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‘Existential Migration’: Voluntary Migrants’ Experiences of Not Being-at-Home in the World

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**This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
PhD.**

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Abstract

In this thesis I describe a process of migration that has not previously been formulated, or recognised. I conceptualise this process as ‘existential migration’. Unlike economic migration, simple wanderlust, exile, or variations of forced migration, ‘existential migration’ is conceived as a *chosen* attempt to *express* or *address* fundamental issues of existence by leaving one’s homeland and becoming a foreigner. This thesis arose from, and is structured around, phenomenological interviews with twenty voluntary migrants. These interviews generate themes and sensitivities that arise as definitive of this type of migration. Themes include notions of an interactive self, the importance of pursuing individual potentials, the importance of freedom within belonging, openness to experiences of the *unheimlich*, and the valuing of difference and foreignness as stimulus to personal awareness and broadening perspectives. Among the co-researchers there is a marked preference for the strange over the familiar or conventional. There are also themes indicating the impact of family relationships in decisions to leave home, the meaning of home and not being at home in the world. As well as the new concept of existential migration, the thesis proposes a novel definition of home as a specific experience of self-world *interaction*. This is in contrast to the usual assumptive definitions of home as *place*. The thesis also problematises accepted definitions of being at home, the foreign, belonging, and homelessness, by contrasting their ontic and ontological meanings, revealing existential perspectives on our contemporary world. In Part Two, the emerging phenomenological themes are clustered and “crossed” with existing concepts in various disciplines and in existential-phenomenological philosophy, in particular, specific aspects of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Laying this phenomenon over existing models and orientations is purposive in my attempts to further elaborate this vestigial concept as a specific type of concept, and to illustrate its contributions to existing literature. Therefore, the emerging sense of existential migration is compared with current multi-disciplinary thought, highlighting preliminary possibilities for reformulating existing areas within migration studies, cultural anthropology, tourism studies, cross-cultural training, refugee studies, and psychotherapy. In contradistinction to most concepts, ‘existential migration’ is presented as a *process* concept, guided by the philosophical work of Eugene Gendlin. Suggestions are made as to how to use such a phenomenologically-derived concept in a phenomenological way. The study also implies that there may be more profound psychological consequences from increasing world globalisation than are currently acknowledged.

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to acknowledge the generosity of the twenty people who participated as co-researchers in this study. They shared much more than their time and I feel honoured to have been entrusted with these emotionally intimate and formative stories of leaving home. I continue to learn much about myself from these interviews.

My gratitude, if not a plea for forgiveness, goes to the friends who continued to abide and nourish me despite my stubborn obsession and unreasonable selfishness during the phases of transcribing, analysing, and writing this thesis. I am aware that living with a PhD student is not one of life's most pleasurable experiences.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Society for Existential Analysis for honouring me with the Hans W Cohn Scholarship, thereby making this PhD project possible in the first place. I hope that the Society members will feel that their support has been justified and worthwhile and on a more personal note, I hope that Hans would have approved. I would like to gratefully acknowledge Sanja Oakley whose attention to detail improved the readability of the final product.

Lastly, I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Ernesto Spinelli, my supervisor over the past four years. Ernesto's gentle guidance has always been fruitful for me, though I sometimes wonder if it has always born the fruit he intended.

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Dedication

From the outset this project has been dedicated to all of us who alternate between the wayward and the defiant, whose deeper motivations for leaving home have been misunderstood or silenced. The tribulations entailed in persevering with the thesis would be more than recompensed if a single reader found herein some acknowledgment of the profound significance of their need to leave, and thereby, even fleetingly, felt the possibility of belonging.

The thesis is also dedicated with appreciation and love to my father and my mother, who didn't have to understand my decisions in order to support me, and who withstood many painful moments at airport departures without ever trying to stop me. Thank you.

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Introduction

*Why spurn my home when exile is your home?
The Ithaca you want you'll have in not having.
You'll walk her shores yet long to tread those very grounds,
kiss Penelope yet wish you held your wife instead,
touch her flesh yet yearn for mine.
Your home's in the rubblehouse of time now,
and you're made thus, to yearn for what you lose.*

Andre Aciman, *Out of Egypt: A Memoir* (1994)

My primary aspiration in presenting this thesis is to explore the process of voluntary migration and to assert the importance of under-acknowledged existential motives in migratory moves from one's 'home'. In so doing, I intend to present the thesis with a structure and style consistent with the methodology and philosophical approach elaborated later. This intention now requires a paradoxical *return* here, to the beginning, in order to recite a more or less chronological development of the project, while both bracketing and also prefiguring conceptions that emerged later in the study. As with every facet of this thesis, in this return I acknowledge themes of journeying; a venture out into the unknown followed by a homecoming. Such enticing themes will resurface repeatedly throughout the project at various interconnected levels and perhaps in ways that the reader is better able to judge than I am. The thesis has been largely self-generating, developing its form and reflexive mode of analysis in constant reference back to its topic. In clarification of the opening sentence, as evidenced below, the topic was not abstractly preconceived and then empirically formulated in the hopes of confirmation, but rather the direction and resultant concept emerged from liminal personal speculations that only eventually took shape in interaction with the study's co-researchers.

