have been defined and assessed in different ways since Hofstede’s work and Oyserman et al (2002) conducted a meta-analysis to suggest rethinking such approaches in the light of the increasingly complex composition of contemporary societies where cultures meet and mix in multiple and subtle ways. In such studies the following ‘binaries’ are discussed:
Individualism – Collectivism  
Materialism – Spiritualism  
Free Will – Determinism  
Cognitivism – Emotionalism  

Laungani (2002) warns that if such classifications are seen as dichotomies, they are limited in being useful. That is because in an era where personalities, identities and ways of living are so diverse and multi-faceted, it is not realistic to attempt to fit individuals or nations in any neatly formulated category. He suggests an approach that considers ‘human variability’ (p. 133) where someone or a nation can be more of X or less of Y at any point of space and time along a continuum.

In another paper about therapy in multicultural settings, Laungani (2004) stresses the danger of values that underlie multiculturalism to become redundant due to the tendency of homogenisation that underpins the phenomenon of globalisation. So, although there has been a strong force of discourse discussing ‘difference’, which in my view also includes the danger of emphasising stereotypes, there is also the force that erodes cultural identities. Bearing that in mind, how can a therapist manage to handle appropriately (i.e. avoid imposing or stereotyping or resisting or even unconsciously pathologising or over-normalising) the variety of values that operate within them and in their work, especially when moving from one country to another where the conflicts may be reinforced on a more collective and invisible level? My answer to that question would be to develop the quality of attitudinal elasticity within and remain close to the calling of helping a human being deal with their difficulties.

For the therapist who faces the challenge of cultural values that may be in conflict, there seems to be a striving towards integration that enables a balanced way of being. A vivid account of that is demonstrated in Vivian’s account below:

“I am working on being able to appreciate the best in English and Indian cultures. For example, I like to keep the good professional mannerism and structure and organisation that I was exposed to here in the UK but also keep the spiritual values and certain usefulness in family that are important back in India. I believe that bearing that in awareness makes me a better practitioner after all.”
That dimension is also relevant to attitudes towards what is considered as ‘healthy’ and what as ‘dysfunctional’, something that can also create states of conflict within a migrant therapist’s work. Carter (1991) summarises the four aspects in the therapeutic process that may be affected by cultural values, as follows: a. the therapist’s racial/cultural background, b. the client’s racial/cultural background, c. the assumptions that each in the dyad makes around the helping relationships and the nature of illness and d. the role of cultural values in the environment where therapy takes place. A therapist that has questioned their own perceptions of self in relation to being exposed to different cultural norms through being a foreigner can be sensitive towards avoiding pathologising or attitudes.

**d. the lens of transference and counter-transference**

Transference and counter-transference are concepts used by therapists who work mainly within a psychoanalytic or psychodynamic approach; however they are constructs that describe phenomena that are relevant to many relationally based psychotherapies and are often adopted as useful ways of understanding those processes, regardless of the theoretical background (Gelso and Hayes, 2007). The use of those terms in my writing needs to be explained here; they were used by a few participants, even if of non-analytic orientation, to conceptualise the specific dynamics between client and therapist, based on a relational perspective. By transference, I refer to the emotional reactions of a client towards the therapist in relation to the client’s sense of who the therapist is culturally speaking (linked to their race, ethnicity, class, religion and so on). Similarly, the therapist’s emotional response towards their perception of their client’s cultural background and expression is what I refer to as counter-transference in the context of this study, something that Perez Foster (1998) has coined as *cultural counter-transference*. Seeing those dynamics from a relational viewpoint is crucial given that the cultural background of each member in the counselling dyad has mutual influence.

What I consider significant is that the human element between client and therapist is not diminished due to them being imprisoned in their own emphasised racial and cultural identities and what is provoked in their interaction (Kareem and Littlewood, 1992). In my view, the migrant therapist is invited to hold these tensions and reflect on
ways of acquiring a perspective that does not compromise the flow of the therapeutic alliance in constructive ways. Rather than seeking the best fit in terms of therapist-client matching, as affected by their cultural backgrounds, the idea is to attempt ‘an evolving, dynamic, good enough fit’ (Kaplan, 2004: 51, my emphasis). This may seem highly complicated at first glance, however, there are certain qualities that appear to develop in therapists with such an experience that may assist this process, as discussed below.

**Perceptions of skills and qualities developed in the foreign therapist**

Participants’ accounts indicate that their ‘foreignness’ may inspire a sense of freedom for a client, especially one who identifies with the experience of feeling alienated or not fitting in within their life experiences and relationships. And in parallel, a migrant therapist appears to feel more comfortable with handling and empathising with such states of being. Participants described a number of qualities they developed due to their experience of migration, such as:

- An openness towards diversity and difference and ability to see beyond or challenge stereotypes

- A curiosity as a tool towards cross-cultural understanding, combined with a sense of humility towards the unfamiliar and the unknown - something that in my view, enhances having the courage to step with a client into such emotional territories without fearing the sense of getting lost

- A capacity for advanced levels of empathy, not only culturally speaking but also in relation to the process of change. That relates to a sense of inner ‘movement’ from what is old and known to what is new and unknown

- An ability to be flexible and less fearful of stepping out of a perceived comfort zone
• An ability to step into different worldviews, becoming more tolerant and inclusive - I experience that as a quality of intellectual, emotional, spiritual and relational elasticity

• An ability to acknowledge differences but also an ability to transcend these into levels of shared universality and humanness

Cheng and Lo (1991) point out the advantage of therapists belonging to a minority group, in terms of this enabling them with the skill of acquiring more cultural objectivity and neutrality for clients, when they do not identify as mainstream. Another dimension is that of challenging ‘our ethnocentric complacency’ (Ungar, 2003) in order to truly attend to another’s worldview. In his words:

“If we are to play a part as contributing professionals who have skills to facilitate the emergence and empowerment of people who are marginalised, then we must put ourselves in places where we see more clearly the ethnocentrism of what we hold to be true” (p. 4)

From this section, it is evident that there are a number of complexities as well as growth opportunities for foreign practitioners. Those may be silenced or resisted, in order to avoid threatening the therapist’s persona around competence and effectiveness. Such attitudes may serve to minimise any sense of inferiority or weakness experienced by anyone identifying with a non-majority group. What may apparently be overlooked is that skilled migrant professionals can be an asset to the country they move to (Legrain, 2006). They bring new ideas and worldviews and contribute to expanding the pool of talent and quality. And especially in relation to the therapist professional group they may have the language to challenge what can be taken for granted or what is adopted due to being ‘institutionalised’ but not necessarily the best practice. I see that this is not only relevant to cross-cultural work, when it is defined as a separate ‘category’. The peer group of therapists who are native can benefit too from developing dialogue with colleagues who are migrants and discover that their work may include such dynamics, less visible to them. In that sense, it is useful to consider that:

“…there is a dialectical relationship for therapists between their professional theoretical commitments and their cultural orientation as shaped by their own
family and socio-economic group. In a sense, all counselling, even when the counsellor and the client are of the same ethnicity or share other variables of diversity, is cross-cultural” (Christopher & Smith, 2006: 271)

3. The use of second language and the effects on relationship with mother tongue

When moving to a host country, together with a new culture, one often adopts also a new language. Close to attachment, I see language being affected by the experience of migration, strongly linked to the sense of identity. The migrant therapist faces the challenge to work in a second language, where articulacy is an important professional tool, requiring competence at a deeply nuanced level.

To summarise and reflect upon participants’ accounts on the matter, the central points are as follows:

- Depending on fluency in the second language, different levels of difficulty arise when training and/or practising in a second language. Some shared that they were lacked emotional vocabulary and highly nuanced expressions or metaphors, which are central to therapy work and related training; in those cases a level of anxiety was present in relation to whether they would understand a training session or a client when working. From personal experience and some of the participants, I see that having close relationships in which the second language is used demolishes such barriers more easily and quickly. In my view, a therapist who works in a second language should actively seek exposure to and immersion in that second language, through reading literature, seeking social relationships with people who speak that language and so on.

- The encounter with a second language potentially involves contact with a certain dialect or accent. For example, when I moved to the UK and went to study in Durham University, I found myself in an overall very middle class environment with people using what I called ‘the Queen’s English’; at the same time, I found myself exposed to the local ‘Geordie’ accent that I was totally unfamiliar with. That experience was sometimes similar and at other times different to those participants who moved to London or Wales or Scotland.
Despite that, a few participants suggested that such language barriers can be overcome by giving priority to empathy.

- Some therapists mentioned the significance of being open to using non-verbal (such as art work and metaphor) and other means of communication (such as dreams) to overcome language barriers. Metaphors seem to act as vehicles to both expressing and understanding what cannot be easily comprehended with rationality or what cannot be easily put into words; hence imagination and embodied awareness may offer images or metaphorical ideas that provide access to such territories, offering a visual or sensory language instead of words. Especially when a distressed client is also using a second language and may not be able to articulate or abstract certain details, I would add the value of incorporating ritual, such as movement, reproduction of myths and so on, as a way of overcoming linguistic barriers (Al-Krenawi, 1999). Again, the appropriateness of such ways of working depends on the therapist’s orientation and openness to experimenting and the client’s receptiveness and level of trust. Attention shall be given to any attempts towards interpretation, as there are many symbols that are culturally bound besides those that bear universal meanings.

- Some participants expressed the idea that receiving their training and/or practising in a second language was helpful in terms of having a necessary ‘distance’ that enabled them to access challenging emotional material. In the literature chapter, I explain that psychoanalytic perspectives may see the second language as a defence, effectively distancing oneself from accessing painful intra-psychic material, originally experienced in the mother tongue. There is also the broader question around whether the expressive medium of any second language is compatible with the experiences stored in the mother tongue (Mohavedi, 1996). Although I do not wish to reject elements of truth in that stance, when reflecting on my own experience as a bilingual, in either the client’s or counsellor’s position, I find that the two languages have expanded my means of expression and experiencing, rather than restricting it. Research by Burck (2004) also shows that such ‘linguistic detachment’ provoked by the
use of a second language may actually enable the person to process such material. That is highlighted by Foster (1996) when discussing the language independence of coordinate bilinguals:

“These are people who possess two language codes with which they can think about themselves, be themselves, express ideas, and interact with people in their lives. [...] at a more fundamental level, a multiplicity of symbolic codes may in fact offer multiple opportunities for experiencing themselves” (p. 99)

- Some participants expressed a sense of splitting between their mother tongue and their second language, resulting from training and/or practising in a second language. They often said that the therapist in them thinks and operates in English as a second language whereas they operate in their first language as persons and in other social or close relationships. That could be interesting when they find themselves working with a client who shares the same mother tongue, when in the host country and they attempt to work in their shared native language. In those cases, it was observed that language switching often occurs during the same session, between the mother tongue and the second language, depending on the content or fluency or emotional experience at a given moment. Here is a vivid example from Bethan:

“I did practice in my mother tongue (English) when in Geneva, with clients that had English as second language...but sometimes they would regress into French or German and I followed them to that cause it felt important. We had more languages in the room and I noticed that if for example they referred to early childhood material, they would express themselves in the mother tongue. I had to watch my own switch points between languages too”

I have predominantly practised in English as my second language with clients who had English as their native or second language. Overall, I have become very fluent and as the years passed, I have felt that the English language has inhabited me or dominated my thinking over my mother tongue. I have not experienced any discomfort in practising in a second language, given that my training has been in English and over the years of developing my professional identity, this process has taken place in English. Additionally, I have always taken the attitude that if there was an occasion that I did not understand something that a client may have shared, I would ask for clarification. I acknowledge that some therapists may not feel as confident to do so and this is a matter
for supervision; I suspect that the feelings and level of comfort with regards to the use of a second language or mother tongue are perceived as affecting the co-created power dynamics in the therapeutic relationship. This may also be interpreted differently, depending on the theoretical approach that each therapist draws upon.

On occasions that a Greek client came to see me for counselling I noticed that I was less comfortable ‘performing’ in my Greek native language. There is research (Gamsie, 2009) suggesting that when a therapist is practising in a language that is different from the language in which they received their professional training, increased discomfort maybe provoked and a sense of intrusion or disruption to their professional identity. In such occasions, I felt as if speaking Greek when counselling gave me a feeling of not being able to contain my professional status and manner. In supervision I saw this related to the following reasons: a. I lack the professional vocabulary in Greek in relation to my counselling role; even if I do not use it with clients, it would create a feeling of losing some of my professional status or manner when on the counsellor’s chair and b. I felt that counselling in my mother tongue could potentially jeopardise the balance of power dynamics, in terms of maintaining the clear boundaries of the relationship. There were occasions that offering counselling in Greek to a Greek client in the UK, intensified the possibility of me being perceived more as a friend in their transference, which I was invited to manage. What has been significant is that once I discussed those issues in supervision, with a supervisor who is sensitive to cross-cultural concerns, I gained the confidence to be able to work comfortably in either language, knowing that there will be a new learning curve and identity adjustment if I decide to move to Greece and start working predominantly with Greek-speakers.

To conclude this section, it is important to remember that language and culture are closely intertwined (Sculic, 2007). For that kind of awareness to be possible, supervision and training input that facilitate that appears crucial. This seems to be problematic or not easily available from many supervisors with such a sensitivity and competence, as reported by most participants, something that I will address in another section of this chapter.
4. To return or not to return?

“The Phaeacian sailors deposited the sleeping Odysseus on the shore of Ithaca, his homeland [...] Ithaca showed to him an unaccustomed face; he did not recognise the pathways stretching into the distance, the quiet bays, the crags and precipices. He rose to his feet and stood staring at what was his own land, crying mournfully: “Alas! And now where on earth am I? What do I here myself?” (Homer - the Odyssey)

The question, motives and dilemmas around the possibility of return is present across immigrants’ life cycle (Dustmann, 2001). This has been present since the first year of my move to the UK. Although I originally migrated for educational purposes, I embarked on a life and professional journey where the question related to where to settle turned to a matter of ‘permanent temporariness’. Factors such as personal circumstances, relationship dynamics, professional choices, existential dilemmas and a more general life perspective, relevant to location and/or beyond the question of place affect this decision. In the context of this study, I originally set out to conduct interviews with therapists who were residents in a country different from their original one. In those, the ‘fantasy’ of repatriation came up soon enough, without prompting. That triggered my decision to seek some participants who have actually returned, so that I had touched upon the whole spectrum of the cross-cultural transition phenomenon I set to explore. This aspect exists for immigrants, whether in reality or as a fantasy (Alsop, 2002).

In exploring this angle of the experience, I faced the following limitations: a. relevant data is with therapists of Greek origin only, who returned to Greece after a number of years abroad. So, any discussion is relevant to their specific context, although one could draw tentative insights in the broader sense b. I also conducted a 2nd interview after a year of repatriation, with Bethan, whom I had interviewed previously, when still abroad. This is the only participant I interviewed twice, due to this being the only case practically possible c. at the time of writing this thesis, I have not attempted repatriation myself and hold unresolved tensions around the dilemma concerning whether I want to attempt it or not. The decision of an immigrant about whether to return or not seems to be in a state of ‘pending’ for an indefinite time, often containing the paradox of one ‘temporarily’ deciding to ‘settle permanently’ in another country, as I shared earlier.
The transitional experience of one’s return has been labelled as *re-entry* (Werkman, 1979), *reacculturation* (Martin, 1984) or *repatriation* (Howard, 1980). Storti (2001) also uses the terms *reverse* or *re-entry cultural shock*\(^\text{16}\) or *repatriation distress*. It is described as a process of adjustment similar to the ‘culture shock’ of someone who moved to live overseas but the focus is on “the difficulties of re-adapting and re-adjusting to one's own home culture after one has sojourned or lived in another cultural environment” (Gaw, 2000: 85). This part of the migration transitional experience is full of paradoxes, one of which is vividly demonstrated in the words of Odysseus, when he returned to Ithaca and felt more like a stranger in his own land. Returning to one’s home country after living abroad does not necessarily equate comfort but seems to require a series of new transitions, where psychological shifts occur.

In those accounts, it was evident that those therapists found themselves re-negotiating personal and professional ways of being, relating and behaving at different levels:

At a **personal level**, they described feelings of anxiety, loss and losing confidence that lasted for long time, following the original phase of return (Selby et al., 2005). It was not uncommon to feel like a stranger in one’s own land, something that I perceive as a form of disenfranchised grief\(^\text{17}\) (Doka, 2002), given that the environment may expect them to feel comfort. Most of them mentioned difficulties with relationships, grieving over those that they had to leave behind or revisiting old ones, upon their return, that did not feel the same, due to changes that have taken place. The challenges of reintegration in the original culture may appear to be more difficult than those of immigration for the same person (Arowolo, 2000) marked by a complicated process with high levels of stress, isolation and marginalisation upon return. The changes that have taken place relate to sense of identity, worldview, values, and behaviours and so on. So, there is often ‘a mismatch between the re-migrants’ memories and the reality awaiting them’ (Tannenbaum, 2007: 166). Some mentioned also an excitement and

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\(^{16}\) This phenomenon has first received scholarly attention in 1944, when Scheutz (1944) examined the difficulties of returning armed forces veterans. Lysgaard (1955), Oberg (1960), and Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) were the first to describe *culture shock* and *reverse culture shock* qualitatively as intercultural adjustment.