Personal Identification of the Topic

I commenced my research preparation by submitting a proposal on a totally different thesis topic. It was approved, and I diligently prepared a literature review for some months before setting the work aside in favour of the current topic. Initially I was motivated to investigate the personal impact upon junior doctors of working within a hospital setting with its associated medical science view of human being. I was proposing that existential-phenomenological supervision groups would be personally and professionally useful for

these doctors, and I had formed a partnership with a large medical school to assess this hypothesis. This thesis topic was informed by and complimented the work I was doing at that time, as a psychotherapist within an NHS hospital. The radical turn in attention, from studying medical staff to exploring voluntary migration, crystallised during a two-week visit to Calcutta and Kathmandu; two weeks which instigated a profound and gradually transformative effect upon me. It is worth mentioning some specifics of that trip since it somehow drew to the surface a nascent concern regarding 'the unheimlich' that had been formulating within me, most explicitly since my clinical training in existential psychotherapy. In retrospect, after contemplating the stories of others and living with the thesis for over four years, I realise that the profound issue of being-at-home, or not, has always been a powerful undercurrent in my life, guiding much more than the present project.

In spring 2001 I took a break from the stressful confines of managing a hospital psychotherapy service and travelled to Asia at the invitation of a friend who was engaged in doctoral research in Calcutta. It was my first glimpse of India, or anywhere like it, and I was shocked and inspired by what I saw. Waking early on the first morning, I wandered onto the roof garden for a look around this exotic city that I had seen only in the darkness of my arrival the night before. That arrival itself was eventful, being threatened at gunpoint by a group of drunken police officers who were stopping traffic on the way from the airport into town. After extricating ourselves from a rather bizarre and quite frightening episode with the Indian police, my friend and I continued into Calcutta by taxi, past countless open fires dotted along the roadside all the way into the nebulous city centre. The scene created, for me at least, a very atmospheric, opaque dream-like feeling, enhanced by the disorientation of jetlag. The next morning, wandering onto the roof garden, I was half confirming that the evening before had in fact occurred; that I was waking up in this alien world of Calcutta. As I gazed across the morning skyline, I was unable to draw upon much in my life experience that could reference what I observed. There was *something* in this colourful and chaotic foreignness that enthralled me. I had dreamed that someplace so utterly alien still existed in the modern world; it was an unexpected *relief* to be surveying a city so totally other, not even a Coke sign to betray that it belonged on the same planet as the western world I had left behind; but why *relief*?

Thus commenced a two-week contemplative-adventure, characterised by an incessant dialogue with my friend regarding the allure of foreignness, the compulsion to explore the

diversity of the world, the strange experience of travelling through liminal spaces like airports and border crossings, all superimposed upon a potent ambivalence regarding the conventions of a settled home life. I returned to London with the conviction that the question of home; the motivations for leaving home to live in foreign places, and the underlying question of being at-home in the world, constituted the appropriate topic for my PhD research. Herein constitutes a phenomenon that has imbued my life choices yet remained obscure; a phenomenon that with even a little contemplation became totally perplexing. Professor Spinelli indulged my alteration of topic and I set about producing a new proposal starting with a preliminary investigation of existing literature on the experiences of voluntary migrants. I did not approach the topic with a hypothesis regarding *why* people chose to leave their homes to live in strange lands. I genuinely wanted to discover whether there was anything to investigate at all in this act of leaving. It was possible to me that I, or perhaps my friend and I, were the only ones who floundered upon inscrutability at every attempt to understand this choice. I was somewhat apprehensive that we were overlooking something obvious, yet every obvious explanation, including the elaborate psychoanalytic ones, seemed to unravel when compared with our own lived experiences. In discussions with my friend the mystery had deepened, not dissipated, and during our second week in Kathmandu I was already tentatively observing fellow travellers trying to identify which were engaged in what I later came to call 'existential migration' and which were short-term tourists in the more conventional sense. I felt that somehow I could make speculative judgments about membership of this process category that I was yet to conceptualise – he or she tended to be the person sitting slightly apart, favouring the 'authentic experience' over the beaten track, gazing into an 'inner distance' while writing in a diary, unobtrusive and nearly invisible, almost imperceptibly troubled. Some of these initial intuitions seemed consistent with what was later revealed during the analysis of the interview protocols. The preliminary literature review reinforced the nascent presentiment that there was indeed something to explore in this topic and reassured me that I could at the very least contribute a needed phenomenological study of voluntary migrants where presently there existed abundant academic theorising and philosophical speculation.

Outline of the chapters

The first chapter offers a preliminary literature review in order to ascertain a justification for further exploration of my initial personal intuitions regarding voluntary migration and the

issue of home. The prime directive of this chapter is to offer a context that loosely holds the unfolding research without being overly constricting or presumptive. In order to honour the phenomenological intention of encountering experience as it presents itself rather than simply finding a way to fit it neatly into current gaps in our knowledge, I have diverged from the research tradition that presents a comprehensive literature review at the outset. Chapter One also depicts potential constructive contributions that such a study might make to various disciplines and their discussion of contemporary questions.

Chapter Two presents a brief review of the task of phenomenology as it deviates from the presumptions and methods of a natural scientific approach. This is followed by introductory remarks regarding the chosen mode of phenomenology and how it relates to the research question and concrete decisions regarding the interview protocol, co-researcher recruitment, and other aspects of methodology. The second half of the chapter strays into specific recollections of my experience of conducting the interviews and some initial responses by co-researchers to certain questions in the interview protocol. At every turn of the thesis the reader may notice where I shy away from ‘scientific’ questions of data collection and results in favour of a narrative, almost evocative, account of the experience of researching and the subsequent phenomenal nexus. I intend to comment on the significance of this as I proceed.

In Chapter Three I reconsider the assumptions underpinning my approach and style of analysis. This chapter also incorporates a step-by-step description of transcribing the interviews, re-configuring them according to meaning units and clustering these meanings into themes for each co-researcher. The themes are then also clustered across co-researchers in order to construct a more general imprint which seems implied from the individual experiences of existential migration. It also includes a brief recollection of my sabbatical in Budapest, which reveals the integral intersubjective facet of the philosophy of the methodology and my ineluctable individual involvement in the entire research process.

The Fourth and final chapter of Part One commences with a brief disclaimer regarding the epistemological status of a ‘theme’ in the present context. I then proceed to the substantive component of the thesis, comprising a discussion of each emergent theme, illustrated by lengthy accounts from co-researcher biographies so that I can attempt to fulfil the promise of

the thesis, to inculcate within the reader a ‘felt sense’¹ of the concept I am formulating. Co-researcher narratives, exemplifying numerous accounts of the diversity of lived experiences of leaving home, hopefully evoke a directly-felt reference that will ground the reader in preparation for the high pedantic discussions in Part Two. Chapter Four concludes with a first-person narrative of the experience of existential migration as I currently conceive of it.

Part Two is a re-introduction of the broader context within which this thesis is situated. Here again the reader may notice where the topic of ‘existential migration’ recapitulates itself in the form of its presentation. Where does this new concept *belong*? The struggle in this portion of the thesis is to keep alive the felt complexity of the descriptions from Chapter Four. There is the seductive allure of academic jargon, taking the project further from its phenomenological source and intellectualising what is in essence the poetry and tragedy of human dwelling on earth. This portion of the project was most challenging in respect of the necessary discipline and, at times, courage, to prioritise what has been revealed in the analysis of these interviews, in order to guide but not bias a substantial exploration of existing discourses and conceptualisations, balancing inherent validity with desires for corroboration. Again I have diverged from tradition and restricted myself to aspects of the literature which could further elucidate the embryonic concept of existential migration through comparisons and contrasts, while consistently attempting to resist enticements to enter convoluted and well-worn controversies between contemporary therapeutic orientations and philosophical schools. Part Two coalesces around chapters and sections that remain based upon the co-researcher themes, elaborated by disciplinary demarcations and the work of pre-eminent authors. The thesis concludes with a summary of the apparent distinctiveness and possible contributions offered by this new conceptualisation of voluntary migration.

¹ A ‘felt sense’ is a holistic feeling in the middle of the body generated in response to our life situations, in this case as a response to reading this thesis. It contains emotion but is more than clearly defined emotion. It is a concept from the work of Eugene Gendlin (1981) and is described further on page 168, though its meaning will gradually become clearer as it is used in the text.

PART ONE: CONCEPTUAL GATHERINGS

Chapter One

Preliminary Literature Review

*'Unheimlich' is the name for everything
that ought to have remained ...secret and hidden
but has come to light.
- Schelling
(cf. Freud, 'The Uncanny', 1919)*

Delimiting the topic

In this chapter I endeavour to proffer a *preliminary* literature review in order to ascertain the extent to which the issues that emerged while in India indeed form a viable research topic, original and sustainable enough to constitute a four-year PhD project. At the same time, my intention is to restrict the review so as not to shape preconceptions regarding what I *should* automatically accentuate in the experiences of others or what pre-existing theoretical questions constitute controversies awaiting research in the area of migration. For these reasons I have elected to resist the tradition of scouring existing research before embarking upon my own study. Though precarious (for example, I might have discovered at an inopportune late stage that my study amounted to a mere replication rather than original research) I believe this inversion has sustained the mode of phenomenology I attempt to employ. In order to corroborate the emergent concept from Part One, I will return to a more extended review of applicable literature in Part Two. Though this entails some repetition of content, it is my hope that it also safeguards the intention to proceed phenomenologically.

The preliminary literature search revealed that, with the exception of a few evocative autobiographies, notable among them Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* (1989) and Edward Said's memoir *Out of Place* (1999a), the lived experience of migration has been neglected, especially so in the mainstream psychological, psychotherapeutic, and social science research literature. The literature that does exist, including the autobiographies cited above, mostly focus upon individuals who have been forced into exile by political and social circumstances, or pressed to migrate (as a child in Hoffman's case) in search of a better standard of living or advanced education (Said), rather than those who, *for some reason choose* to make

themselves 'foreigners'. It is not uncommon for voluntary migrants to cope with a decreased standard of living as a result of leaving their homeland, demonstrating that their motive for departure is not primarily economic. At the beginning of the 21st century, the individuals who *choose* to leave their homeland constitute a growing subgroup of those who leave home to live, even temporarily, in a foreign place. These individuals are not refugees in the accepted sense: they could have stayed and they can return, at least from a spectator or sociological viewpoint. It is interesting that in the following interviews most co-researchers adamantly insist that they *couldn't* have stayed, they *had to go* (though not as a result of external compulsion). Yet it is unclear what motivates an individual to abandon their familiar place of origin, and in some cases comfortable standard of living, in favour of becoming in the words of the psychologist Harriett Goldenberg², 'a stranger in a strange land'.

In the existing cursory glances at voluntary migrants, it has been assumed that the motivation for these individuals is explained by their personal psychology; their leaving constitutes a comment upon biographical experiences, family relationships, 'object relations' etc. Therefore, the 'mental health' difficulties that can arise as a consequence of migration are thought of as 'pathologies' of the person's individual psyche. Consistent with this assumption, Grinberg and Grinberg (1989) have written the seminal text, *Migration and Exile*, applying a psychoanalytic understanding to migration and its 'pathologies'. This approach to understanding 'voluntary migrants' can be compelling, and perhaps psychologically useful, but as I will outline later, it is without the phenomenological foundation that is attempted here. The Grinbergs begin with a complex tapestry of psychoanalytic metapsychology and then offer case study confirmation of these preconceptions. In contrast I have attempted to begin with a felt egression, preconceptual in the sense of being devoid of formal theoretical interpretation, an attempt at general sense-making rather than experimental replication and theoretical corroboration.