\(^{17}\) *Disenfranchised grief* (Doka, 2002) is the grief experienced by those who face a loss that is not openly acknowledged or publicly mourned or socially supported.
satisfaction with the decision and reality faced when back, which was related to being close to loved ones.

At a professional level, most participants expressed feelings of anxiety, loss and disappointment related to their professional identity and confidence being under threat when returning back to a country where counselling is not well understood or is underdeveloped or where relevant employment opportunities are limited. In the context of Greece, where the returnee participants were from, counselling is a new area that has developed in the private sector in the last 10 years or so; however, without a first degree in psychology, it is rare to get a position in an organisation. For those Greek participants who trained as counsellors or psychotherapists abroad, but without a psychology degree, their main option was to work in private practice. That is relevant to the situation in other countries where counselling is a new field.

The issue of accreditation problems and unemployment when one trains in one country and relocates to another is acknowledged in other professions too, including skilled migrants who may be bringing valuable knowledge and expertise but are facing a situation of “brain waste” (Grant & Nadin, 2007) instead. A factor that was also discussed, containing feelings of ‘shame’ about Greek society was the phenomenon of nepotism being widespread in the workplace, making the job-seeking process even more frustrating.

Those who work with clients shared some of their challenges, particularly related to the following: professional mannerisms in relation to client expectations, the challenge of maintaining professional boundaries, ethical dilemmas and returning to use of the mother tongue in the therapy room. Such dynamics related to the Greek context, I discuss elsewhere (Malikiosi-Loizos & Christodoulidi, 2008).

By conducting a second interview with Bethan, I gained further insight, through contrast ing her account of a different cultural context. Looking at the whole of her cross-cultural experience as an immigrant, commuter and returnee therapist at different phases of her professional life, Bethan has reached a place of what she described as ‘a complete circle’. She said: “I have gained a lot of qualities and skills through being a therapist abroad. Now that I am back to my roots, although challenging to begin with, I
feel I am where I need to be, where I can appreciate both cultures and be richer in experience about therapy work”. It seems that she has reached a stage of integration (her word) where she can appreciate all she has gained from both cultures and integrate them in her way of being and her work.

What can we learn from the above examples about the experience of a therapist who returns to live and work in their country and culture of origin after living and working abroad?

Repatriation challenges relate not only to the personal sense of one’s self, country and culture after living abroad but also to employment and professional identity shifts that are common to many today (MacDonald & Arthur, 2003). In examining the experiences shared by the participants of Greek origin and Bethan, I made a number of useful observations:

All the returnee Greek participants moved from a big city in the host country to return to Athens, the Greek capital (from urban to urban context), apart from one who moved from a small town in the UK to a Greek island (from rural to rural context). Bethan, as a non-Greek example, left from a cosmopolitan European city to return to a small, remote rural area of Wales (from urban to rural context), something that has highlighted for her the issue of subcultures and society composition in relation to the experience.

The Greek returnees returned from multicultural societies to a fairly mono-cultural one, in terms of nationality population, especially those who would seek therapy. Similarly, Bethan left a multicultural host society, after 18 years, to return to a very ‘white working class area’, where her only paying clients would be the very few middle-class, educated ones. It is argued that therapy is predominantly a middle-class occupation with clients who are mostly of middle-class backgrounds (Totton, 2009) and in live in urban areas. So, the issues of urban/rural, multicultural/monocultural and class come into play as well in such transitions.

What is interesting is that the Greek participants returned from countries where these disciplines are developed to a country where they are still growing and often misunderstood. Bethan returned to a country where these disciplines are developed but settled in an area where there is not much provision and as such the meaning of such a service is also rather blurred. Those observations highlight that therapy, in the ways it is
understood and delivered in contemporary western and westernised societies appears to be a postmodern, urban activity. This seems to be a significant factor in relation to a therapist’s cross-cultural transition experience, especially if their income depends on being accessible to clients or finding themselves in places populated by people who would seek therapy.

A sense of nostalgia was also present in those conversations, either towards the land of birth when exploring the fantasy of return or towards the host culture, when left behind. Patterns of splitting also occur in the experience of return, between idealisation and nostalgia. For the therapist who may have trained, worked and hence developed their identity in a host country, the nostalgia may have dual ‘residence’ as the nest may be experienced as located differently in relation to different parts of the self. At an intimate level of family and belongings, the nest and desire for it may be placed in the country of birth whereas the nest of the professional identity, when developed abroad, may be ‘residing’ in that particular host place. So ultimately, the question becomes more one of returning where? For me, homecoming or return has to do with the process of individuation (Stein, 2006); I experience it as a return to the self, the true self that became more visible through the processes of separation (on departure), maturation (on mobility) and re-negotiating the multiple aspects of identity into awareness, in relation to both individual and collective levels.

There are also a number of positive effects resulting from that experience. In Storti’s (2003) words:

“There is also tremendous satisfaction and excitement in seeing one’s own culture with new eyes, from the perspective of the foreign country. Whether you like or dislike what you see is not nearly as important as the gift of this new critical awareness, the ability to step outside your normal frame of reference and examine your behaviour from a new vantage point” (p. 186).

Looking at the experience from this angle, I was offered a clearer gateway towards reflecting on the ‘collective’ versus each individual’s voice. I did approach each transcript on its own right, but also remained alert in questioning: are there any common patterns that may be voiced in terms of a collective perspective of those Greek born and raised participants? How does this attitude inform my way of listening to or
dialoguing with my data? Sussman (2000), when examining the identification with cultural identity throughout cultural transitions claims that this is not always so strong. However, in my study, the participants of Greek origin who returned appear to strongly identify with their ‘Greek-ness’. Such attitude is explained in a study by Tannenbaum (2007) with Israelis or Jewish returnees whose ‘self identity is highly associated with national, cultural aspects’ (p.153) due to their history of invasion and attack. Papadopoulos (2003) explains the notions of home (home-leaving and home-coming) through Homer’s Odyssey, which could be seen as inherent in the Greek soul through myth and tradition but is also a more universal archetypal symbol of “reconnecting with one’s self and accessing the dis-membered parts of one’s personality” (p. 15).

Coming back to the story of the Odyssey, with which I began this section, Odysseus is a symbol of liminal man/liminal state of being (Russo, 1997), like many of those who have participated or identify with angles of this study. Is there a process of negotiating a personal and/or professional homecoming in a migrant therapist’s decision to return to their country of origin? This process may vary and is a complex one. Below I discuss a closely related thread.

5. Identity, Home and Belonging

In this section, I am reflecting on this theme of identity, home and belonging that emerged in powerful ways. Although those concepts could be explored separately, I am choosing to discuss them together as this is how they were also reflected upon in many of the participants’ narratives; they appear closely interconnected, both in literal and metaphorical terms (Rapport & Dawson, 1998; Madison, 2005).

Amongst the three concepts, I am taking the concept of home as central one which encapsulates aspects of identity and belonging. Throughout this research and within my personal experience, it feels that in conceiving the relationship between sense of self and home, the concept of belonging is like an ‘experiential bridge’ between the two (Madison, 2005. There are multiple layers of meaning, conscious or unconscious, in our attachment to house and home. These could be extended to the meaning we attach to home-land and original culture which becomes clearer and magnified when one becomes an immigrant and lives in a host-land and host culture. It is there that the sense
of home and belonging reach a state of flux and become liminal; those attachments get intensified or questioned. So, ‘home’ may be internalised, idealised, and rejected or reconstructed.

When considering participants’ accounts, the issue of their sense of self in relation to where home is and their belonging becomes central. They speak about how it is to feel ‘at-home’ or being ‘out of place’. For many, especially when the host society has been in a multicultural city, they shared feeling ‘at home’ amongst other foreigners who are ‘out of place’. And although home is not necessarily a geographical territory, the self needs some sense of ‘positioning’ or ‘containment’ to have its sense of coherence. As stated by Papadopoulos (2003: 19): “Home is the locus where the physical and metaphorical meanings of containment are closely interlinked to a degree that they become inseparable dimensions of the same entity”.

For some participants, there was a sense of splitting manifested in terms of their sense of personal vs. professional belonging. For example, a few participants of Greek origin that moved to the UK shared that they felt at home in terms of their professional identity in the UK due to the opportunities to practise, but still felt that they belonged more to Greece personally speaking, a feeling also tied up with a sense of duty (as opposed to betrayal towards their heritage); Mary echoes that vividly when she says “Greece is calling you back, as if you always have to defend your land”. The tension between embracing the new culture and not forgetting the original one is emotionally charged for many migrants. Some participants talked about a struggle to create a sense of belonging by embracing elements from both cultures and, “marrying two worlds within” (Bethan) as a way of finding peace with such a dilemma.

For a few female participants, the dilemma of home was reasonably resolved when they became mothers. I understood this as a connection between becoming a mother and how motherland may be perceived. The distance from one’s motherland, due to migration, may make the relationship with it more visible. Others make a conscious decision around making a home where they are at each phase of their lives. And then, for some, the fluctuation between feelings they have to home continues for long time, if not forever. A couple of participants find some peace in relation to the split through adopting a spiritual perspective that encourages going beyond physical attachments to
belonging; they seem to choose a positioning where home is found in their relationship with the spirit or God.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines home as “a place, region or state to which one properly belongs, on which one’s affections centre, or where one finds refuge, rest or satisfaction”. This definition of home is incongruent with the postmodern world of fluidity, hybridity, mobility and “de-territorialised culture of ‘homelessness'” (Morley, 2000: 2). The concept of emotional homelessness as a condition of modern life is discussed in numerous studies (see a comprehensive review and critique in Rapport and Dawson, 1998). So, home is not necessarily (or only) a physical location. Vincent Descombes (2001) sees the sense of someone being at home as bearing a ‘rhetorical’ rather than a geographical dimension:

“The sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others, without any need for long explanations. The rhetorical country of a (person or) character ends where his interlocutors no longer understand the reasons he gives for his actions, the criticisms he makes, or the enthusiasms he displays” (p. 108)

Identity, home and belonging appear also mobile and maybe more anchored in ‘inner places’ rather than ‘out there’ in some sort of territory. There are existential dimensions in the position between home and uprooted-ness, belonging and non-belonging, fitting in or not. Many participants expressed feelings of suffocation or rigidness in relation to their family, their home country or nation; moving abroad and becoming a therapist in another country, within a different culture, usually choosing a host multicultural one, were both gateways towards claiming freedom and opportunities for development and meaningful self-expression. A spectrum of ambivalent feelings is reported between resistance and integration towards original and host country in relation to where they consider home to be. Tension is expressed in a negotiation between dwelling and movement; belonging implies some sort of settling and restlessness implies travel and mobility. Such tensions are similar to a client’s process when in the agony and desire for change.

When I read the above paragraph, I can identify with the conflict between security and movement, between comfort and the yearning for expansion and change. Although I
have never felt settled in what was called my ‘familiar’ home and culture in my original culture, when I immigrated to the UK there was an even more intensified emotional response to where security and where exploration lie within my experience. So, in what ways may all the above be relevant to therapeutic work and the focus of this study?

If I relate that kind of feeling to what happens in the counselling room, I can recognise the same conflict that a client may experience between remaining within the illusional comfort of the known but unhelpful state and moving towards growing into a process of transformation that is unknown and provokes change. This is one reason why I believe that a therapist abroad can actually develop advanced empathy towards the stages and processes involved in the process of change, inherent in the therapeutic process itself. Papadopoulos (2003) poses the question whether psychotherapy is a replacement of home and whether it should be so in someone’s quest for ‘homecoming’, which may take several forms other than the literal one. He highlights that “homely warmth is not what psychotherapy should be offering” (p. 3). However, he acknowledges that:

> Once we accept that home occupies a pivotal position in our approach to psychological development, then a new epistemology emerges where the sharp boundaries between inner and outer, physical and psychological, individual and collective lose their impermeability. This perspective is strikingly similar to the very dynamics of most therapeutic processes” (Papadopoulos, 2003: 24).

So, is the counselling room and therapeutic process providing a symbolic home? In my view as a practitioner, I see the therapeutic process as a ‘space’ where one can discover and/or cultivate ‘home inside’, in the sense of getting to a position where one is ‘at home’ with oneself, in the journey of self-actualisation. Afuape (2008: 174) highlights that “therapy that contains and holds together various tensions may feel like a type of ‘home’ to clients”.

Papadopoulos (1997) also argues that the sense of home is part of the core “substratum of identity” which resembles a “mosaic” and “consists of a great number of smaller elements which together form a coherent whole” (p. 14). Those other elements are “the fact that we belong to a country, that our country exists, that we belong to a certain language group and we are used to certain sounds, that we belong to a certain geographical landscape and milieu, that we are surrounded by particular types of
My research is questioning the above sense of prerequisite ‘belonging’, as those who are immigrating voluntarily may not feel strongly associated to where they come from; they may rather find a sense of fitting in somewhere ‘foreign’ due to what this space represents for them.

Choosing to be a therapist abroad may also be connected to finding one’s place in a discipline that often holds, contains or accepts those kind of liminal and thresholds states of existence and experiencing. At least, this has been the case for me and my own personal, educational and professional journey permeated by mobility and immersion in a host culture and second language. For many of the research participants, the whole issue of ‘up-rootedness’ and belonging or not has been significant both at a personal and professional level. It is interesting that most participants use the phrase ‘back home’ to refer to their country of origin, even if that does not feel like home anymore, essentially at an emotional level. In an email exchange with my research supervisor, he reminded me that:

“We are counsellors because we don’t belong; we live on the edge and potentially can then empathise with people from other cultures. That is the resource within us that could be tapped into for cross cultural work. The other resource is our (child like) curiosity of the ‘other’” (West, 2008, personal communication).

Reflecting on that, I see two skills being crucial in cross-cultural work, amongst many others, which are assets of therapists who have experienced cross-cultural transitions themselves. These are: a. the capacity to exist in liminal spaces, out of comfort zones and therefore empathise with this sense of disrupted at home-ness’ and b. having a balanced curiosity. I view these issues as related to the sense for continuity of self that is sought in the counselling room.

Another way of accessing the meaning of those dimensions is to reflect on my experience at this very moment. As I was writing this document, I felt the urgent need to re-arrange the furniture in my bedroom. From a heuristic point of view, this is another expression of my inner search for creating an indwelling environment to host both my rest and my demanding study period. And in that process, objects become again significant, the meaning of furniture or luggage appears on the internal screen.
This issue also relates to the professional self of the foreign therapist as there is also a questioning of belonging in a certain peer group or modality that may represent or operate from within values that are reinforcing the possible conflict between original and host culture. I contemplate on Hall’s (1995) reporting below about the ‘in between’ position in the search for negotiating ways of being and having a home between discourses and experiences of sameness and difference:

“People, who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language (literally and metaphorically), inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home; they have learned to negotiate and translate between cultures and, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories ad cultures, they have learned to live with and indeed to speak from, difference. They speak from the ‘inbetween’ of different cultures, always unsettling assumptions of one culture from the perspective of another and thus finding ways of being the same and at the same time different from, the others amongst whom they live” (p. 206, original emphasis).

Isn’t that unsettling of assumptions one of the most powerful dynamics in therapeutic work, where clients and therapists work together towards expressing the freedom of an authentic self and relating to the world? And, isn’t it a necessity for therapists to be able to acquire such a perspective, reflecting both on the ‘cultures’ and ‘identities’ within themselves and those within the contexts where they practice?

All the issues discussed so far require a rigorous reflexive space for therapists. An obvious question in the therapy world would be: Is supervision such a fruitful space for those working in a host country and culture?
6. Therapists’ experiences of Supervision

In the following paragraphs, I will begin by discussing the context of multicultural supervision whilst summarising the issues that appeared of particular interest in participants’ accounts; I will then reflect on the issues affecting the choice of supervisor for the migrant therapist before presenting some insights gained from my personal experience and supervisor and supervisee in my host UK culture. Finally, I will attempt to discuss what may be useful for meeting the needs of migrant supervisees and draw some conclusions.

The context of multicultural supervision

There is a clear consensus in American and British literature that supervision is an important ingredient in the training and professional development of counsellors and psychotherapists (Lago, 2006); in the UK it is compulsory. However, this is not always the case in other countries, often depending on the modality. A therapist who may have trained and practised, for example in the UK, who then moves to work in another country, may find themselves in a context where either supervision is not provided or where it is understood differently.

Cross-cultural or multicultural psychotherapy supervision is defined as a specific three-way interaction (Batten, 1990) in a triadic relationship among a supervisor, a therapist and a client where cultural backgrounds may differ significantly. Due to the diversity of people and subcultures that exist even in a broadly homogenous culture, all supervision can be seen as multicultural (Falicov, 1995). In a literature search, what I mostly found was from the US context and related to the supervision of international student trainees (for example, see Nilsson, 2007; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Nilsson and Dodds, 2006) or international doctoral student therapist’s supervision experiences (Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Inman et al., 2008; Mori et al., 2009). In such studies the emphasis seems to be on role ambiguities in the supervisory dyad and levels of comfort with multicultural discussions.

BACP and UKCP guidelines outline a minimum of 1.5 hrs per month for the supervision of their accredited members in the UK.
Issues of multiculturalism in relation to supervision are generally ignored as revealed by Leog and Wagner’s (1994) paper that reviewed this area. They concluded that race and ethnicity profoundly influence the cross-cultural supervision process in ways that may be either non-explicit or over-simplified. In her doctoral study, McLeod (2008) reviews and critiques the relevant literature she discovered after the 1994 study just mentioned. She highlights that these studies focused primarily on issues regarding race and ethnicity, focusing more on demographic variables rather than exploring the process of multicultural supervision. It is evident that the impact of mobility is not addressed in that context; supervisors and supervisees may have divergent perspectives regarding events in multicultural supervision (Duan & Roehlke, 2001). The difficulties or advantages of a supervisor being culturally different to the client-therapist dyad can be complex or invisible or resisted, even more when all three parties involved (counsellor-client-supervisor) are of different cultural backgrounds.

Lago (2006) discusses the triangular supervisory relationship (counsellor-client-supervisor) in terms of black and white racial identity with its inherent power imbalances within society, potentially played out in such a professional relationship. He makes reference to the power dynamics in cross-cultural supervision through the lens of Ryde’s (2000) triangle on three dimension of power: role power, cultural power and individual power. I agree with his highlighting the necessity for the supervisory relationship also being supervised, due to the potential invisible or resisted or highly challenging dynamics that may occur. Extensive reference is made to the matrices of possible triads (through the lens of black and white), drawing from the work of Thompson (1991) on issues of race and culture in counselling supervision training courses.

In this discussion I consciously chose not to draw understandings from models (as for example a model developed by Judy Ryde (1997) and discussed in Hawkins and Shohet (2000:p. 88-105) when writing about trans-cultural supervision) that discuss cultural values comparatively, through categorisation. This is because I believe that such models fall into the danger of over-simplifying notions of cultural identity and fail to acknowledge the overriding impact of globalisation upon how individuals and groups position themselves culturally speaking (Seneviratne, 2004). Knowledge about how the Greeks or the British or the Mexicans do things is not enough in addressing
multifaceted and fluid embodiments of identity and relationship dynamics, also in the context of supervision where more than one culture is involved. What appears significant in the participants’ accounts is whether their particular challenges and experiences could be received and understood by a supervisor who would be a good ‘fit’. As in the therapeutic relationship, where the matching of therapist and client may be affected or not by dynamics of sameness and difference, there is a similar question in relation to the supervisory relationship (as also suggested by Nolan, 2007).

To summarise the challenges mentioned in discussions with participants about their supervision, they include the following:

The worldviews and attitudes of each member in the supervisory triad are inevitably influenced by each member’s cultural upbringing, socio-political history, life experiences, therapeutic modality, experiences in training as well as their personalities. These affect the convergence or divergence of each or all of those factors, the attitudes towards health and pathology, the concept of self and relationships, the conscious or unconscious tendencies towards stereotyping, understanding the world and so on. In the supervisory relationship where the therapist is a migrant, dynamics of power may take different forms, depending on the characteristics and attitudes of those in the dyad. Sometimes, there may be feelings of inadequacy or shame, triggered by the impact of migration and the role of the host culture, second language, contrasting of values and so on (from either party).

In contrast to what difference may provoke, at other times sameness may trigger a degree of colluding or taking things for granted or making assumptions. Such dynamics may lead to defensive reactions such as avoidance and withdrawal. Some issues may be silenced. On occasions where there is openness about discussing matters related to culture, there may be opportunities between supervisor and supervisee to draw upon their own cultural experiences and open up to understanding effectively a wide range of client groups. Those processes may be similar to what may happen in therapy where there is cultural difference. However, the focus here is to draw understandings in relation to what is particularly relevant to the supervision needs of migrant therapists.
Many of the participants actively sought for a supervisor who was also a migrant with the expectation of being better understood; this raises the questions around matching. For example, Isabel said that by having a migrant supervisor she felt comfortable “to bring cultural responses to the working style which maybe were not compatible with some North American therapy rules”. Astrid also mentioned the significance of finding a supervisor who is also a migrant and additionally, one with whom she could speak both languages she used in her counselling work. Fuertes (2004) recommends that supervisors of bilingual counsellors assess the language preference of the supervisee and monitor the supervisee’s language switching patterns in order to identify potential issues in supervision.

Shame, guilt, vulnerability are feelings that are often inherent in any supervisory relationship, regardless of model, setting or the characteristics of those involved. This is due to the fact that it is a space where the practitioner brings anxieties, dilemmas, self-doubt, concerns around their own limitations and so on. The honest engagement of issues of racial and cultural difference can be experienced as risky and shameful, by both the supervisee and the supervisor. Given that there is a disproportionately high number of white supervisors, those who may lack multicultural competence may sometimes rely on culturally different supervisees as being the expert in such issues of diversity (McNeil et al., 1995); they may even avoid those issues altogether due to feeling inadequate or less powerful in the relationship with a foreign supervisee when referring to multicultural counselling work (Estrada et al, 2004). So, there is a danger in pre-supposing difference/sameness as the central issue, rather than the intrinsic relational inter-subjectivity, itself dependent upon the perceived role of ‘supervision’ and the therapeutic approach. Such dynamics may also appear the other way round as in the case of a supervisee working with an ethnic minority supervisor and assuming they are an omniscient source of cultural knowledge (Tummala-Narra, 2004: 304). Despite those assumptions that may not apply consistently, it is not surprising that culturally different clients, therapists, and supervisors tend to be more aware of the potential impact of race on the psychotherapeutic relationship when compared with many White therapists (Yi, 1998).
Some participants shared feeling misunderstood in supervision, in terms of the challenges faced due to being of foreign background or working with culturally challenging clients. It is common that feelings of discomfort towards the supervisor are not easily talked about by supervisees (Webb, 2000; Nolan, 2007). It is suggested that supervisors sometimes fail to acknowledge that the process of supervision involves multiple cultural interactions and that all supervision must integrate race and culture. In such cases, the supervisor and the supervisee may collude in avoiding discussion of cultural issues altogether, in the guise of providing a ‘universalist approach’ (Tummala-Narra, 2004: 304) to the work. For example, Hird et al (2001) examined experiences of supervisees of colour and found that there may be a tendency from their supervisors to avoid addressing the issue of culture or to operate from a dominant-culture perspective, despite good intentions to pay attention to issues of diversity. That may be resisted due to underlying power dynamics or fear of being seen as racist or lacking in knowledge or carrying shame and so on. I suspect that such attitudes may also be dependent upon the nature of the supervisory alliance, depending on whether it is from within either a ‘developmental’ or ‘process’ framework (see Hawkins & Shohet, 2006).

All the above requires contextualising also within the supervisor’s theoretical model (Lago, 2006) which makes the issue more complex. In the UK, as compared to US and Canada where there is broader range of approaches introduced on counsellor training programmes, there is a tendency to emphasise on one approach, mainly due to time length of courses; and within that, “trainers and supervisors may demonstrate considerable resistance to approaches other than their own” (ibid: 130). So, if there is resistance towards other approaches, perhaps it is no wonder that there is resistance towards personal needs and client material that migrant trainees and practising therapists may bring into sessions, if they have the courage to overcome the anxiety provoked by such tensions. With such complexities in mind, in the following paragraphs I will attempt to discuss what may be useful in supervising the migrant therapist. I begin with reflecting on personal experience.

Insights from my personal experience as foreign supervisee and supervisor

I recall my own training as a supervisor where one of the trainers, a person-centred practitioner, was also a psycho-dramatist and brought this perspective into the work. I
was part of a training group of 10 where I was the only one from a non-British background. What we found particularly useful in examining the relational dynamics played out in the supervisory triad was to rehearse, through psychodrama, the three roles and allow the practitioner who was bringing a certain client for supervision to sit in all three chairs in turns and speak from that position. Both trainers in this course were practitioners and supervisors with substantial international experience, well-travelled and ‘politically active’ in the therapy professional circles. The co-facilitator, a practitioner with a transpersonal background, was bringing the ‘super-vision lens’ when reflecting on supervision dynamics. In my view, her holistic approach was also providing a fruitful space for issues of diversity to be explored. The issues of culture were brought into the work in a tentative manner, something that was not reported by many of the participants in this study. This is a positive example of a group setting with the use of psychodrama, where such a potentially challenging triad can come into life and be explored. It is my impression that the ‘acting’ that takes place in performing the roles, alongside a transpersonal perspective, made what could be otherwise invisible, more visible to awareness for those involved.

Over the last year, I have been supervising a Greek trainee counsellor, an experience that provided me with the opportunity to reflect on the supervisory relationship with a fellow national in our shared host culture. What has been particularly significant in this interaction is the use of language. From the very first session, we have jointly found that although we share the same mother tongue, it feels more comfortable to conduct supervision in English. I have initiated a discussion around our cultural dynamics and linguistic preference in our work and we both came to understand that, although I offered to conduct supervision in either language of her choice, we agreed that ‘our professional self is rather thinking in English, which is the language of our training and practice’. We occasionally switch languages and I have found that this happens when there is some sort of ‘regression dynamic’ between us or parallel process with childhood material of the client we are discussing or memories of my supervisee’s life back in Greece. When supervising counsellors of British background, I found that they felt comfortable in bringing diversity issues with their clients, due to my own foreign background, something that was also explored openly in the relationship. Therefore, the role of transference and counter-transference in relation to the same or different cultural and linguistic background seems significant.
In terms of my experiences of being supervised, I shall mention that I have had satisfactory supervisory relationships with supervisors who were not foreign themselves but held an interest in cross-cultural issues and substantial international experience. Currently, both my research and practice supervisors are White, British, males. In discussing with both what makes our relationship so effective I identified that it is the qualities of humility, openness, flexibility, courage and cultural sensitivity that they embody, as well as their own scholarly interest in issues of diversity and culture that contribute to this level of quality in our relationship. This leads me to conclude that getting stuck into the label of ‘foreign’ or ‘migrant’ or ‘matching’ according to certain commonalities or differences is distorting the reality of the effectiveness of such relationships. There is the idiosyncratic nature of human relationships and at the same time, we shall not forget that:

“The challenges of racial and cultural dynamics are by no means limited to work with ethnic minority clients, therapists, and supervisors but broadly apply to the issue of general clinical competence for all therapists and supervisors” (Tummala-Narra, 2004: 301).

A powerful ‘tool’ in my experiences as supervisee and supervisor, has been the use of the notion of ‘parallel process’\(^\text{19}\). Specific research on that in relation to inter-cultural dyads and triads would be potentially very revealing but beyond the scope of this study. In the following paragraphs, I reflect on what may be useful for meeting the needs of migrant supervisees.

**What may be useful in supervising the foreign therapist?**

“Supervisors, when consulted by counsellors from different racial or cultural origins to their own or when consulted about clients who are culturally or racially different, will be under pressure to attempt to understand the presented dynamics and story” (Lago, 2006: 160).

Depending on the level of experience between supervisor and supervisee, the dynamics of this relationship can vary between hierarchical imbalance and a more equal

\(^{19}\) Searles (1955) was the first to make reference to this term, labelling it as a reflection process. This process has its origins in the psychoanalytic concepts of transference and counter-transference. It refers to the analogy of emotions or dynamics that occur in the therapist-client relationship being recreated in the supervisory relationship. See also the parallel process model by Clarkson (1997).
relationship amongst colleagues. Supervisees may often struggle to see their supervisors as equals or may feel intimidated by them, especially when they would wish to raise contentious or subtle issues (Lawton, 2000). In the case of the supervisee being a migrant therapist, I wonder also whether the supervisor, depending on their background or confidence around diversity, also feels intimidated or struggles with questions of power and authority. West (2003) discusses the usefulness of seeing supervision as ‘a kind of subculture within the larger professional culture of counselling and psychotherapy’ (p. 125) and within that, care should be taken to avoid the potential danger of certain issues being excluded or disallowed as threatening. Feltham (2002) reinforces that view by arguing that ‘supervision by its nature creates micro-cultures of conformity and mediocrity’ (p.27).

Tummala-Narra (2004), drawing from a psychoanalytic perspective suggests the following strategies for supervisors who strive towards engaging more effectively with issue of race and culture in their work: a. increase cultural knowledge, b. initiate the discussion around culture with their supervisees, c. attend to transferential responses on behalf of each member in the triad relationship and d. actively engage in multicultural education. Drawing from participants responses in a workshop conducted for migrant therapists in New Zealand, Thorpe and Thorpe (2008) suggest that ongoing support groups for such professionals is necessary, whilst drawing attention to the fact that “additional supervision and personal psychotherapy is recommended for any new immigrant therapist to facilitate this potentially traumatic process” (p. 42).

Gatmon et al. (2001) and Duan and Roehlke (2001) in their studies of ethnic variables in supervision found that the cultural/racial match between supervisor and supervisee was not as significant to supervisee satisfaction as the presence and quality of the discussion of differences and similarities. In a study about what black therapists look for in a supervisor, Seneviratne (2004: 112-113) highlights that they did not think it is necessary to work with one of the same origin but rather valued the supervisory relationship holding the following qualities:

a. the importance of being accepted in all our complexity, across the sameness-difference continuum
b. the need for supervisors and supervisees to be able to cut through the anxieties and expectations that surround issues of race and culture

c. the need for supervisors to have awareness of their own identity, not resist issues of difference and see challenges as opportunities for learning

d. the strength to hold the challenges, through honesty and un-defensiveness

e. acquire knowledge and understanding of the role of the broader context within which relationships take place, such as politics and history

Those qualities appear, in my view, necessary ingredients for an effective supervisory relationship. I hold the idea that group supervision where members are of diverse backgrounds, both foreign and native, may be a way of addressing some of the subtle issues related to migrant practitioners - given that the facilitator is experienced in terms of visible and less visible inter-cultural dynamics. If there isn’t a facilitator but group supervision is in the form of peer, equal input, members may need to find ways of negotiating that they bring sensitive attention to such matters. The understandings of self frame the understandings and expressions of emotions, in relation to whether one looks for them within (more towards individualistic) or to others (collective) and whether that is shared (for example, allowing therapists’ eyes to water during a session as Isabel said). Feelings of guilt are more appropriate in collective contexts although they are seen as something to overcome in a more individualistic one. In a group supervision context, those issues may potentially become more visible to awareness.

I am also reflecting upon the question on whether it is helpful to have compatibility or coherence of the theoretical orientation between supervisor and supervisee. Movement across theoretical frameworks may work better, when those in the triad have different backgrounds and journeys till they arrived at the meeting destination. The increasing need for plurality in supervision practice (Gilbert & Evans, 2000; Nolan, 2007) appears relevant to this context. Variety of values and understandings may allow space for the diverse voices and meanings, as influenced by the underlying cultural beliefs, to be expressed (Messer and Woolfolk, 1998). There is no neat answer to such dilemmas; it
appears to depend on the individuals, settings and orientations involved. What appears significant is an openness to address these issues with an attitude of humility, sensitivity and honest dialogical collaboration.

On a final note on this theme, the supervisor of inter-/trans-/multi-cultural work has a lot to learn from the migrant or foreign therapist, something that shifts the traditional power dynamics in this relationship, depending on the level of experience of each in this dyad. What seems to summarise the complexities involved is the recognition of ‘holding’ an inevitable tension, as described below:

"Despite the fact that all individuals hold both conscious and unconscious beliefs and fantasies related to race and culture, racial minority clients, therapists, and supervisors are often placed in a position of holding issues of race and culture that tend to reflect the marginalized status of ethnic minorities in our larger social system. The supervisor and supervisee are then challenged with addressing the relatively marginalized position held by issues of race and culture in the field of psychotherapy while simultaneously confronting the relatively charged nature of topics such as racism that can be experienced as too powerful or overwhelming to the supervisory and therapeutic relationships” (Tummala-Narra, 2004: 305).

What appears crucial, in my view, in addressing those complex issues in supervision, as with other complex issues both in an effective therapeutic and supervisory relationship, is the quality of this relationship (Carroll, 1996; Hawkins & Sohet, 2000; Ladany et al, 2001, Page and Wosket, 2001; Nolan, 2007). Having discussed some issues related to supervision, allowed me to acquire a ‘super-vision’ over the broader picture of this study that relates to the ‘culture’ of therapy itself. This is highly debated today and my relevant reflections follow.

7. The ‘Culture’ of Therapy: a professional identity in flux

“…the problem is not the variety of our individual or group constructions, but what occurs when interpretations of how things should be are imposed by one group on another. In such instances, if we are to be successful at providing therapy, we may be forced to tolerate at least some aspects of others’ truths even if we find them personally and politically oppressive” (Ungar, 2003: 6).

Many of the issues discussed in this thesis, faced by therapists who move abroad are connected to a broader context, that of the ‘culture’ of therapy itself. According to Basu
“cultural dynamics are affected not only by the spatial movement of people and things, but also by the movement of meanings and discourses across and between groups that may or may not be spatially distinct” (p: 187). I think it is important to explore this idea in relation to the professional groups in counselling and psychotherapy, especially during a period when there is a tendency towards re-visiting the meanings of such identities and practices, in the light of regulations, professionalization discourses and collaborations or splitting amongst modalities and practices.