The following study is designed to systematically gather the lived experiences of voluntary migrants. It will explore what provoked the initial leaving, what motivates those who return 'home' (or who long to return), and what happens to the person and their whole concept of 'home' during this process. Specifically, questions of alterity, the 'unheimlich' or 'the

² Harriett Goldenberg, herself an expatriate Canadian, offers workshops entitled 'Stranger in a Strange Land' both in London and Vancouver. My attendance at this workshop influenced the development of my interest in this topic.

uncanny', the attitudes exhibited toward the 'foreign' place and toward the place of origin and how these attitudes change as one moves back and forth between the two, are subject to exploration. I want to move beyond the apparently psychological processes involved, for example theories of attachment and separation, to concentrate on the underlying existential-ontological bases of these processes. In short, by focusing on voluntary migrants, this study is an attempt to augment current understandings of migration with an underlying existential dimension. Even if such an endeavour cannot be fully realised, this venture may disclose something constitutive about the general structure of human being, which may transpire to be therapeutically useful for understanding migration in general, including the experiences of refugees, international business recruitment and retention, and for working with cross-cultural psychotherapy clients, if not clients in general.

Practical Rationale for the Study

The 21st century, with its emphasis on trans-national interventions and corporate internationalism, is generating increasing demands and opportunities for a mobile workforce and therefore encouraging an unprecedented increase in the numbers of voluntary migrants (Aronowitz, 1984). There is evidence to suggest that these cross-cultural experiences, while exciting and enriching, are not without struggle, pain, and distress (see for example, Rapport and Dawson, 1998)³. The difficulty involved in such experiences is often not anticipated by the individual and rarely acknowledged in the public domain. As the number of people coping privately and individually with these issues increases, there is a growing imperative to understand the underlying meaning of this process and the effect it can have on those who *choose* to experience it. There is a corresponding need to explore and understand the subsequent experiences of those who eventually attempt to return 'home': is it possible to settle in an environment that is deeply familiar but subsequently, due to inevitable change in person and place, also eventually unfamiliar? The existential dynamics of voluntary migration may unveil a more ubiquitous malaise underlying our 'post-modern' world. Or perhaps such an analysis will offer some small comment on the tensions inherent in the givens of human existence. It may be that our contemporary world is offering increasing opportunities to experience the 'uncanniness' of the world (its simultaneously combined

³ The difficult adjustments of acculturation; bereavements, confusion and distress, highlighted in reference to the refugee and asylum seeker's experience seem mirrored in the experience of voluntary migrants. Though there are significant differences between the groups, it will emerge that the act of choosing to leave does not seem to efface the turmoil of doing so.

strangeness and familiarity), voluntary migration being one potent constituent of this. However, if so, this is an unintended side effect of international capitalism, in fact a potentially undermining one in that it subverts the natural attitude toward conventional forms of life. In this consists the rationale to attempt a clear exposition of the sorts of experiences and choices that are now being made for the most part unreflectively.

Although the primary purpose of this study is conceptual parturition, another undertaking is to intimate possible therapeutic ramifications stemming from inquiry into 'the uncanny' especially within the context of what will be formulated as 'existential migration'. It is therefore noteworthy that an outcome of the investigative format of the interviews was the promotion of new individual insights for co-researchers, some of which may be suggestive of both the therapeutic and the research potential inherent in exploring manifestations of not being-at-home in the world. The study co-researchers overwhelmingly found that the opportunity to reflect in-depth regarding their leaving home was a valuable and positive experience, and a peculiarly emotive one. They also found that their self-understandings were transformed during this exploration. This raises questions regarding which specific forms of dialogue are efficacious for this population or this issue, while also suggesting that our self-understandings in general may be positively enhanced when we explore circumstances and dilemmas in terms of their potential to reveal aspects of the 'uncanny', 'unheimlich', or simple 'mystery' of life. As will become clear in the methodological discussion, this theme of the ineffability of human existence emerged as a prominent aspect of the study.

Focusing on a population that willingly encounters situations of marginality may also develop our understandings of common human themes of belonging, diversity, homogeneity and security, as well as the positive aspects of not-belonging, not feeling at home, and human insecurity. It was my expectation that carefully and thoroughly exploring the phenomena of being a foreigner in relation to the concept of 'home' would have implications for general therapeutic practice with all client populations, though exactly how this would be manifested was entirely undetermined. I envisaged that many commonly encountered difficulties in living, evident in the consulting room, may harbour an implicit element of the struggle for 'home', a struggle that is perhaps inherently deeply human and thus perhaps not within the realm of what can be satisfactorily resolved. Though as the interviews presented here suggest, even dialogue without resolution can be positively engaging, facilitating life-forward movement.

Implicitly, I was also intrigued by potential applicability of existential psychotherapy to the fields of cross-cultural studies, anthropology, migration studies, and developmental work with refugees. There are obvious possible implications for working therapeutically with immigrants and refugees, but also ex-patriot communities, anthropologists engaged in foreign fieldwork and NGO staff preparing for work in international locations. For example, supportive therapeutic groups for 'trailing families' of corporate staff relocations to foreign cultures, or perhaps any group of individuals having cross-cultural contact. The literature review will repeatedly affirm that cross-cultural contact can result in shaken life assumptions and the deconstruction of a 'natural attitude'⁴, resulting in a gap or fissure into which I believe a more primordial and unsettling way of being may emerge, even briefly. One finding of the present study is that these unsettling experiences of voluntary migration are not currently given credence or acknowledged in their full complexity. In partial confirmation of this unmet need and the potential for group work, there were repeated requests by co-researchers to meet with others from the study in the hopes of being able to share their experiences with those who might understand their intricacy.