Although there are efforts made by several fields towards developing policies and cultures of inclusion as a response to an increasingly changing global demand for internationalisation of higher education and the professions (Iredale, 2001), that is not the case in the field of counselling and psychotherapy. One can think of various legal factors that contribute to that as well as attitudes towards help seeking and understandings of the role of such professionals. Many psychology graduates may choose to undertake counselling or psychotherapy training afterwards but there are others, from other disciplines that may enter such programmes. Psychology is an established discipline with clear training routes and procedures towards qualification and accreditation. The biggest challenge occurs for counsellors due to the several routes of training that are not mutually recognised, even within the same country; this is something that not only effects such practitioners at an individual level but there is a wider effect at a collective level of identity (Gale & Austin, 2003). This is demonstrated vividly by Gazzola and Smith (2007):

“within the mental health field, counselling continues to struggle to find its identity, in part because of the significant overlap between the work of counsellors and that of other mental health professionals” (p. 98).

Broadly speaking, therapists are influenced by their own personal cultural identities and by the culture of the theories they were educated by and within which they operate. I emphasise that the therapist’s subjective socio-cultural positioning is even more of focal importance when the therapist is moving from one country to another; being challenged to not only carry but also negotiate and find new positioning within, as a result of the new blending of social and cultural influences. Just as there are majority/dominant and minority/non-dominant groups in society, similarly there are hierarchical divisions within and between therapeutic modalities as well (Moncayo,
A vivid example is that of Astrid who although she could be employable and have credibility in the eyes of clients and colleagues as a person-centred practitioner in her sessional work in London, when she tried to offer her services in Germany, her modality was seen as inferior or not professional enough and the insurance would not cover the costs of clients for such a service.

So, can a therapist, trained and having professional experience in a certain modality, move to another country which may hold and operate within a different set of beliefs and values system and work effectively without experiencing confusion and challenges within their role? Obviously but not necessarily broadly acknowledged, this is a rhetorical question. All therapies are based and operate upon a set of theories and assumptions about the self, the formation of relationships, the world and how all these are experienced, perceived and interpreted. When a therapist develops their professional identity in a certain context and moves to a country and culture, where there are either absent practices in place or ones that contradict what he/she developed elsewhere, the conflicts may be highly challenging.

**Reflecting on the Inter-disciplinary conflict in the therapy professions**

The problematic and unsettled quest for the professional identity of counselling is longstanding (Hanna and Bemak, 1997; Totton, 1999; Gale and Austin, 2003; Rollins, 2006) and it is not only related to its relationship with psychotherapy and psychology. There is also long standing conflict with its relationship with counselling psychology (Goodyear, 2000) although often, at least in the UK, such professionals work alongside each other, even doing the same job but are employed on different payment scheme due to the lack of statutory regulation that would ground the status of the discipline as a profession. In many countries, those who have trained as counsellors cannot be employed at all but only have the choice of private practice.

In a recent survey conducted with members of the Canadian Counselling Association (CCA), counsellors perceived their work as being highly similar to that of psychologists and moderately similar to the practice of social workers, bearing in mind that such professionals often work in the same organisations in Canada, often in teams (Gazzola and Smith, 2007). In the US, counselling is regulated by statute, having both positive
and perilous effects of statutory regulation (cf., Handelsman and Uhlemann, 1998). Many other countries across the globe traditionally follow practices from the UK or Anglo-Saxon countries but there is a lot of variation in the attitudes, definitions and legal restrictions around the practice of counselling and psychotherapy. In the context of the UK, there are several bodies and associations – the main ones being the BPS, the BACP and the UKCP, all with their divisions and specialist groups.

Attempts are made at cross-disciplinary dialogue, for example the flourishing interest in the Society for Psychotherapy Research and the society for the Exploration of Psychotherapy Integrations, both international organizations. In terms of psychotherapy in different countries, there are a number of reports that refer to particular countries. Additionally, Van Broeck and Lietair (2008) have conducted a review of legal regulations for psychology and psychotherapy in the Health Care across 17 European countries. At the time of writing this thesis, the present status of the professions of counselling and psychotherapy, is also in a state of highlighted uncertainty. For example, in the UK, Health Professions Council (HPC) is consulting on the statutory regulation of counsellors and psychotherapists, where the issues of professional boundaries, standards of training and permitted titles are facing potential changes with wide implications. The professional titles of a certain professional in those fields is very much determined, influenced or outlined by professional bodies, if they exist in a given country or they may be used without any commonly shared consensus in countries where associations or such bodies do not exist. Generally speaking, in the European context, a counsellor or psychotherapist who does not hold a psychology or medical degree prior to their counselling or psychotherapy training, is not working through a regulated title.

As I mentioned earlier, it is not in the scope of this study to attempt to review the unrealistic task of collecting information around the status of these professions internationally when there are pending changes on the horizon. However, it is important to bear in mind this issue and the tensions that come with it, given that for those therapists who move between countries, the state of affairs in this kind of debate and

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20 See for example the SPR website: www.psychotherapyresearch.org under the Interest Section on Culture and Psychotherapy, for reports on Australia, Austria, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland, Uruguay and USA.
reality is crucial. That is because not only may professional qualifications, which are recognised and allow employability in one country, not be acknowledged or allow for applying for work in another; it is also because the perception of one's professional identity may be under threat when the broader peer community or governments or legal structures are inhibiting such a professional from offering their services.

The ‘culture’ of therapeutic modalities

“Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul” (Jung et al, 1928: 361).

Jung reminds us that the rivalry between theoretical perspectives in the practice of therapy may be irrelevant to truly facilitating the quest of a person who is seeking help. As evident from what is discussed above, psychology, psychotherapy and counselling, as well as their different modalities or orientations appear to be, paradoxically for some, in conflict rather than in collaboration; Des Gasper (2002) observed that disciplines tend to be competitors rather than partners, similarly to cultures. Orlinsky and Ronnestad (2005:5) recognise that:

“As a rule, the study of psychotherapies has been favoured over the study of psychotherapists - as if therapists, when properly trained, are more or less interchangeable”.

That makes me think of the narcissism around the therapist’s role. In this thesis, my focus has been the therapist’s experience from the angle of the therapist who stepped our of their comfort zone, who made themselves a foreigner. Is the impact of migration making one more humble? Is being confronted with what is out of the familiar zone leading to questioning and discovering the real, authentic self?

Regardless of the modality offered by a given therapist, there is common recognition that the working or therapeutic alliance in the dyad is the crucial factor. The factors that are important in building this alliance are suggested to be: empathy, mutuality, the dynamics of power and authority, the use of self, and the process of communication (Shonfeld-Ringel, 2001) and present maybe more complexities when in reference to cross-cultural practice.
When a therapist moves from one country to another, having completed training and having gained professional experience in a certain cultural context, he/she carries those when going to practise in a different one. In the context of this study, what is important to consider is whether a certain modality is culturally appropriate or relevant to a certain culture. Additionally, attention shall be paid to the fact that “individual therapy along Western lines may not only be inappropriate but actually harmful when working with clients from a different cultural group” (Rapp, 2000: 100).

I hold the vision of the therapy related disciplines (counselling, psychotherapy, psychology) acquiring a commitment to multiculturalism and social justice (Morrow, 2007. When there is variety of ‘cultures’ involved in the counselling room or in organisational discourse or amongst professional philosophies and modalities, the issue of tolerance or intolerance lies in interpretation and openness to dialogue. Is cultural pluralism possible or is it resisted or expressed in forms of splitting, out of a desire and struggle with identity-definition?

What is the place of the foreign therapist in the contemporary therapy culture?

What is the place of the migrant therapist in the ethnocentric, Eurocentric, individualistic and colonial narrative where therapy takes place, as we understand it in the countries where it is offered in a structured form? Usually this therapist has moved to one of these countries where training programmes exist to undertake training. So, these notions inevitably form their thinking and professional identity or way of practising. Moodley (2009) discusses the idea that the marginalised, or clients of ethnic minority groups (because of socio-cultural and geo-political histories) are often positioned ‘outside’ those conventional theoretical epistemologies of the talking therapies and become ‘voiceless’. He then argues that those clients may risk “unwittingly embodying the stress and trauma” (p. 300). I am wondering whether such tendencies, even more subtly, take place for the therapists that are practising in a host culture. Although they may be articulate and aware in relation to the therapeutic discourses, what is overtly highlighted in this study is that the particular challenges they face and struggle with, as well as the unique opportunities they draw upon, due to their cross-cultural experience, are not discussed. So, this voice may also risk remaining unacknowledged.
Towards the end of each conversation, I spent some time with each participant to reflect on their experience of taking part in my research and to offer them the opportunity to explore these issues. It is notable that nearly all of them drew attention to the fact that in their professional life they had never been triggered or encouraged to talk about such a profound experience, tied up with their personal story of mobility; and they expressed a disappointment that there is a lack of discourse around this phenomenon, although so contemporary for many therapists of today. Tina expressed her surprise as follows:

“When talking to you now I find it shocking to realise that we never actually addressed those things during any of my training. And that is so strange, especially related to all my extensive training in the UK which is such a multicultural society. My experiences as an immigrant affect my way of thinking and I think, in some ways, the relational dynamics I bring as a therapist culturally speaking. And yet, I was never asked about that until now that I am sharing with you…it is taking me by such surprise!”

Having acknowledged such a ‘surprise’ to many of the participants in this study, I will now reflect on the process of this research as a whole and discuss surprises or insights, resulting from the vision I have gained at this later stage of writing.

6.3 The Methodology: Implications and Limitations

Richards & Morse (2007) use the term ‘re-revisiting methodological congruence’ (p. 211) that I come to reflect upon at this stage of my writing. Is there consistency in what I set out to do, in how I committed myself in undertaking the steps of this research and so on?

Moustakas’ heuristic research inquiry, which emphasises the self experience of the researcher, originated from his seeking a way of resolving a major crisis in his personal life, which led to his studies of loneliness. Sandy Sela-Smith (2001; 2002) has reviewed and critiqued Moustakas’ Heuristic method and came to the conclusion that it is a model presenting several ambivalent points between its theory and its application; therefore, she revisited the various areas in question and formulated a model that she considers as more congruent to the Heuristic process, called Heuristic Self-Research Inquiry (HSSI). Amongst her main observations has been that “due to unacknowledged resistance to experiencing unbearable pain, Moustakas’ research focus shifted from the
During the whole of my PhD journey, I have experienced various levels of resistance towards a. the PhD topic itself b. processing the interview material and c. the writing process. Ultimately, given that I relate to my research topic in an embodied way, this resistance has been towards myself and my self’s experience of the experience under study. In relation to that resistance, it is argued that: “…the resistance has to be confronted and overcome before full discovery can occur” (Sela-Smith, p. 58). I have been aware of my levels of resistance but also developed in becoming more resilient; there has been a trial and error process in discovering ‘what works’ which then becomes the focus and that is inherent in heuristics.

From the embarking phase into this PhD study I was aware that I had both the passion and the motivation to conduct the study; I have also always been confident in my academic ability, I had made the space in my life to undertake that project F/T and I was not afraid of the commitment and dedication it would entail. So, when experiencing the levels of resistance, I knew that those were not so much related to being reluctant to do the work. I came to question the following:

- Is it possible that my resistance is telling me something about my experience of, and relationship with the topic and the research process?

- Was there something around myself seeking ways to dissociate from the painful feelings that the experience held for me?

- And could I admit that to myself, my supervisor, and the audience or reader or examiner of my thesis openly, without being ‘deported’ by what I understood as being valued and expected from a PhD student?

There were numerous times during the PhD years that I felt completely lost and out of control, a feeling also associated with the experience of being out of place or in-between places and inner spaces, this state of flux and liminality. As confirmed by
Douglass and Moustakas (1985), in heuristic research: “a feeling of lost-ness and letting go pervades, a kind of being wide open in surrender to the thing itself, a recognition that one must relinquish control and be tumbled about with newness and drama of a searching focus that is taking over life”. I have come to accept that given that this is a process that is intrinsic in my experiencing of my multiple selves in that journey, then I congruently share that my resistance has been a dominant feeling as well as the indicator and drive of the study. During a PhD supervision session, I shared the following:

“I feel that throughout doing the PhD, I have been in a process of grief as well as transformation. There were periods that I felt overwhelmed and I could not contain the feelings I held around my topic and my living it in the here-and-now. The more I come to a stage of acceptance after the mourning, the more I can hear myself and the research material, the more resilient I become; although the process feels as if it starts and stops, many times, all over again”.

This mourning described above is not only due to the personal challenges associated to my topic. I see it as stemming also from my desire of conducting ‘re-search with soul in mind’ (Romanyszyn, 2007) where the researcher has to attend “to the feeling of mourning for what is left behind in his or her ways of knowing and expressing and remembering soul” (p. 30).

A key attitude that is suggested as a catalyst in a heuristic research process is that of ‘surrender’. The path of surrender to an internal process that flows from the internal experience of the I-who-feels (as opposed to the observing-not-experiencing focus) could be seen as follows (guided through intuition instead of any formal technique):
Inward attention
↓
Surrender to the relevant feeling responses
↓
Being carried to unknown aspects of self
↓
New, revised or expanded understanding
↓
Internal reorganisation
↓
Self-transformation
↓
Social and transpersonal implications

Fig.13: The ‘Path of Surrender’
(Christodoulidi, 2010 – from Sela-Smith, 2002: 59)

It appears that Moustakas “himself shifts back and forth within his method between focus on self in the experience and focus on the phenomenon that is experienced, because his own personal research subject and process contain confusion” (Sela-Smith, 2002: 77). This author suggests that no research participant is necessary for heuristic studies because they are actually distracting the researcher from experiencing the experience; they remove the researcher from his/her own painful feelings. She highlights that: “It is in this surrender into feeling-the-feelings and experiencing-the-experience that allows the self-as-researcher to enter heuristic self-search inquiry” (ibid: 83). The only useful function she acknowledges in relation to involving what she calls ‘co-participants’ in a heuristic study is related to the illumination process; in her words:
“Co-participants, if they are used in self-search, are valuable as reflectors of possible areas of resistance that may be out of conscious awareness in the form of denial, projection, or incomplete search” (Sela-Smith, 2002: 78).

My striving towards remaining rigorously committed to being reflexive is guided by reminding myself that reflexivity “is thus above all a question of recognising fully the notorious ambivalent relation of a researcher’s text to the realities studied” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000: vii). Moustakas developed his paradigm of Heuristic Inquiry based on an essentially humanistic theoretical base. The person centred-philosophy (which I consider as the basis of my training and perspective as a practitioner, although it developed more integratively over the years) places great emphasis on authenticity and congruence (Rogers, 1980); similarly Heuristic Research is based on an attitude and ability of transparency and extensive self-search aiming at being authentic.

At the same time, I acknowledge what is suggested by West (2009) in relation to researchers often having counter-transference reactions to their relationship with their studies. In the same paper, when reflecting on researchers’ personal involvement with their topics, he stresses that there is also an ‘unconscious’ impact of this involvement to the data analysis process that is “best acknowledged rather than being immediately put aside or denied” (p. 193). I have already declared in different sections of this thesis the levels of my personal involvement with my study and I am also aware that the unconscious processes are operating at each moment of my writing in the here-and-now. I do not wish to deny that, nor to negate it, I actually wish to pay respect to this dynamic too. I see it as the data that is possibly holding what has not emerged in awareness either at individual or more collective level.

The ‘Untold’ and ‘Unconscious’ in Research

In different sections, I have attempted to articulate what was immersed in heuristic illumination and explication. However, a lot of the time, I have been aware of areas that remained unexpressed; and in trying to explain this, I often assumed that such areas must be lying in the unconscious, must be out of awareness or possibly permeated by challenging dynamics and therefore resisted, again unconsciously. Haaken (2003) suggests understanding the concept of the unconscious through adopting dramaturgical vs. mechanistic metaphors. Combining this with the metaphor of theatre that occurred
to me when processing the creative synthesis phase of my research (see conclusion chapter) is to see these possibly unconscious processes in dramaturgical terms, where “the unconscious refers to those subplots or marginal characters in the theatre of consciousness that represent unassimilated aspects of self-experience” (Haaken, 2003: 55).

In a lecture I attended by Dr. Jo Frankham at the University of Manchester (on 15th April 2008) where she spoke about approaching difficulties in collecting data with an inquiring rather than a disappointed mind, she drew attention to the following points:

- Data may exist in silences/refusals/denials/resistances as well as in utterances
- Not everything is ‘speak-able’ of
- We should consider whether interviewees have ever before spoken about what we are raising in them: do they want to hear themselves telling these stories and why yes or why not?

In approaching this matter, I was drawn to Jungian work (see for example, Jung, 1968) who discussed such concepts in relation to culture. It is not just the unconscious of the individual that creates dynamics that are out of awareness, but when one moves between countries and emerges in another culture at a psychological level, it is also the collective unconscious that operates and, from personal experience, I can say becomes more visible. The collective unconscious is the storehouse of latent memory traces inherited from our cultural and ancestral past (Boyantzis, 1998: 27).

In approaching data collected about the experience of internationally educated nurses in a Canadian city, Sochan and Singh (2007) use the terms the 'Told' story and the 'Untold' story, explaining that: “The Told story is the life history as shared, and described by the participants, that is, the histories participants feel comfortable, and safe in sharing with the interviewer. The Untold story is the perception, or understanding of the interviewer of what is unsaid, and what is 'between the lines'. These are the interviewer's interpretations of what is unsafe, painful or unwilling to be shared by the participant” (p. 132)
In the above study, the experiences of those interviewed comprise a three-phase journey of self-discovery:

1. **Hope**: about the life in the new place

2. **Disillusionment**: around accreditation difficulties, threats to professional status and professional identity, and

3. **Ways around navigating disillusionment**: in relation to what to do with the qualifications they brought from overseas.

It is important to share that there have been numerous periods of time that my inner process of meaning-making was ‘disrupted’ or filled me with anxiety in containing the insights that I could sense at a visceral, tacit level but could not be spoken. I was aware that there is an untold and unconscious part within myself and those I dialogued with that I could neither disturb nor access. I embraced that feeling as ‘data’ in itself and acknowledged that the accounts discussed here are not the whole story that I desired to reiterate but are snapshots along a continuum, possible versions of the journey, communicated “…in the authenticity of the moment for the storyteller. How people decide to tell their story at one moment in life may vary according to their self-concept, their developmental stage, and the contextual dimensions of their lives” (Thomas & Schwarzbaum, 2006: 1). Inevitably, there could be different versions to the story and my intuition compels me to encourage the reader to be inspired and, if intended, create their own.

In finding my voice I have kept reminding myself that I come from a position of my own personal, cultural and political inheritance that contains certain inevitable ethnocentric biases; but also, humility is required in acknowledging that no matter how sensitive I feel towards equality, freedom of expression and peace among people, “it is part of the vicissitudes of the human condition that all of us are victims and perpetrators of stereotyping, prejudice and ignorance” (Rapp, 2000: 94). Similarly, I have been cautious in not becoming ‘culture-blind’ (Fernando, 1991) and ignoring cultural differences with their political connotations, due to the fear of stereotyping. My hope is that if any such unintentional tendencies exist in my writing, they may be forgiven. My sense of responsibility towards that danger has often inhibited my free
writing flow and I just had to accept my imperfection in order to continue. I would invite the reader to hold this tension and acquire such a perspective when reading and reflecting upon this thesis. I am also in touch with a sense of *vocation* or *calling* in all roles of practitioner, researcher and writer, where I am reminded that “...a work chooses one as much as one chooses it and there is always that felt gap between what one says and what haunts one as wanting to be said” (Romanyszyn, 2007:16).

### 6.4 Final remarks

Writing this chapter resulted from my intensive self-dialogue, dwelling in a tacit dimension and in the experience of my dialogue with others in attempting to make sense of the significant emergent meanings. I do not make any claims that those meanings are the only ones; I am aware that another researcher with a different background and unique journey could have potentially attached different meanings to the angles of the inquiry. My hope and guiding principle has been that “as we dialogue from within an interior perspective, we may inspire others to trust and give voice to their own knowing” (Denton, 2005: 757).

I am aware that throughout this thesis, I have inevitably used terms and referred to individuals or people with certain words that may seem as ‘labels’; my intention was to find a language to speak my voice rather than intentionally adopt such position. So, I use these terms as ‘labels of convenience’ for my writing. What I have learnt is that the way of avoiding assumptions, is to ask and clarify what is important in either context and also to expect to receive questions. That applies to all my roles: counsellor, client, researcher, supervisor, supervisee and ultimately as a person, woman, migrant, native or citizen of the world.

The future is full of uncertainty and there is an existential position required as to what one may be, how one may live and relate. I have discussed what it is to make oneself a foreigner, with special emphasis on this foreigner being a therapist. I am reminded of Van Deurzen’s (1998) words:
“In some ways all forms of counselling and psychotherapy are about this: those who come to us are always alienated and although not always foreign by culture, they often feel foreign by nature” (p. 61).

As I said previously, producing this thesis feels like a pregnancy. Sometimes I felt the euphoria of the ‘baby thesis’ growing inside, at other times an anxiety around it being lost in my surrender. In anticipating its birth, I had a dream of my ovaries producing eggs that then transform to a butterfly at those periods of flowing creativity. The thesis has transformed from a statue with drawers to a fertile living being:

![The Rorschach Ovarium](image)

Fig 14: The Rorschach Ovarium

By Zuzana Lola Hruskova ©

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21 In describing my image to a soulful artist friend, Zuzana Lola Hruskova (also a migrant in the UK with whom we have shared numerous conversations about mobility, the simultaneous needs for travelling and ‘nesting’) she created this image. With thanks and acknowledgements.
Chapter Seven (7): Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Summary

7.3 Implications for Training, Supervision and Practice

7.4 What is more relevant to the UK context?

7.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

7.6 Creative Synthesis

7.7 Final Words
7.1 Introduction

“Incompleteness – the more that is told, the more we are made conscious of remaining on the edge of silence. How much remains that can never be told, is unknown” (Frank, 1997:148)

I acknowledge that when I began this research journey, I romanticised its ending point, through a desire to resolve inner conflicts and make a difference by assisting others with a similar experience. I am now writing from a point of maturity and grounded-ness. Throughout the writing process, I have tried to express my ideas with Richardson's (2000a) criteria in mind of (a) a contribution to understanding, (b) aesthetic merit, (c) reflexivity, (d) emotional or intellectual impact, and (e) lived experience. My hope is that in that process, a transformation has taken place; in that I see that this research calls for a revision of what it means to be a practitioner in an era and world of globalisation, mobility and cultural and linguistic encounters that requires a new conception of self, relationships and worldviews. In this chapter, I will begin by summarising the main findings of this research and considering the implications of this study for training, supervision and therapeutic practice; I will draw attention to some dynamics relevant to the UK context. I will then discuss the limitations of the research, suggesting possible perspectives worth exploring in future projects. A section will be dedicated to Heuristic Creative Synthesis, followed by my final words.

7.2 Summary

In my inner search and conversations with participants, both challenges and opportunities emerged referring to the same experience. In attempting to summarise those, I begin by highlighting the two main threads where those occur for therapists who move abroad: a. personal life and b. professional life. Those levels affect one another having an impact on their physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and attitudinal well-being and perspective. Some of those may be common for any migrant; however, the particular ‘flavour’ that they may take in relation to this specific professional group was discussed in previous chapters. In brief, trainees, supervisees and practising therapists who move to train and/or work abroad face a number of personal, professional, cultural, linguistic and existential challenges that are often not acknowledged. This is due to a variety of obvious and less visible factors, such as: their
Therapists that move to a different country and culture face a number of complexities. At a **personal level**, those include:

1. loss of regular contact with parents, family and friends
2. loss of clients and colleagues, previous employment
3. loss of factors that create a sense of stability such as housing, geography, climate, habits and so on
4. loss of language where one moves to a country with different language
5. a sense of confusion around belonging and where is home

Apart from the ‘culture shock’ that such a person experiences due to changing living environment, there is also the impact resulting from how the profession is practised in the new country. So, at a **professional level**, the results of such a migration may be related to:
1. a sense of being ‘infantilised’ by the process of professional status being threatened and where relevant, facing confusions around professional recognition

2. the domination of a certain model over others and the antipathy towards ways of working that are not measured. This is intensified by internal professional politics (e.g. the rivalries between counselling, psychotherapy and clinical or counselling psychology)

3. the need to develop new professional and referral networks as well as to understand new interpersonal dynamics between professionals in the host country

4. recognising the subtle ways in which clients in the host culture present their attitudes towards psychological help-seeking and the expectations upon professionals, as related to their styles of interpersonal relating, values system and so on

5. a need to integrate any previous knowledge and experience on multiple levels as well as to become familiar with a new healthcare and social welfare system

Apart from those challenges, there are a number of positive effects in that experience, as revealed in the conversations with participants and my own experience. At a personal level, those include:

1. a sense of freedom and personal agency

2. gaining ‘visibility’ of one’s own self and own culture though being exposed and immersed in another

3. becoming an ‘adult’, gaining maturity

4. becoming resilient, flexible and adaptable
5. finding answers to existential/philosophical quests by operating in a liminal space, through being a foreigner abroad

**Professionally** speaking, the experience encourages:

1. heightening cultural sensitivity and hence becoming more competent in terms of resilience, flexibility, open-mindedness and resourcefulness

2. gaining advanced empathy, especially in relation to processes of change and identity related or cultural issues

3. being able to manage diversity in terms of client groups and their presenting issues. That includes capacity to work bi-culturally and bi-lingually, when relevant to certain clients.

4. developing sensitivity towards issues of difference, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, racism and so on when a therapist becomes a ‘foreigner’ him/herself

5. gaining confidence in relation to potentially challenging dominant or mainstream attitudes and/or practices which may not be in the best service of certain client groups or organisational contexts.

As I was writing the above summary points, I felt in touch with those processes entailing a letting go, as remarked by of Van Deurzen’s (1998) words:

“For the melting pot that we now live in will continue to shake our cultures and populations together and will require of us a new flexibility and an ability to let go of previous securities of belonging to a country or culture” (p. 60).

This may sound rather ‘ungrounded’ or even ‘disturbing’ to some, but is it really? The answer lies within, in my view, and could be reflected upon through considering the rich experiences that I attempted to convey in this thesis and the implications discussed below.
7.3 Implications for Training, Supervision and Practice

Throughout this thesis I have been explicitly or implicitly discussing issues related to the quality of inter-cultural encounters in therapy, training, supervision and the broader context. When considering the implications of this study, I remain committed to seeking the emerged understandings within, as a heuristic researcher. The journey of transition seems to continue, even when I am temporarily ‘settled down’ and realise that the temporary transition has somehow become a permanent state that will forever follow me to some extent. Is it possible for the two cultures within to co-exist in harmony? I consider the question posed by Roy-Chowdhury (2009), a therapist of Indian origin who migrated to the UK in early childhood and who explains that even though he ‘settled’, the tensions and splittings occurring between his two cultures become evident and tormenting during periods when facing life choices; his following profound question resonates within me too:

“If we make the assumption that my experience is not unique and that others make equally finely contoured and idiosyncratic cultural transitions, how can we then construct an account of this phenomenon that captures its complexity and then apply this understanding to the context of psychological therapy?” (p. 18)

I view this study as informing a. the literature and practice in the area of cross-cultural career adjustment and cross-cultural counselling practice b. trainee counsellors and practitioners as well as helping professionals who either remain in the host culture or choose to return to practise in their original culture c. the current counsellor education system in general and counselling trainers in particular in terms of developing ways of assisting international trainees in their learning experience and transition to employment d. counselling supervisors in terms of assisting sojourner counsellors in attempting integration of their multiple identities and adjusting their working styles for culturally sensitive counselling provision and e. host country therapy organisations and accredited bodies. Additionally, the research may provide useful insights relating to the needs of the broader community of international students and migrant professionals, who go through cross-cultural transitions. Below, I summarise some of those implications, more specifically.
• **Implications for Training and Supervision**

Despite the increasing interest in issues around therapy and culture in training curricula, there is little attention paid to the issues involved for trainees who have migrated from different countries and cultures. This, combined with Eurocentric bias present in counselling and psychotherapy training programmes, limits opportunities for exploring issues that concern those therapists, as well as discourses and approaches that are outside the dominant schools of thought. On the whole, participants highlighted that trainers and supervisors are not aware of the needs and complexities as well as valuable contributions they can bring in the field, unless they have had similar experiences themselves.

Trainers need to be aware of issues related to culture, not just in relation to client work but also in relation to trainees who have moved from different countries\(^{22}\); attention shall be paid also to the fact that they may be preparing future therapists who may move to a different county when they qualify, or who may be facing the challenge to integrate the cultural influences of their original and host culture during training or subsequent practice years. They shall seek or establish relevant training and reflect on the issues arising in staff supervision meetings and so on.

Curricula shall include those topics, especially in experiential activities that encourage exploration of those amongst diverse trainees. A good example is the research by Clarkson and Nippoda (1998) about a group of counselling trainees from diverse cultural backgrounds being encouraged to describe and explore their cultural background; this encouraged all course participants to describe their own less visible identities and address prejudices, attitudes and assumptions. When training groups are not so multicultural, attention shall be paid to avoid attitudes of scapegoating, which can be avoided by raising the issue of sub-cultures existing within more culturally ‘homogenous groups’. Additionally, diverse healing modalities and values systems shall be introduced in training curricula and CPD activities. As suggested by Feltham (1999), what is needed in counselling and psychotherapy training is:

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\(^{22}\) As a reminder, there are some relevant issues for those who are second generation immigrants or of mixed-race background. However, this study has focused on those who have moved abroad at an adult age only.
Multicultural competence develops through exposure and immersion in cultural diversity (Arthur and Januszkowski, 2001) and cross-cultural contact. In the context of educational settings where mental health professionals work (such as school counsellors or psychologists), it seems that awareness of one’s own racial/cultural identity development is of vital importance. Apart from teaching modules on the topic, a suggestion can be to incorporate sojourning experiences of exposure to culturally different communities into counsellor and psychotherapy education (Wihak and Merali, 2007; Culhane, 2001). If that is not possible, a proposed example presented in the context of a classroom could be transferred to counsellor/psychotherapy training. This framework is supported by 4 bases, as follows (in Elsen and St. John, 2007: 31-33):

1. **Frontlining the familiar**: voice and explore the different identities, sets of values, attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices and so on of those present in the group

2. **Facing the foreign**: use literature, media products, film, linguistic variations to create contact with experiences that are beyond their context and encourage discussions, role-plays, brainstorming and so on

3. **Foreignising the familiar**: encourage realisation that one’s perspective is not the only one or the best, invite learners to project themselves into other people’s shoes and come up against one’s own perspective as expressed by others in an encounter (challenge ethnocentric attitudes)

4. **Familiarising the foreign**: seek opportunities for contact with members of other cultures via invitations, short visits abroad, student exchanges and so on

Training programmes cannot be transferred from one country to another without considering the contrasts that may exists between the values and beliefs where the programmes or therapeutic approaches developed and that of the culture where they are ‘imported’. Many counsellors who train abroad may be returning to their homeland, sometimes to be pioneers in counsellor training at their original culture, especially if counselling there is a new field. A general principle to be considered at all contexts is what is highlighted by Wheeler & Elliot (2008):
Regardless of the model of therapy being taught, counselling and psychotherapy training must address the theory and skill of psychotherapeutic practice and its ethical, cultural, organisational, economic, social, and political context.”

Trainers and supervisors shall avoid pathologising culturally different practitioners or demeaning their understandings of their therapeutic relationships with their clients. Foreign trainees or supervisees may hold feelings of loss and isolation, leading to withdrawal whereas trainers and supervisors may carry feelings of shame or guilt or lack of awareness that may lead to resistance or dismissal. Moodley (2000) emphasises that:

‘As trainers of counsellors and psychotherapists we must seek to understand fully how the dynamics of “race”, culture and ethnicity can be used/misused/abused, confused in training counsellors.’ (p.222)

A participant, Mina, makes the following suggestion around using the diverse experiences of students and trainers themselves as gateways for learning and increasing self-awareness around the impact of cultures, difference, transitions and change:

“In most psychotherapy training there is a real difficulty in accepting and accommodating difference that goes back to the history of psychoanalysis and Freud. It results, in a kind of dogmatism, where only one ‘psychotherapy language and culture’ is thought of as correct and acceptable. Rather than incorporating some teaching or culture, training would be better off in enabling some dialogue and divergence of opinions between students and staff that would reflect on the students’ diverse experiences and cultures”.

Given that training - including ongoing professional development - and supervision are closely related activities that inform each other, the implications for training are relevant to supervision as well. Supervisors who are working with supervisees who are practising therapists who have moved from a different country need to be aware of their own cultural positioning, stereotypes and language related issues (Sculic, 2007). This can be addressed by attending multi-cultural forums in the form of group supervision or professional development activities, including addressing such dimensions in personal therapy. Another idea is that trainers and supervisors seek opportunities for observing sessions conducted by therapists of different background and/or in a second language (Aguirre et al., 2005). All the above is more relevant to those working in multicultural cities, although the sub-cultures of the same culture and the dynamics that they bring,
depending on context, shall also be considered. Ultimately, an appreciation of ‘uncertainty and timidity’ (Speedy, 2000: 428) could bring more humility in training and supervision contexts, possibly allowing more space for cherishing difference.

- **Implications for therapeutic Practice**

According to Jokinen (2005) three fundamental qualities are essential in managing a career abroad: self-awareness, commitment to personal transformation, and inquisitiveness. The therapists’ experiences discussed in this thesis demonstrate the importance of those qualities and require more attention.

Considering the experiences of therapists in a host country, that could be helpful in avoiding mis-diagnoses of immigrant clients and seeing their authentic world (Chi Ying-Chung & Bemak, 2002). However, attention shall be paid in that those therapists are often typecast as experts in working with ethnic minority clients or those of the same cultural background. Although that can be accurate, it is a strong assumption that may not always be the case or present particular dynamics. Furthermore the careful and selective use of self-disclosure seems to be powerful therapeutic tool in the context of the work of therapists in this study. Personal therapy and robust supervision can assist therapists to manage the transferential and counter-transferential dynamics resulting from their background.

The arguments for ethnic matching that focus on client and counsellor compatibility are persuasive but do not take account of counsellor and client geographical mobility and availability, class or socio-economic differences. Whether a therapist is bilingual or monolingual, bi-cultural or mono-cultural, it appears important to address the needs of both those therapist and their clients and also explore connections between language and cultural concerns (Rivas et al., 2005).