Relevant Literature on Migration Studies

In *Migration as a Part of Life Experience*, a paper given at the New South Wales Institute of Psychiatry (Seminar in Cross Cultural Therapy, 1981), June Huntington, a Senior Lecturer in Social Work, contends that those who work with migrants must be conscious of their own feelings about psycho-social transitions, loss, and their feelings about home. 'This can only be done in small groups, in a climate of trust, in which participants can get into the feelings generated by this kind of material and the connections it may have with their own life experiences' (Ibid:8). This must be even more true of those who work *abroad* with migrants, exiles, and refugees, for these workers are faced with other's experiences of transition and loss while simultaneously dealing with their own, by being in a foreign environment. While completing the analysis of the interview transcripts I arranged to live in Budapest, a city with which I was entirely unfamiliar, where I knew no one, and where I could not speak the language. I put myself into the position of analysing others' accounts of transition and not

⁴ The 'natural attitude' referred to repeatedly in this thesis consists of a belief that everyday objects and events *are* as they appear; the scientist 'believes in the existence of those entities to which his theories refer' (c.f. Dreyfus, 1991:254), in other words accepting the evidence of our senses, our common-sense explanations and our social practices as objective realism.

being-at-home, while simultaneously negotiating my own experiences of the same. It was an attempt to sensitise myself to the analysis but it also confirmed to me the imperative that international workers assisting migrants and refugees should ‘not only become better equipped conceptually but also experientially, so that in working with the distressed migrant they can respond from the heart and gut as well as from the head’ (Ibid).

In ‘The insertion of the self into the space of borderless possibility: Eva Hoffman’s exiled body’, Danuta Fjellestad (1995) sets out to challenge the ‘persistent myth of the so-called “European model” of voluntary immigration, acculturation and assimilation that leads directly to a seamless if not quite painless absorption’ (Ibid:134). Fjellestad speculates that the ‘deconstructive critical gaze’ has been averted from celebratory ‘successful’ accounts of European immigration, such as Mary Antin’s *The Promised Land*, because the writer is a Caucasian immigrant. Eva Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation* (1989) traces the darker story behind the fairy tale of immigration as triumphant progress. According to Fjellestad,

[Hoffman’s] book speaks of the results of the loss of what poststructuralist wisdom would call a romantic illusion of unity and centre and of the costs and rewards, the joys and the terrors, of being thrown into the postmodern world of constantly shifting boundaries and borderless possibilities (Fjellestad, 1995:135).

In a recent interview (Kreisler, 2000), Hoffman speaks of her own experience of the topsy-turvy re-arrangement of all cultural values, including ‘notions of human intimacy or beauty or the distances at which we stand from each other...’ She goes on to say,

Yes, I think every immigrant becomes a kind of amateur anthropologist – you do notice things about the culture or the world that you come into that people who grow up in it, who are very embedded in it, simply don’t notice. I think we all know it from going to a foreign place. And at first you notice the surface things, the surface differences. And gradually you start noticing the deeper differences. And very gradually you start with understanding the inner life of the culture, the life of those both large and very intimate values. It was a surprisingly long process is what I can say (p.3).

What Hoffman refers to as ‘amateur anthropologist’ I’d like to rephrase as ‘*immersed phenomenologist*’, exemplifying the mode of interaction introduced later in this paper. In this sense ‘phenomenology’ explicitly connotes more uncertainty regarding our ability to comprehend, supplanting an observer’s certainty with a more humble and tentative rising and ebbing of co-created understanding. This subtle re-terminology acknowledges the uncomfortable experience of being unable to fully ascertain which aspects of one’s

experience are of the new culture and which are of one's own biography and sensitivities, what is insight and what is longing.

In her brief review of Peter Read's *Returning to Nothing: the meaning of lost places* (1996), the Australian poet Carole Rivett cites TS Eliot's remark, '*Home is where one starts from*', and echoes Read's refrain that we need a 'second Elizabeth Kubler-Ross to advance *place-bereavement* as a continuing theme of contemporary distress'. This argument is based upon the observation that the affection for a home in western cultures makes the loss of a loved place analogous to the painful loss of a loved person. The actual physical place can become lost, or transmuted, or occupied by others who have no knowledge of the place as yours. This treatise will be explored in more depth in Part Two of the paper, where Read's ideas are revealed as an exemplary counterpoint to the co-researchers' experiences of voluntary migration and marginality. Participants in Read's oral history were deeply rooted in a place they called 'home' and thus experienced profound loss and disorientation when that place vanished. In contrast, the co-researchers will often describe a sort of rootlessness, a paradoxical attraction out towards the wide world immingled with a forlorn yearning for home, underpinned in some cases by the absence of *ever* having felt at home anywhere.