What seems of paramount importance is networking and creating peer mentoring dyads or groups that can also produce opportunities for collaborating for research. More accounts need to be written by therapists themselves, so that silence or isolation is broken and also to assess the shared experiences that would ensure helpful insights and input on training, supervision and peer relationships.
In my journal I wrote:

“Crossing cultures and the psychological impact that it brings is very relevant to the counselling process itself. Isn’t the counselling process a journey into the unknown? Don’t we know as clients and counsellors that in order for change and healing to take place, we need to open up to the challenge of leaving behind the old, familiar -usually destructive - pattern and move through liminal spaces....to reach a new land within the self...a new territory....a different kind of culture? So, isn’t it intrinsically necessary for counsellors to reflect on that process within themselves - of giving up familiarity and belonging, taking risks, living in the dark, even learn to live with their two or more languages - and inspire also colleagues that had not had such experiences, at least in overt ways?”

The above intuitive statement conveys the fact that therapists, like myself, who have moved, trained and worked in a different country and culture, can not only embrace but also celebrate the processes that result from the experience; that is because they parallel therapeutic processes with clients and as such enhance the quality of practice. That realisation can extend its benefits to therapists in general and encourage them to risk extending their horizons and explore new experiences, expose themselves to difference at multiple levels and discover similar strength in themselves.

- **Broader Implications**

It seems to me that there are broader implications raised from this research. To begin with, it is important for the professional groupings and organisations in each country but also at the European or international level to consider these issues. There shall be a cessation of monopolising knowledge and expertise, especially in a profession which, although it inevitably gives power to the professional who offers the service is about empowering the service user instead. There is a suggestion that counsellors and psychotherapists who find themselves ‘not fitting in’ to the profession, not due to lack of training or competence but due to bureaucracy and lack of recognition that is rather based on inter-professional unresolved dynamics, are invited or motivated to become more activist in order to contribute to the formulation of a congruent, ethical, robust professional status, reflecting the profile of the work they offer. As Astrid shared in a post-interview dialogue:

“Following the interview I have decided to stop working so hard within my UK professional organisation. The lack of awareness and complacency
around these cultural and regulation issues, the danger they pose to the diversity of the profession and to colleagues migrating across Europe and wishing to practise, is wearing over time. I have decided to focus my energy working at the European level instead and help institute a European Certificate of Person-Centred Practice and towards creating a European Platform for psychotherapists and counsellors where common standards are set and apply”.

Additionally, if advocacy and contribution to social change, besides the work with clients, has been seen as a professional imperative for counselling (Clarkson, 1996; Myers et al, 2002), then it may be time to move away from professional rivalry, return to shared values, and develop interdisciplinary and democratic dialogue and collaboration among professionals who are trained to a high standard to work alongside each other, rather than be in a state of constant attack and doubt. Useful questions to consider are:

1. What can we learn for work with clients, as a consequence of making therapists themselves the focus of study?
2. What can we learn from this work in relation to skilled professional mobility as a whole?

Our era generates increasing demand and opportunities for a mobile workforce, resulting in an increase of voluntary migrant professionals who seek to expand knowledge and possibilities by training and/or working abroad. Providing insights into the experiences of a group of therapy practitioners in terms of how they manage cross-cultural transitions is likely to be helpful for a range of professionals in the helping professions and beyond.

7.4 What is more relevant to the UK context?

I have conducted this study without choosing a strictly defined cultural context of those participants involved. However, most of those, including myself, have moved to train and practise in the UK, a highly multi-ethnic, ever-changing society (Parekh, 2000). For those reasons, I am reflecting on the dimension related to that particular cultural context.
Britain has a colonial history of slavery from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, and economic exploitation of the Third World thereafter, creating a history of dynamics of racism and ‘race relations’ in Britain (Osler, 1997) that are not just amongst people but also institutionalised (Cole, 2004). During the last 60 years, there is co-existence of anti-immigration and anti-discrimination acts which demonstrate the ambivalence of British nation and governments in relation to attitudes towards inhabitants of foreign background (Watson, 2004), posing restrictions dependent on study or contributing workforce that are a source of financial benefits. Fernando (1991) contends that ‘...the British have never held a favourable attitude towards the immigrant who chooses to migrate to Britain.’ (p.31 & 32).

Thomas & Schwarzbaum (2006), highlight that:

“During a multicultural counseling course, it is not unusual for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant students to be the last to acknowledge that racism, bigotry, and discrimination still exists, in part because these are experiences they tend not to have. The ethnic identity of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants might remain weak or not relevant for most of the person’s life [...]. Clinicians need to be aware of their ambivalent discomfort, if or when it surfaces, as they work with their ethnic minority clients and are encouraged to explore the influence of their ethnicity and ethnic socialisation on their own identity development and functioning” (p.75).

Another significant point is that related to language. I would say that due to the fact that English language is used officially across the globe and that makes Britain the choice of study for many students who come from abroad; those who are native speakers may neglect to empathise with the challenges faced by those who are not. In the research conducted by Stanley (2000), her findings highlight that:

“British counsellors learn a lot from their foreign colleagues during their training together. Through discussions and group-work the awareness of issues like power, racism, culture and prejudice are raised; in particular the issue of communication as far as language is concerned. This is a necessary and important contribution in Britain where different languages and their implications is a neglected area of attention in training and therapy – to be aware of the fear of isolation when people struggle to express themselves and do not find the right words”.

Astrid, the commuter therapist, offered powerful reflections in relation to her vision concerning the training and practice of the profession in multicultural societies like Britain:
“We need to look more closely at our professional culture, how embedded it is in a particular national and discourse culture. We need to cultivate respect for the varied modes of working and each other as professionals whether titled counsellor or psychotherapist. Research says that no one approach is better than another, rather is what suits the client. And it may be that my approach, however dear I may hold it, needs to be modified to help a client resident in a different country thereby requiring that I become deeply au fait with that culture. It is interesting that UK and German training courses that am familiar with, only tend to look at cultures resident in those countries but not at the issue of moving across cultures and what that might mean to the therapist. Or even what the differences are across Europe in particular. I have always found the British to be deeply insular in this respect. Only with awareness can the therapist become a force for change in professional politics”.

I now move on to what I consider as potential limitations of this research and suggestions for further study.

7.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The insights discussed in this thesis are not generalisable; I have only attempted to offer the account deriving from my personal experience and dialogue with others in a congruent way. Given the relatively under-explored nature of the study, I have encountered a number of limitations that lead to potential suggestions for further research.

In my initial research design I was hoping to organise both individual ‘inter-views’ (Kvale, 1996) and focus groups. Focus groups were impossible to organise, especially due to geographical difficulties. This would potentially be an interesting course of study for further research in a case where both researcher and diverse participants are located in the same area. Other methods of collecting data could be applied. An interesting example is the use of ‘critical incidents’ theory (Brookfield, 1995) which has been identified by researchers as a way of capturing students’ reactions to cross-cultural training experiences (see for example, Arthur, 2001; Heppner & O’Brien, 1994).

This study has a narrow range of international representation of those who participated. A researcher residing in a more multicultural place, such as London or a Canadian city for example, could have access to migrant therapists of a wider variety of cultural backgrounds. Of course the findings would be interpreted according to context and the particular lens of the researcher, depending on where he/she and the participants have
moved from and where to. My study could be taken as an example, in terms of both design and research process. Additionally, that could be seen through the question of the advantages and disadvantages of ethnic-matching—not as demographic variable but as foundation for exploring relational dynamics—in different cultural contexts between immigrant therapists-clients or supervisors-supervisees.

Considering the impact of the use of second language by such practitioners, research can be done into considering how that is affected if the therapist also receives personal therapy and or/supervision in the second language or what are the possible effects when language-switching is possible (Sculic, 2007). Also, the study was conducted in English, and having English as a shared second language amongst participants brought a certain flavour to the study. It would be interesting to conduct such studies influenced by other languages: what would the experience be when talking to therapists who moved to practise, for example, in France using French as a second language? What about therapists who moved to practise in less widely spoken languages?

This study could not offer a longitudinal perspective (Menard, 2002). An interesting project could be to select a smaller sample and interview the same participant more than once at different stages of their migratory experience or during and post-qualification and so on.

Drawing from the insights gained by this small sample of repatriate therapists, there are questions arising for further research, such as:

- **What patterns could be predicted among remigrant therapists to other countries or societies?**

- **In what ways could professional bodies facilitate the possibility of a mobile workforce in this field, especially when designing regulation and professional recognition procedures?**

- **Is it possible for a therapist to be an internationally mobile professional in the context of the contemporary globalised world?**
• What sort of useful insights can be gained for migrant clients presenting issues, drawing from that of therapists themselves?

Another suggestion would be to seek such participants from a variety of countries and collect such data in person or online, suggested as a suitable medium by Sussman’s (2002) study of 113 Americans who returned after spending time teaching in Japan.

Having reached a clearer vision of the ‘heart’ of the research and in celebration of what this study did bring into awareness, I will now present the Creative Synthesis section.

7.6 Creative Synthesis

There is a stage in the heuristic research journey where a ‘synthesis’ of the process occurs. What Moustakas calls Creative Synthesis is a point where the researcher has discovered the core of the inquiry and is able to express it in some ‘whole’; like the conductor who is operating with the whole of an orchestra. It is important to clarify that “synthesis goes beyond distillation of themes and patterns. It is not a summary or recapitulation. In synthesis, the researcher is challenged to generate a new reality, a new monolithic significance that embodies the essence of the heuristic truth” (Douglas and Moustakas, 1985: 52)

The word ‘monolithic’ in this quote feels rather inaccurate for my process; it feels that if I place my topic in the fluidity of the changes at this time and era, within the therapy and broader world, I could probably justifiably say that more ‘historical' time will be required to reach anything nearer such monolithic truth, if it is to be reached at all. What I understand instead is that therapists who move between cultures and practise a profession that is affected in various subtle ways by socio-political and cultural changes, are in the both challenging and privileged position to participate in that exploration of contemporary identities.

Throughout this research, I have struggled with finding a voice to communicate my experience, with coming to an authentic compromise around the dilemmas concerning what to disclose in an ethical manner and what to leave in its respected privacy. The struggle of articulating was also present in the dialogues with those other therapists who
found themselves taken by surprise in our dialogues about similar struggles. I rather found expression in poetic or artistic forms:

*The poetic form juxtaposes voice (the implied and real narrator), temporality, point of view, and character, while privileging emotion and emotionality. A primary goal is to evoke emotional responses in the reader, thereby producing verisimilitude and a shared experience* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:155).

I wrote a number of poems, at moments when I was finding the courage to surrender even further where the current and tacit dimension of the research was taking me. Some of these poems occurred when I was mobile in a means of transport or when I was still, after a meditation or having woken up from a restless sleep. Before I share with the reader some of those poems, it is useful to talk about some reflections on the poem-writing from my diary (May 2009):

“To my surprise, I am in such creative mode, having poems coming out of me, without prompt. Part of me feels puzzled and I want to hide them or keep them private but having shown them to my supervisor, he reassured me that this is where I need to be, the process is indeed happening. My understanding is that the poems seem to do the holding of the difficult stuff; they are part of the heuristic process, especially in the creative synthesis phase. The words flow in a second language in a rhyme, sometimes...it feels as if my conscious and unconscious find common channel of expression. Realising that feels both disturbing and comforting. Part of me wishes that my poems were in Greek. On the other hand, the writer in me is operating in English, for an audience that understands English. Also, I consciously stop resisting what comes out of me, native or not, however we define it, and embrace it in my whole. The process is genuine and I wish to cherish what is given to me and the understanding of this process”

Vaughn (1989) has conducted a PhD on the experience of writing poetry to express what seems otherwise inexpressible and refers to it as “a way of looking into darkness and seeing what cannot be seen. It is a way of listening in the silence, for what cannot be heard, of experiencing both the emptiness and the fullness of all that cannot be held in one’s hands” (p. 81-83).
Creative Synthesis in the form of Poetry

Listen to presences inside poems
Let them take you where they will
- Rumi

A central theme in my journey, of the people I have dialogued with and the topic as whole is about home and belonging. In seeking my own sense of home and listening to my fellow travellers’ stories, I wrote the following poem:

WHERE IS HOME? (Christodoulidi, 2009: 9)

Is it a building?
Is it a place?
It is a room?
Is it a piece of furniture?

Is it here?
Is it there?
It is everywhere?
Is it nowhere?

Is it in me?
Is it in you?
Is it in our shared territory?
Is it beyond space?

Is it in the woods?
Is it in the sea?
Is it on this Earth?
Is it on one of His planets?

Is it where the children sleep?
Is it where our parent dies?
Is it where the flowers creep?
Is it where our body lies?

Maybe the question is not... 'where'?
Maybe the answer is more of an ‘every-where’

Maybe there is no such real question
About home
Maybe home is in our heart
Maybe home is in our spirit
In the rays of the sun
In the wilderness of the thunder
In the smile of your little son
In the hestia that has no wander

I find home where there is soul
I find home where there is love
I find home in me and you
I find home in I and Thou

I find home cause He exists
In the motherland and the fatherland
In beyond any land
He is here, there and everywhere

Very often, the puzzlement around where home is comes with finding oneself operating in a second language. Depending on the context of the society where a therapist moves to, it may find him/her not only living and working in a second language himself/herself but also having clients who may be using a second language or shifting from one language to another. This ‘Babel’ dimension of the experience inspired me for the following poem:

**BABEL**

Languages within
Different alphabets
Idioms, phrases, metaphors
The language has invaded me
Do I remember my mother tongue?
The lullaby is more of a tune
Beyond any words
I can hear more that the words allow
Am here with you
In your losing your words
Am here with you
In finding your authentic voice

My Greek alphabet is so old
It is screaming out, searching for its place
And yet
I dream in English, just like you
Apart from when the mother appears on the screen
And reminds me of the patriotic songs
With which she put me to sleep
Far before my departure

The languages live within
And am free
My mind has a home for each of them
My heart speaks what is best for meeting you
I speak what you hear
My dear client
My dear reader
My dear fellow traveller

And I remain silent
When you take your own journey
We then speak with the body
I can feel you when you are far
In my own body, my felt sense

I wave at you...this is my good bye
No more words are necessary
No Babel

With my supervisor, also a researcher interested in dynamics of culture, we have shared numerous conversations during the PhD years around what are the best ways of helping and providing therapy in a culturally sensitive manner. Such discussions were becoming more vibrant especially whenever we returned from a conference abroad. Here is a poem that I wrote after one of those conversations about what is most appropriate help in different cultural contexts:

DO YOU STILL WONDER?

You wonder about service
about better ways of helping

Wondering leads to wandering
unsettling what it takes
you travel and dialogue
you muse and read plates
In Africa and India
where colours are more bright
You come back and wonder
see your isle in different light

I found you in my travels
In this British Queen land
you were wearing no crown
It's your 'aura' that made me land
We talk about culture
We call our ancestors to stand
I bring seeds in my pocket
You offer me soil for my plant
We wrestle with the question
how is it best to help?
We listen to each other
And put our histories to rest

West doesn’t know better
only one answer in the noise
I listen and write better
I discover my own voice
Do you still wonder?

Mobility can often challenge existing dynamics of power. At the same time, the
dilemma around ‘return’ to the homeland may be inhibited by factors that are beyond
control. During the last year of my PhD, I visited once again the British Museum in
London and spent hours with the marbles of the Athenian Parthenon (‘Elgin Marbles’);
a long-standing debate exists between my original and host culture concerning their
return to my/their birth city, Athens. Here is the poem that I wrote, as if am speaking to
‘them’:

MARBLES IN EXILE

I saw you posing under the dark sky
At the British museum
Yearning for the blue sky
Of the Acropolis in Athens

I see the Lapiths and the Centaurs
The Caryatid of the Erechtheion
Pieces of the Propylaia
And damaged scenes of the Gods

Oh my Gods and Goddesses!

You were attacked by Elgin
Sold by a Sultan at the time
I now wanted to kidnap you
Become a thief of my own belongings

The vandalism was named ‘protection’
Rumours say Greeks cannot maintain you
As if the orphanage is better nurturer
Than the natural mother

I am far away from the motherland
And so are you
I need no permission to go back
But you do, though you are not orphaned
You are a symbol of democracy
An artistic masterpiece
You are one of the wonders of the world
And yet you are in exile

Only Byron was on our side
But he ‘lost his marbles’ one day
You are admired by tourists
Ignorant of your grief, yet pride

Here I am in academia
Daring say a true story
The Caryatid whispers slowly:
“It is time to go home...”

You are giving me courage
For challenging an authority
You have survived several atrocities
That is your real victory

In earlier chapters, I have spoken about the literal and metaphorical presence of the archaeologist, architect and archivist within me. In those personas, the desire to ‘arch’ the number of dualities or gaps, in terms of research topic and methodology, brings out those figures as (arch)aeologist, (arch)itect and (arch)ivist. And with those, the creative synthesis in terms of research process occurred to me in the form of the following poem, which also includes an ‘arch’, that of the Rese(arch):

RESE(ARCH)

Am seeking an arch
For bridging the gap
This Heuristic gap
Of my tacit knowing

Am digging my past
An arch-aeologist in place
It is my ancestors that last
And bring the echoes on my face

Am constructing the present
The arch-itect’s scaffolding
Within the Thesis’ content
Am doing loads of holding

Am visualising the future
As the arch-ives pre-tell
My cultures have a router
Where the healer is to dwell

Am finding an arch
The gut no longer sore
The thesis fills the gap
And is becoming whole

Finally, a subtle dimension in this study has been touching upon the impact of visibility and invisibility of culture, the politics and meanings of ‘colour’ in relation to dominant discourses, relational dynamics, liminal identities and allowing the expression of what is difficult to be voiced. When contemplating upon my own ‘colour’, I accessed this tacit dimension within, through the following poem:

**AM I BLACK? AM I WHITE?**

I smell soil in your body
As if earth becomes somebody
I see the colour of your skin
As if the mixture becomes kin

You are expression of some type
The two poles of my archetype
Am I black? Am I white?
Why shall colours set a fight?

Love dissolves what’s forbidden
You no longer remain hidden
Any shadow is now lit
You no longer carry split

See me now in full light
Even darkness can be bright
Let this truth be the oath
No need for a scapegoat

Am I brown? Am I gray?
Love me now, as I may
Am I black? Am I white?
Every day follows night
Creative Synthesis in the form of Theatre Play Scene

The arch mentioned just before also linked me to hearing the ‘mind the gap’ call in London Tube, on my way back from a visit to the British museum. When in a train, I wrote the following diary entry:

“Visiting London always felt to me like going to another country; it feels like it is not England. I hear so many other languages when walking in London streets and I see so many ‘colours’. During that visit to London - besides offering me opportunity for heuristic illumination - the repetitive phrase of ‘mind the gap’ in the tube prompts me to go back and fill in the gap in my writing at this stage. When with ‘our marbles’ at the British Museum the image of another form of ‘creative synthesis’ of my research became more crystallised...its setting is the Theatre of Dionysus, at the South foot of the Athenian Acropolis...I cant wait to get back at my desk and write, what is revealed in front of my eyes. It is this play scene told by myself and participants, the chorus of this plot”

The setting of the scene is in front of me:

- The main parts are the orchestra, the skene, and the audience.

- The Greek word for ‘actor’ is ‘hypocrites’ meaning ‘answerer’ or ‘the one who interprets’, as the actor was answering to the chorus.

- Thespis is said to have introduced (and been) the first actor, later called protagonistis.

- The chorus is always on the move, in and out the stage through the parodoi.
In the scene appear:

**Protagonist:**
- Thespis (T.)

**Actors:**
- 1. The Immigrant (I.)
- 2. The Returnee (R.)
- 3. The Commuter (C.)

**The Chorus (Ch.)**

***

**T:** Tell me, Muse, how have I found myself so far away?

**Ch:** you ask the muse...but you chose to depart, to open your horizons, to discover new knowledge, about human suffering and healing. Just like us, each of us has taken a ‘different but similar’ journey

**I:** are you saying that you never think of going back? Of taking all you have learnt in your own land? I feel such a stranger here, but also free, am scared to return, who knows what I will find there?
R: I am now back and it is so shocking! I feel like the fish out of the water...although I have to admit that I feel much stronger...but where on earth is home?

Ch: Home...what is this place?

C: I have found my own solution, I have made two homes, I could not possibly choose. A lot of it has to do with the fact that I wasn’t allowed. I went abroad and became a respectful therapist...but when I came back with all my nice stamps and certificates...”it was all Greek to them” here, they rejected it...how dare they!

Ch: you can avoid ‘hybris’, just relax; it is all still happening...would Hippocrates or Asclepios be accepted in those circles far from Athens? They still tell the oath...but there is something lost in translation, as if there needs to be another way...something to find its new place, in the country that it lands, don’t you think?

T: I am not sure if I agree with you...what is the meaning of psychotherapy...do you really remember? Maybe you need to study Greek language again...it stands for ‘soul therapy’...soul is in all of us, isn’t it? But it responds to different symbols, different manners, different values...and yet, we know that the human needs are more or less the same...I travelled all over and realised some of that ‘soul searching’ within, before discovering any real therapy...what do you think?

Ch: You always gain and lose something when you move between cultures.

I: It feels better to be a foreigner in another country rather than feeling like a stranger in my country, whenever going back.

T: there is something in all that which is at the core of being a good therapist. We are therapists because we don’t belong and people come to us because they feel something similar, no?
I: Indeed, having constantly questioned who I am by working abroad, I feel more empathic, as if I can deeply relate to what it means to be in flux or in question or in transition, there is such a parallel in this experience.

R.: and I learnt to be more flexible, I was less directive in one country and more so in another. That is such a skill to have mastered! And am more culturally sensitive now, because I have a foreigner myself! But then, talking about therapeutic boundaries or legalities...that is complex that!

Ch: Here you are as the cunning Ulysses, though the word is misleading when translated to English! Remember, he is not someone who is ingeniously deceitful; that would make him untrustworthy...the meaning of the word ‘polymichanos’ is rather the one who can offer wise counsel, relevant to the need and context...may you be such an Ulysses!

***

The voices of some of the participants are in that play scene. And it feels as if we have healed something in each other, when I engaged in each dialogue, even if we even frustrated each other at times, due to the complexity of our experience. There are several connections between therapy and theatrical performance, mainly related to inviting us to shift our worldview (Friedman, 1984). And, “Indeed, for the Greeks, drama was not only an inherently psychological event. It had the power to be therapeutic: the Greek poets whose tragedies form therapy’s roots acting like community psychologists, writing, directing, and acting in plays designed to reflect the shared experiences of their spectators” (MacCormack, 1997: 5). By using the theatre and play metaphor, I ‘acted’ as well as witnessed the co-created performance of new meanings (White & Epston, 1990). It reminded me of my mode when sitting on the therapist’s role who engages with my client’s drama, where they unfold their plots.

23 Lyketsos (1980) describes the use of ancient Greek drama for the treatment of patients in a Mental Health hospital in Athens since 1959. The ancient Greek drama is used by other mental health professionals in more recent years (see for example, Kourkouta, 2002).
bringing in all the significant characters and enact the scenes that are challenging or important for them.

There is a ‘basic pattern of arrival and departure in the Greek Theatre’ (Rehm, 2002: 19) and, relating to that, Chadwick (2006) asks: is the space of the play a therapeutic space? Also, she highlights that “we recognise that by moving our work across boundaries, whether they are national, generational or professional, we can create energy” (ibid: 193). And, I see this energy as related to ‘change’, positive impact, agency, new vision. I recognise my own process of change in that crossing of boundaries that I thought to have defined me. By doing so, I saw clearer who I am and I threw light on the areas that were not visible to me in my previous familiarity. I saw my self, my family, my history, my nation, and my multiple roles in a whole new light, a clearer one. And I have ‘played’ my own ‘drama’ in that healing process of my mobility. It is known from Aristotle that the art of healing and the performing arts were very close, aiming at catharsis. Another such cathartic moment of creative synthesis occurred for me in creating a collage; am presenting it below.

Creative Synthesis in the form of a Collage

The use of a collage has been used by other doctoral researchers, as a way of conveying meanings visually (King, 2008; Knowles and Cole, 2008). In qualitative research of experiential nature, collage can bring to the fore the tacit dimension, as explained by Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2009) during a conference:

“When using collage reflectively, the researcher focuses on a question, dilemma or the like, and then selects pictures that metaphorically reflect aspects of this thinking. Then operating intuitively she creates a collage, producing a visual composition with the selected fragments. This collage process breaks away from the linearity of written thoughts by working first from feelings about something to the ideas they evoke, instead of the reverse. The resulting visual juxtapositions frequently reveal new connections and understandings that have previously remained tacit.”

It was a Saturday afternoon when I attended a class at a local gallery. I spent time browsing images and books, playing with colours and contemplating on my inner space. I felt the tension of finding a way through “the multifarious deployments of the liminal
(threshold) spaces between ‘showing’ and ‘telling’” (Speedy et al, 2005: 67) in my process. I left carrying the collage below:

*Fig. 16: Odyssey: Creative Synthesis Collage* - Christodouli, F. (2010)
7.7 Final Words

As a person and counsellor with humanistic and spiritual values, I am hoping for pathways to peace in the hearts of individuals, communities and the world. I want to visualise a future where counselling and psychotherapy are not needed, even if that would entail the end of the profession. My attempt was to approach this piece of research from the heart and consult the intellect through the spirit of the service that I hope to acquire in my therapeutic role.

There were many moments that I experienced the production of this doctoral thesis as painful process. However, I would say that it was mostly a healing experience as my ‘traumas’ as well as wonders or experience (and those of my participants) were re-visited and re-constructed through the telling and sharing and re-framing. I have so often struggled with the sentiment that “we are not at home in our homes, because we are not at home in ourselves” (MacEowen, 2002: xx1). But now, I have come close to what I wrote long before I reached this stage of writing the last paragraphs of this thesis. On 22 February 2007, I wrote to my supervisor that I had this fantasy about what would be the end of the PhD journey, as follows:

"Here I am towards the end of this Thesis...contemplating on my last words. I am moved in realising that beyond the inevitable exhaustion due to my travels, both the internal and the external ones, I am actually now given a gift...I have eventually found 'home'! This is not located somewhere specific on the global map; it is not restricted by any borders or boundaries, any politics or systems, any climate change or domestic habits. It is an ordinary but also sacred place that lies inside and I carry it wherever I am. The time has come when whichever way I travel, I am going home. And, this gift is not given to me alone or for my own benefit only. Now that I have grown from that experience, I can actually travel alongside those that trust me along undertaking the therapeutic process together. Now that I have embraced the unknown, now that I have managed to transcend the need for familiarity and belonging, I can facilitate with more courage and presence the confident transition that 'change' involves. I have learnt to keep balance in the liminal spaces; I have learnt to navigate into the void. I embrace myself and my work, all this wandering to the unknown, as if I am born again”

Was that a wish for resolution of my own wounds, resulting from a personal ‘complex’? The biggest challenge for me, also present for those who participated in this study, has been to attempt to articulate the heart of the experience. I am reminded of Foulkes’ (1948) comment that “working towards an even more articulate form of communication is identical to the therapeutic process itself” (p. 169). Whatever the
answer, it is time to let go of this thesis and set my writing and process to rest, remembering that, if the above is accurate, then “the work that comes through the researcher’s complex is no longer about him or her. The wound becomes a work that is part of a larger story when the researcher has been forced to let go of what he or she needs the work to be…” (Romanyszyn, 2007: 55).

Coming back to where I started from, when I ‘set out for Ithaca’, the voyage has been indeed ‘full of adventure, full of discovery’. I believe it has been both idiosyncratic and sharing something of a collective level of experience, when we hopefully realise ‘what these Ithacas mean’. As I come to write the final sentence of this thesis, I am reminded of Vickers (2002) words when she vividly explains that:

“Writing of one’s own life experience is concluded to be writing on the edge - and without a safety net. However, the rewards inevitably stem from connecting with those who want to know” (p. 608).

The journey continues…
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During the second year of the PhD, I attended a workshop on ‘Storytelling’. One of the experiential exercises was for participants to write basic life themes, as if they were chapters in a book. During that exercise, a process of heuristic illumination took place within me, where I produced the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIFE/THESIS CHAPTERS</th>
<th>LIFE SCRIPT</th>
<th>THESIS SCRIPT</th>
<th>HEURISTIC PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “Choosing to arrive”</td>
<td>Arriving at this world at a specific time, country, family</td>
<td>Starting the Process, the PhD’s purpose and rationale</td>
<td>Initial Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “Splitting but not knowing”</td>
<td>The experience of alienation from self, others and the world…parts of identity in non-coherence (due to insecure attachment: mother)</td>
<td>Emergence of research topic, researcher’s inner data: mother and motherland</td>
<td>Immersion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “A fish out of water”</td>
<td>The early adulthood years of seeking self and identity, feelings of not fitting, not belonging…even within familiarity</td>
<td>Deciding to undertake counselling training (motives: self-understanding, looking for place to fit in, facing alienation in a host culture (leave one’s own culture to discover new territories)</td>
<td>Immersion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. “Departing and Seeking for ‘home’”</td>
<td>Living my original culture for study abroad (deeper existential quest around finding ‘home’, self and my position in the world…also, seek for companions)</td>
<td>The experience abroad (culture shock, opportunities for growth: change of identity). It becomes a ‘method’ of discovery…meet peers with similar experiences etc</td>
<td>Immersion followed by Incubation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “Journeying through inner and outer worlds”</td>
<td>My experiences of counselling training, gaining professional practice experience, receiving supervision, CPD activities, personal therapy, personal relationships, travelling, reading and writing….as vehicles of journeying</td>
<td>Reflection on personal story of the experiences and of that of participants (parallel to outer journeys between home and host culture) – journeying is monitored, reflected upon etc – meaning making process, discovery of patterns, opportunity for healing</td>
<td>Illumination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. “Towards acceptance”</td>
<td>Revisiting self, relationships, roots, original and host culture – reflecting on experiences resulting from cross cultural transitions within multiple identity…attempts for integration/synthesis</td>
<td>‘Re-entry shock’ to be followed by an attempt towards integration. The process and researcher start falling into place, finding ‘home’</td>
<td>Explication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. “Toward, freedom and agency”</td>
<td>Striving for finding ‘home’ inside, tolerance of the liminal, freedom and choice, service. (Developmental cycle evolves: adulthood, maturity, transcendence)</td>
<td>New insights around managing cross-cultural transitions and developing growth of self and practice at different cultural environments, implications for training, supervision, practice</td>
<td>Creative Synthesis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX B: RESEARCH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

*(Same questions in both groups - slight variations to facilitate capturing the whole experience)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants who chose to remain abroad</th>
<th>Participants who chose to return to original culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What were the circumstances that led you to move abroad? (Personal, training, professional opportunity, other?)</td>
<td>1. What were the circumstances that led you to move abroad? (Personal, training, professional opportunity, other?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How would you describe your experience of training as a therapist abroad?</td>
<td>2. How would you describe your experience of training as a therapist abroad?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. a. Did you also remain to work abroad?</td>
<td>3. a. Did you also remain to work abroad?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. If yes, how would you describe your experience of working as a therapist abroad?</td>
<td>b. If no, how would you describe your experience of returning to work in your original culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How would you describe your experience of practising in a second language?</td>
<td>4. a. How would you describe your experience of practising in a second language, when abroad?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. How would you describe your experience of practising in your mother tongue, in your return?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Are you planning to return to your original culture? (Any fantasies around that?)</td>
<td>5. Did you have to work any differently in your role as a therapist, upon return?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What kind(s) of support do you receive to manage/reflect upon those experiences?</td>
<td>6. What kind(s) of support do you receive to manage/reflect upon those experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How does it feel now around talking about those experiences? Is there anything you would like to add?</td>
<td>7. How does it feel now around talking about those experiences? Is there anything you would like to add?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C
Dr. Who & Counselling Qualitative Research: a Reflexive Relationship
Student Research Conference, University of Manchester, 2nd July 2008

1. me and the PhD topic
   • How do I relate to the concept(s) related to the topic/questions of my PhD at this stage?
   • Do I notice any difference from previous stages? (and can I identify/name those stages) - If yes, what is that?
   • In what ways do I notice the shifts of understanding to the meanings and dimensions inherent in my research through time?

2. Me and the research data
   • How do I relate to the data I am collecting?
   • How do I feel/think when I am transcribing or reading the transcripts?
   • In what ways is the meaning making process of the data affected by my literature readings, dialogue with peers or academics and my professional practice?
   • How does it feel (also what do I think) when I am analysing the data?

3. me and the PhD participants
   • How do I feel towards the research participants?
   • In what ways, if any, have the relationships with my participants developed over time, from initial contact until follow-up communication with them?
   • How do I perceive the relationship with participants is shifting (internally and/or externally), if at all, as I proceed with analysing and discussing their material?

4. me and the research process
   • How do I feel in terms of conducting this piece of research at this moment in time?
   • Do I notice any difference (if yes, could I name it) in relation to how I see myself as a researcher since I began and in relation to where I am at now?
   • What are the challenges and opportunities that I have been facing at each stage of conducting this research?

5. me and my PhD supervis-or (-ion)
   • How do I experience the relationship with my supervisor is affecting my performance and growth in relation to conducting a PhD?
   • What are the qualities in my academic supervision I find helpful?
   • What are the factors/elements/dynamics in my academic supervision that I find less helpful? What would I like to be different?

6. me and my support system
   • Which people in my life have helped me (and in what ways) to manage the challenges I encountered as a result of conducting this lengthy research?
   • What activities/support systems have I drawn help from in order to cope with the impact of the research process?

7. me and my work
   • In what ways is my work/practice and relationships with colleagues/peers changing as a result of my undertaking this research project?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ap/x D.</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Original Culture</th>
<th>Host Culture</th>
<th>Where at Interview</th>
<th>Years of Practice</th>
<th>Prof. Title (by training)</th>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>Practice area/setting</th>
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<td>Stella</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35-40</td>
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<td>Psychologist/ Counsellor</td>
<td>PC/Integrative</td>
<td>Private Practice &amp; Counselling Training</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Host</td>
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<td>Counsellor/ Psychotherapist</td>
<td>Eclectic/ Integrative</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
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<td>Age Group</td>
<td>Original Culture</td>
<td>Host Culture</td>
<td>Where at time of Interview</td>
<td>Years of Practice</td>
<td>Prof. Title (by training)</td>
<td>Modality</td>
<td>Practice area/setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Daniel</td>
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<td>India</td>
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<td>18. Anthony</td>
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<td>20. Tatiana</td>
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APPENDIX E: My collaboration with a ‘transcriber’: another ‘eye’ on my research

In an attempt to achieve a level of triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) as well as through the conscious decision that it would be mostly useful to have another reflexive ‘eye’ on some of the research material, I collaborated with a person who would transcribe my interviews and with whom I could discuss the content. I placed an advert online for this job and amongst several responses, I chose a person to whom I will refer to as Angel.