Following a similar vein to Read, but working with post-war migrants, Zita Weber (2000) argues that 'theories of loss and grief are applicable to migrants and their experiences' (Ibid:1). She proceeds to apply these theories to semi-structured interviews with fifteen Hungarian immigrants who arrived in Australia between 1947-1958. While recognising common themes, Weber safeguards the individual experience from 'collective experience, which is generalising and ignores the power of individual differences' (Ibid:7). She sets out to approximate the migrant's own understanding of their experiences by getting 'beneath the skin' and 'behind the eyes' of her respondents. Weber quotes Furnham and Bochner (1986):

The key common experience is loss of a certain equilibrium, of a taken-for-granted relationship between one's inner and one's outer worlds... Migration changes dramatically our outer reality, and imposes on us, at least temporarily, a discrepancy between inner and outer, and the task of reconciling them if we are to adapt and survive with any degree of mental health (c.f. Weber, 2000:8).

In the words of one of Weber's respondents, 'We'd gained so much – and yet, we'd lost even more' (Ibid:9). In the words of another, 'My daughter hated Australia... She had lost hope' (Ibid.). Weber points out the crucial therapeutic value in being able to tell one's story. 'This

story-telling mechanism serves two functions: it facilitates the expression of feelings and hands down factual information to future generations' (Ibid:10). Weber's migrants had taken the opportunity to talk to her and to talk with each other in formal and informal groups. The discussions in these groups naturally coalesced around topics of 'leaving' and of 'home'. Weber saw these opportunities as 'important ways of finding coherence and meaning which act to offset the feeling of dispossession' (Ibid:11). The importance of 'telling one's story', and the possibility of resultant new understandings, was later confirmed by the co-researchers during the interviews for the current study.

June Huntington (referred to above) describes her own conception of the human being as 'closest perhaps to that of the existentialists...' (1981:1). She asks why the experience of migration can vary from a positive transition, on the one hand, to a threatening and difficult separation, or even a devastating bereavement, on the other. She asserts that the new location inferred by migration has a unique ability to alter our outer cultural and social reality and impose upon us a discrepancy between our inner and outer worlds. This discrepancy is compounded by real *physical* differences between places, in terms of climate, topography, light, flora and fauna, as if the actual landscape is also formative of who we grow to be.

As will be shown, the experience of 'existential migration' contains a curious conflation of the 'usual' migratory experiences (characterised by economic, educational or political motives), entailing similar feelings of loss and dislocation. This alludes to the problematic sense of 'voluntary' in voluntary migration. The question arises frequently for the co-researchers, 'did I have a choice? Could I have stayed?' But the experience of 'existential migration' can also invert the common descriptions of general migration. Whilst Huntington asserts that migration is the alteration of outer culture, causing a discrepancy between inner and outer worlds, for the 'existential migrant' this alteration in the outer environment may paradoxically lessen the discrepancy between inner and outer. For example, some co-researchers in the present study will report travelling to a totally foreign and unfamiliar place, turning a corner and gazing upon a scene that evokes for them a powerful feeling of 'being-at-home' though they had never previously set eyes upon the place. This exemplifies how inquiries into 'voluntary migration' can highlight suppositions and elaborate our general understanding of migration by revealing assumptions in our basic concepts such as 'inner' and 'outer', including what constitutes 'discrepancy' or 'similarity'.

Huntington argues that migration is a distinct and potent category of bereavement. It involves loss of our usual 'life space' and our assumptions about reality,

...our model of man, the assumptions we have about human nature ... All these assumptions emerge out of a given time and place; they do not magically appear from nowhere... When our external world (a society that is usually place-time specific) changes, we face a crisis for our assumptive world no longer fits that of the people around us. Inner and outer reality are [sic], temporarily, discordant. Now this is a familiar experience to many of us when we go abroad on holidays. Then we may experience it as exciting, stimulating, lots of fun – though not for everyone of course. But on holiday we know the discrepancy will be temporary and that we *choose* to return home again where there is a closer fit between inner and outer realities (Ibid:3, *italics added*).

This typifies the common disregard concerning the voluntary migrant and his or her experience of *not* conforming to the assumptions inherent in their original place-time environment, and their subsequent choice not to return 'home' from the unfamiliar place. Huntington's suggestion that the *fit* between inner and outer reality is important will be taken up again later in the thesis, along with her assumption that this fit consists of finding an 'outer' world that is similar enough to the original world we carry 'inside' of us. Unlike most researchers, Huntington does touch briefly upon the specific experience of the voluntary migrant though it is somewhat dismissed as a minority view and one that does not illustrate her concept of 'place bereavement'.

Some people, of course, are opened up by such an experience and led to question the external reality of the home environment. Indeed, we all know of people (holidaymakers or migrants) who on arriving at the new place experience a kind of instant recognition, almost a falling in love, an amazing sense of fit between their own inner world and this new external world. These are often people who have never really felt at home in their own society ... But I believe they are a minority. For most people, the major migratory move from the known to the unknown brings an experience rather like hearing a discordant note in a familiar piece of music (Ibid:4, italics added).

Huntington taps but does not open. Her comments provoke engaging questions which she does not pursue but which the current study sets out to explore. For example, what is the impetus for not feeling 'at home' in the original homeworld for this minority? What constitutes the minority's deep affinity with a foreign culture while their compatriots feel a certain degree of dissonance and a desire to return to the familiar? Huntington's interest is in exploring the majority experience, as she conceptualises it, while I endeavour to offer a description of the minority position and its capacity to contravene routine assumptions, extending innovative elaborations of our sense of 'home' generally.

Huntington relies upon the theoretical lineage of Bowlby and Winnicott to explain the dread that a migrant may feel. She points out that 'For Bowlby, separation trauma and anxiety are greatest when two factors are present: the *presence* of the strange in the *absence* of the loved and familiar' ⁵(cf. Ibid:5, *italics added*). Migration to an unfamiliar culture involves both of these, and Huntington explicates why *some* people exhibit compulsive attachments to the place-culture milieu of their 'home', displaying apprehension when the familiar is replaced by the threatening foreign world. Bowlby's theory emphasises the child's primary care-giver as the source of the child's experience of 'containment', supplying a secure base from which to venture forth and test out his or her independence, and to return to for security and sustenance (see Ibid:5). These psychological and psychoanalytic approaches to the subjective may seem alluring and efficacious, however, my research study maintains a steadfast attempt to explore the more abstruse existential realm of this phenomenon, avoiding the instigation of another array of psychologically-bound theories of maladaptation etc. Attachment theory and bereavement models would have a lot to say about so-called 'place bereavement', but only *after* serious phenomenological attempts to appraise the experience in its lived diversity with indications of its potentially inherent existential components⁶. The haunting question for me is whether it is valuable or even possible to investigate the actual foundation of our *possibility* to feel at home, not at home, without a home, and homesick? An overview of the complexities of the experience of *not* feeling at home may illuminate what it means *to* feel at home. Both Freud and Heidegger referred to the experience of 'the uncanny' or 'unheimlich', the potential for not being-at-home. Below I will outline their differing perspectives in an effort to prise the philosophical from the psychological preconceptions in this experience.

Freud and the Uncanny

Presently, this section may appear more as detour than direct route, but the experience of the uncanny or unheimlich will prove ubiquitous to later discussions making its introduction at this point germane to the chronological development of the project. The following discussion is based upon Freud's essay '*The Uncanny*' (1919) from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. According to Freud, the uncanny (unheimlich) is related to what is frightening, especially to what evokes dread and horror. In

⁵ I will return to this formulation in the section on Freud and the Uncanny, below.

⁶ Of course that is not my project here. This study does not include a phenomenological exploration of 'place bereavement', presumably a more common experience than voluntary migration. As presented in Part Two, Read (1996) offers a preliminary explication of this concept of bereavement.

particular, he says the uncanny is that class of the frightening which refers back to what was long familiar. Freud struggles with the phenomenon, indicating the paradox that the familiar can elicit the uncanny while the novel can at times almost be welcoming (for example in travel). The definitions of heimlich (being-at-home) and unheimlich (uncanny) are thus intertwined, implying each other (Ibid:223). For example, Freud's analysis culminates in his assertion that the heimlich can mean both what is familiar and agreeable, and also what is concealed and kept hidden. Unheimlich is used as the contrary to the first meaning only. There is an interesting implication here that *feeling at home entails keeping some things hidden* – we shall see that Heidegger's description of the unheimlich echoes this theme. The experience of the unheimlich occurs when something that should stay hidden in order to feel at home, becomes revealed.

However, Freud's analysis of this phenomenon remains purely psychological. He suggests that feeling uncanny may be traced back to a childhood castration complex, 'We must content ourselves with selecting those themes of uncanniness which are most prominent, and with seeing whether they too can fairly be traced back to infantile sources' (Ibid:234). Of course Freud has a complicated theoretical rationale for pre-supposing the infantile source of uncanniness, but from a phenomenological perspective Freud is gathering and limiting the experience prematurely, giving it the shape of his theory then purporting to discover what he himself has moulded.

Freud also relates the uncanny to old animistic conceptions of the universe; he assumes that each of us passes through a phase of our development in which we believe, as did 'primitive people', that the world is imbued with human spirits. For Freud, the uncanny is the class of frightening things in which the frightening element that is repressed then *recurs*, so this uncanny is not something new, but something long familiar that has become alienated through repression and then resurfaces momentarily. Our mortality is perhaps the best example of a familiar given which can evoke the unfamiliar and strange. According to Freud, We have now only a few remarks to add – for animism, magic and sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, man's attitude to death, involuntary repetition and the castration complex comprise practically all the factors which turn something frightening into something uncanny (Ibid:243).

Freud concludes that 'an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs

which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed' (Ibid:249). Like Heidegger, Freud suggests that anxiety leads to the sense of the uncanny or the *unheimlich*. However, for Freud, anxiety and the uncanny result from the presence of the repressed, whereas for Heidegger anxiety is an existential, and the *unheimlich* is an aspect of our primordial being. This is not the only difference between the two conceptions, as each thinker seems to extrapolate to a different end: Freud to psychological experiences of 'the unfamiliar' and Heidegger to human 'not being-at-home' in the world. Later it will be evident that data from the co-researchers in the current study seems to substantiate a more Heideggarian analysis. Remaining true to my primary aim of developing a phenomenologically-derived concept of 'existential migration', the numerous questions arising from this cursory account of Freud's 'uncanny' must unfortunately be bracketed, though not before some further elaboration in the next section. Again, this stage of the project only constitutes a preliminary review in order to ascertain that there could be a rationale for launching a phenomenological research study into this general topic.

Grinberg and Grinberg. The application of psychoanalysis to migration

In his introduction to *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Migration and Exile* (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989), Otto Kernberg describes the text as the 'first psychoanalytic study of the psychology of emigration and exile' and as an exploration of adaptation and failure to adapt, a study of normal and pathological mourning, which are seen as 'essential constituents of migration and exile' (Ibid:vii)⁷. The Grinbergs embark upon a project to systematise phenomena encountered in their clinical practice into a 'psychopathology of migration' within their understanding of object relations theory. Their work includes very few references to the subgroup of voluntary migrants who left home by choice, always from a perspective which is heavily pre-laden with psychoanalytic language and developmental assumptions.