Angel is a social psychologist from Indonesia who had her own experiences of immigration and going through cross-cultural transitions. She obtained her PhD in Social Psychology at a University in Holland and at the time we met for the purpose of assisting me with my research, it was about a year since she had immigrated to the UK with her family, following her husband who was pursuing his PhD at a British University. Angel was in the ideal position to be able to have in depth understanding of the nature of my research, due to her own personal story. She had previously moved from her own colonised original culture to European countries and she also had her own experience of having completed a PhD abroad.

Angel became my fellow-transcriber during the second year and we collaborated through exchanging emails about several aspects of my study, meeting in person and seeking every possible opportunity to exchange ideas and reflections about the topic, in all its practical, philosophical, spiritual, political and multi-faceted dimensions. We mutually agreed on the ground rules of our collaboration which included a contract which ensured the ethical handling of the data. Once I completed an interview, I would send her the recording and she would produce a draft transcript. I would then listen to the recording again and make any corrections. We would occasionally dialogue about the content of the data and the research process itself, as a result of both of us immersing ourselves in the material through that process.

Angel shared with me how her own background affects the ways she is able to acknowledge subtle dimensions related to culture, which inevitably has relevance to therapeutic work. In her own words:
“I come from Indonesia which is a multicultural society, every island consist of its own culture, with totally different language, customs, mannerism, and religions. And these subcultures do not always melt nicely in the cooking pot. So, psychologists are all used to note the ethnic origin of their clients/respondents, because when we bring it into a large scale evaluation, then this ethnicity really matters. My colleagues, who are practising therapists, told me that success with their clients depends very much on the therapists’ sensitivity toward his/her client’s cultural background. The strange thing is, people in general public are avoiding talking about this openly, it is considered as a very sensitive issue. There are 3 things that are not easy to talk about, unless you are in a mono-cultural group, among your “own people”; i.e.: ethnicity, race, and religion. Perhaps, in my view that’s why people in UK also do not address this issue openly. For example: I have a Chinese origin, and I was there a Catholic in a Muslim majority country, (not to mention the fact also that I am a woman!). So, I do not always sit comfortably among the other Indonesians, of course they have all these preconceptions about me, but they are reluctant to discuss it openly with me. I do not “fit in”, even in my own country, I am different even in physical characteristics, so people spot me immediately as “foreign” even in my own country. My parents still speak Dutch, so when I went to Holland, I thought that I will find a bit of my “roots” over there. But, that was not the case, I was more of an oddity there, because they think of me as the Indonesian immigrants over there, and they have a lot of prejudice for this group, I had to fight constantly to overcome the discrimination. I am wondering whether all these dynamics are taken into account when in the counselling room, depending on what the ‘dyad’ consists of, of course”.

Due to the colonial history of Angel’s background, she was in the position to offer some insights about some of the most challenging and ‘taboo’ issues that seem to be operating as least at an unconscious level in multicultural societies where different cultures co-exist and also in the experience of those who move between cultures, therefore relevant to the experiences of immigrant therapists too. When talking about her perception of attitudes in the UK, she said:

“I find that depending on the history of a certain society, there may be cautiousness around how differences are addressed or discussed publicly. British society is a multicultural one, with a colonial history, and I notice that terms like ‘justice’, ‘inclusion’ and ‘equality’ are sort of used in a ‘magic way’. I think there is an issue of ‘power’ operating. Perhaps the white British maintain (from colonial times) the idea that they are still being ‘gracious’ and ‘noble’ to the rest of ‘lesser’ beings by being ‘accepting’ and not pointing out people’s differences. I think that they believe, maybe unconsciously, that by treating differences as such, those will soon evolve to a ‘higher’ degree and those different people within British territory will soon become similar to the white British. But of course, we immigrants know well that people don’t just evolve, I resist even to use the word integrate cause it would feel like I am diminishing my core; we know that we just learn to compromise and adjust ourselves”.
Such a statement seems to be relevant to the evolving cultural identities of immigrants that move to a culture with history of exercising power, and it can be relevant to either counsellor or client in such a position, when referring to what may be the specific or the wider context to what is going on in the counselling room but also in the world behind its door. Angel added on another occasion, how this challenge to her identity has broadened her attitude in the sense that:

“It is because of my history of struggling to achieve a more or less stable identity that I have come to extremely hate prejudiced attitudes towards anything and actually reach a point of teaching myself to be open and tolerant to others, no matter what is their skin colour and no matter how ‘weird’ their ideas may sound to me”.

Angel has also expressed some interesting ideas, drawn from her own experience, in relation to cross-cultural contact, sameness and difference, universality and understanding of global culture of humanity. She said amongst other things:

“I think that in the presence of “contrast”, individuals learn to understand more easily and quicker about oneself, one’s weaknesses and strengths. Experiencing difference brings a more important contribution to our understanding of “humanity” and “humankind”. I believe it is then easier to understand “humanity” in its core existence. It may sound as paradox but I also find that by being aware of differences, it makes us also easier to accept that people are the same….It is natural for people who have more common background to share more similarities, and it could easily lead people to a false belief that the rest of humankind shares these similarities. When you “ignore” the differences, you end up making the wrong assumptions about the similarity, because you look at “superficial” similarity instead of the basic core. But, when you are exposed to so many differences, you learn to “dig” deeper to find similarities, I think people are “designed” to look for similarities to relate with others. People need category, our brains are just designed for that, but by having experiencing to “fit in” in different cultures than you are more ready to accept humanity as a universal entity. And that equality is indeed the way to treat anybody. If we approach people without any assumptions being made that he/she is the same as me or everybody else, we will find that despite of all the differences, they do have a very basic core existence as a part of human race. I believe this similarity is usually being neglected, and people are put in a hierarchy based of “power assumptions”.

There have been times that I have shared some of my frustration with Angel, around the fact that it was often in my interviews that I felt here was a lot of unconscious material present but not articulated. In a dialogue with her, she offered some very useful insights from a social psychology perspective, as follows:
“Looking through my Social Psychologist lenses and drawing from some personal experiences, I would draw your attention to the concept of ‘automaticity’ in how people process information and behave accordingly. In short, there is research on social cognition that is focused on the stereotype-prejudice-discrimination process. It has been proven over and over again, that people automatically make categorisations about other people based on the stereotypes that they already have concerning: gender, race, age and so on, mainly because these “traits” are mostly inherent and visible to naked eyes. So, you cannot stop people from stereotyping, because it is helpful for them to decide how to behave next in meeting the others. And stereotyping is not necessarily negative; it will only lead to negative consequences when people start building a prejudice conceptions that make them behave in a discriminating fashion toward others. The good news is that prejudice and discrimination is NOT automatic. So, when you want to interfere, stopping people from stereotyping, is rather useless, they cannot help themselves, people are just not “colour blind”, that perhaps explains why your respondents are not consciously aware that culture plays a large role in how they operate in and out of counselling practice, the process happens so fast and so automatic that it escaped the awareness level”.

**Reflections: from Triangulation to Crystallisation**

As mentioned previously, I have shared my writing with several critical readers during the writing process, one of which was Angel who became mostly engaged with the interview material. Although triangulation is a tool towards ‘validity’ in research, the process of this piece of work has revealed to me what Richardson and St Pierre\(^ {24}\) (2005) highlight when referring to texts that reflect a postmodernist subjective perspective, emphasising the crystal rather than the triangle metaphor, in the sense that:

“Crystals grow, change, and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose – not triangulation but rather crystallization” (p.963)

Angel, like others, has assisted me in crystallising my understandings, not resulting in fixed meanings but rather enabling me to view the different reflections, in the light of a different perspective upon what was too close to me.

Transcription Instructions - Contract

1) These interviews and the transcripts are confidential. They are to be kept securely at all times. Once the transcript is completed the file and any paper or electronic copies are to be deleted/destroyed by the transcriber.

2) The transcripts should aim to reproduce the interviews as fully as is possible. If you cannot hear something clearly, please put a question mark (?)

3) Try to record pauses … if a long pause put (long pause), sighs, laughter etc should be noted.

4) The Interview is between 2 people, the interviewee and myself. Put a different initial letter in bold indicating the change of the person speaking (for example: A: (for me) and B: (for the other person)

5) Apart from interviewees use of my name all other names, of people or places, should be reduced to initial letters. If the interviewees are referring to themselves use the initial letter allocated to the interview.

DECLARATION:

I, _________________________________ (full name of the transcriber) agree to follow the instructions above. I understand the issue of confidentiality and destroying the material on completion of transcription.

My address:
My phone number:
Date:
Sign:
APPENDIX F: ETHICS STATEMENT

Paying attention to the importance of conducting Ethical Research, I share the thinking of De Vaus (2002) that identifies five ethical responsibilities towards research participants: voluntary participation, informed consent, no harm, confidentiality and anonymity, and privacy. Those principles will be addressed as follows:

- **Voluntary participation:** Participants will be recruited upon voluntary participation, after having been provided relevant information (described below). The option of exercising the right to withdraw from the study will also be clearly stated.

- **Informed Consent:** An information sheet setting out issues related to handling of data will be given to all participants (also providing opportunity for any further clarification in person). This is so that they can make an informed choice and provide informed consent to participate in the study. This will be deemed as given by the participant through signing the consent form, which will be discussed at the beginning of the interview. However, I will apply the principle that, in qualitative research, informed consent had better be treated as an ongoing process, with multiple opt-out points. (McLeod, 2003 [Doing Counselling Research, chapter 10], and Bond, 2004).

- **No harm:** Given that the research participants volunteering for this study will be qualified and practicing therapists, who therefore have completed professional training, have engaged in personal therapy and regular supervision, and abide by a professional code of ethics themselves, the potential risk involved in their participation appears limited though not underestimated. As appropriate for any research involving human subjects, debriefing opportunities will be available from my part at any stage of the research as well as other contacts that can offer them support, if needed.

- **Confidentiality, Anonymity and Privacy:** Participants will be assured of anonymity via the use of a pseudonym that disguises their identity. Any names of other people that may be mentioned during the interviews will also be changed. The recordings will be destroyed on completion of the study or given to the respective participant. Should any unexpected tensions arise, they will be discussed in supervision to ensure there possible the most appropriate decision.

As a BACP accredited practitioner, I hold the responsibility of abiding by the ethical principles and guidelines outlined by the BACP Ethical Framework I follow in my practice (BACP, 2002). As a counselling Researcher, I am also committed to abiding by the Ethical Guidelines for Researching Counselling & Psychotherapy (Bond, 2004) and as a Manchester University student I am also informed about the RGS Guidelines on Ethical Procedures in Research. I give full consideration to applying those in my research design, in communication with participants and in the application of research methods and in informing participants about doing so. Should any unexpected ethical issues arise during any stage of conducting this research, I hold the commitment to address them by referring to those Guidelines in close consultation with my research supervisor.
APPENDIX G: CONSENT FORM

Title: The Therapist’s experience in a ‘foreign country’: a Qualitative Inquiry into the impact of mobility for Counsellors and Psychotherapists.

RESEARCH INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

- The aim of this study is to explore and increase understanding around your experience around the topic, as already explained in our previous correspondence.
- All information held on you will be anonymous and secured in a private place.
- The interview will be recorded and you may have the original tape at the end of the study or it will be destroyed.
- From time to time you may be given drafts of my findings to ensure accuracy of data.
- Some of the information gathered may be occasionally submitted to a wider audience i.e. academic tutors, conference presentations, journal papers or my examiners.
- You may withdraw your contribution at any time prior to Thesis submission and any records on you will be destroyed.
- This research complies with the principles laid down by the BACP’s (2004) Ethical Guidelines for Researching Counselling and Psychotherapy.
- If you have any further queries about any aspect of this research you can also contact my research supervisor:

Dr William West
ESI
School of Education
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester, M13 9PL

Email: William.west@manchester.ac.uk

Please sign below to confirm your consent to participate. A copy of this paper will be given to you.

Your signature:

Name (please print)

Date:

- Thank you -
I would greatly appreciate it if you could complete the following questionnaire (please fill in and save) and return it to me as an attached document by email on fevronia.christodoulidi@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk. Thank you.

1. Are you male or female?  
2. What is your date of birth?  

3. How would you describe your theoretical orientation? (Psychodynamic, person-centred etc)  

4. How many years have you been working as a therapist?  

5. What is your country/culture of origin?  

6. Where did you receive your training? - please state country(ies) and duration of study in either)  

7. How many years have you been practising or have practised abroad?  

8. Have you ever practised in a second language (s)? If yes, please state  

9. Are you currently practising in your original country?.........in a host country?.................(please tick as appropriate)  

10. If you have now returned, after spending time abroad, how long have you been practising in your original culture?  

11. What is your current area (s) of work? (Private practice, medical setting, educational institution etc)  

12. Do you work with clients of your background of origin only or have referrals from culturally diverse client groups? (Please provide details)
APPENDIX I: The PhD Student – Supervisor Relationship and the PhD group

Completing a PhD successfully is a demanding and time consuming process; thus, the supervisory relationship appears to be of vital importance (Gill & Burnard, 2008; Hockey, 1995). As Sheehan (1993) highlights, the relationship between PhD supervisor and doctoral student involves appropriate provision of encouragement and support, constrictive and critical feedback, pastoral care and encouragement for developing independent ways or both thinking and working.

Heuristic and auto-ethnographic research is by nature adding to the challenges involved. Scott (2008) vividly describes the effects of conducting qualitative research with such levels of researcher’s involvement, resulting in states of enmeshment and loss of balance, overwhelming feelings that I experienced numerous times. I am clear that had I not received rigorous, resilient and deeply supportive supervision it would have been impossible to complete this PhD. My research supervisor is familiar with the heuristic process from his own research (West, 1997; 2001). The qualities of mutuality, deep empathy and a common spiritual perspective have facilitated our supervisory relationship. With specific reference to the impact of heuristic methodology upon me and my interaction with it, my supervisor has skilfully assisted me in trusting the process whilst ‘swimming in the chaos’. In my supervisor’s own words (West, 1998):

“The role of the academic supervisor is critical in supporting the researcher through these testing phases of heuristic research”

My relationship with my supervisor involved face-to-face tutorials as well as email exchanges with reflexive content. Here is an example of our email exchanges in dialogue:

Myself: - “I feel engulfed by the chaos of my experiencing in this research and not sure if this Heuristics is ‘safe enough’ after all!”

My supervisor: - “Heuristics involves experiencing and then being able to stand back and allow incubation. So the chaos you feel is data and tells you something when you are able to hear it…take your time, it is not something to be rushed, trust the process”
Myself: - “...I feel anything related to my research so deeply, sometimes it makes my body ache, it is like a state of madness. I have chosen to take this journey and I see that the more I trust and surrender, the more resilient I become. But, there are still times I am scared”

My supervisor: - “I can feel your struggle. But don’t forget that such research can be a bit shamanic. Shamans have to journey, get ill, come out the other side and then help others journey. I have complete trust in you.”

Myself: - “I am grateful to what you offer. It looks like you kind of live heuristically the struggle of your students in a parallel process. You have an immediacy that feels quite containing and encouraging”

My supervisor: “It is like with counselling, you can journey with clients where you have already been. There is something similar in research supervision. I see that I become a kind of midwife in relation to the process of the students I supervise”

Myself: - “Yes, I experience you as a midwife, mentor, witness, befriender and spiritual companion. It is not only supportive but also empowering; I am not only ‘becoming’ as researcher but as a person as well”

Smith (2001), when writing about his own learning through supervising research students uses the metaphors of seeing his role as coach and mentor, as gatekeeper, as peer researcher. Any feelings, metaphors, anxieties, excitements were openly voiced and we successfully managed to handle the inevitable tension: “…the significance of the relationship stems from its duality; the co-existence of intimacy, care and personal commitment on the one hand, and commitment to specific academic goals on the other” (Rapoport et al., 1989, p.15-16). Apart from regular meetings with my supervisor, I have been attending monthly group supervision sessions with other PhD students in Counselling, one of which has described this space as a ‘refuge’ (Wardle, 2007). I acknowledge with gratitude and awe that my supervisor and the PhD research group were constantly available and prepared to discuss the mysteries and subtleties involved in undertaking heuristic studies as well as exploring other paradigms.

Throughout this Thesis, I am referring to journeys and journeying, both in geographical spaces but also inner areas of self and identity. Extending this metaphor to the relationship with my supervisors and the research group, I could vividly share that they have operated as both an anchor and a compass throughout my process, where I am constantly aware that “self-management is more important now than it
has ever been before” (Hawley, 1993: 14). I found that through the support of my supervisor and my peer group I could find myself being assisted by connecting to discernment, serendipity and synchronicity that appeared crucial facilitators of the journey. The group as a whole and the supervisor operated in accordance with agreeing on the fact that “supervision is not only concerned with the production of a good thesis, but also with the transformation of the student into an independent researcher” (Grant, 2003:175). As I have completed this PhD research, I recognise that I am well equipped in conducting research independently as well as assisting or mentoring others that approach me as they embark on such a process.