According to the Grinberg's analysis, quite frequently the immigrant resorts to dissociative mechanisms – for example, idealizing the new aspects and experiences in the society that has taken him in while at the same time devaluing the people and places he has left behind,

⁷ Evidently the analytic orientation presents a stark contrast to a phenomenology that offers no undisputed ground from which to differentiate 'adaptation' from 'failure' or 'normal' from 'pathological'. From my view, any 'failure to adapt' constitutes a form of adaptation, as does the so-called 'pathological' (though perhaps problematic forms of adaptation).

regarding them as persecutory. Through such dissociation he avoids the mourning, remorse, and depressive anxieties which would otherwise be aroused and intensified by the migration, *especially if it was undertaken voluntarily* (Ibid:8). The characteristic of idealising the new and rejecting the familiar is evident in some of the co-researcher accounts which follow later in this study.

Grinberg and Grinberg refer to another psychoanalyst, Menges (1959), who posits that ‘Those who fall prey to homesickness usually have unresolved childhood problems arising from a conflicting relationship with the mother’ (cf Ibid:20)⁸. The authors also cite the analyst Balint (1959), who coined the term ‘ocnophilic’ to refer to the tendency to hold onto what is certain and stable, and ‘philobatic’ to refer to the tendency to seek out new and exciting experiences and situations (Ibid:21). Voluntary migrants are presumed to exhibit the second tendency. I expected this hypothesis to be confirmed in my interview analysis, however, the transcripts suggest that voluntary migrants, perhaps like all of us, exhibit both tendencies, though in specific and idiosyncratic ways. In fact, this ambivalent longing for home united with the attraction to the foreign arises as an essential and intractable issue in ‘existential’ migration. By conceiving of these ambiguities as existential attributes rather than psychological pathology, we accept that they can be *explored* (as disclosing the structure of human being) but not *resolved* (and certainly not ‘cured’).

The Grinbergs present interesting in-depth case studies of their immigrant clients’ “pathologies”, concentrating on their ‘persecutory anxieties’, ‘schizoid/paranoid/depressive positions’, ‘developmental phases’, ‘psychosis’ and ‘oedipal conflicts’ etc. I hope it is clear that the present study, while wanting to respect diverse orientations, is undertaking something quite different, and I believe more fundamental. This does not rule out that the Grinbergs, or others, may validly interpret the data presented in their clinical practice as supportive of their own method of analysis.

As an illustration of a phenomenological, thus philosophically-inclined approach to therapy with migrants, I present the following brief clinical account. While working with

⁸ Throughout the book no evidence, phenomenological or otherwise, is provided for these or other empirical claims. The implication is that the Grinbergs are relying primarily upon their own clinical experience, which may be valid, however, there is no attempt to extricate their client’s experience from their own theoretical preconceptions, thus obstructing the reader’s opportunity to choose their own interpretations.

international students at a counselling service within the University of London, I attempted to uncover, in the client's own language, the existential issues implied within the aforementioned psychoanalytic conceptualisation of migration. For example, I worked for eight sessions with a 26 year-old American post-graduate student who was, for various reasons, having difficulty adjusting to life in London. In our sessions we discussed her previous experiences of living away from home, her experiences of returning home on visits, and her original motivation for leaving America to live as a foreigner in Asia. Through phenomenological exploration of her narrative, we discovered that she had always, even as an adolescent, known that she wanted to leave her home and her family life. Her relationships with her family may have been significant in this, and the fact that she was adopted may also have been contributory, though she did not identify it as such. Her circumstances and outlook could be assumed to fit aspects of the psychoanalytic diagnosis and the label of 'Philobat'. However, *her* experience was that at home she had a physically felt 'panic' of the 'nothingness' of the lives and the world she encountered there. She *needed to* 'flee'. In the session where this relationship to nothingness came to light, the client exclaimed 'this feels really philosophical' and she left with a new understanding of the deeper significance of her choices as well as new questions regarding her future plans. If we had accepted psychoanalytic premises (which in some form are now common cultural assumptions shared by many of our clients) our encounter would likely have contracted to examination of her adoption and infant care-giving relationships. This may have lead to important and useful metaphors for the client, but not likely resulting in the underlying philosophical shift she found through our mutual attempts at phenomenological exploration.

In their chapter on 'The Possible Return' (Ibid:176-84) the Grinbergs present the voluntary migrant's experience as less problematic than other migrations, though they do imply that some difficult issues can emerge. For example, they acknowledge that visits home can present a confrontation,

The visitor's overt desire is to rediscover all that was left behind, but he also has a great fear of not finding it. It is as if he wants to penetrate the unknowable, to know how things would have turned out if they had not turned out the way they did, so he can confirm or rectify his original decision to leave (Ibid:180).

This quote adumbrates the speculative arena in which my thesis project is played out. The hypothesis that returning home implies a desire to 'test' the decision to leave struck me as veridical, however, the actual interviews demonstrate a significantly more nuanced and

complex reality than this. Also, the Grinbergs do not pick up the philosophical implications and existential issues presented by their perspective. For example, why would a person 'want to penetrate the unknowable', what does it suggest about human being that there is a desire to compare lived life with the road not taken, is there really a possibility to 'rectify' the original decision to leave? It is both *before* (offering a phenomenological basis rather than theoretical speculations) and *after* the psychoanalytic enterprise that a more philosophical and existential inquiry may open up deeper (and unexpected) questions and new understandings of our experience as humans. Therefore, the voluntary migrant's reasons for leaving, his or her experiences of living abroad, and the experience of returning home (for visits or to resettle) may reveal salient issues not only for international students, academics, global managers, exiles and refugees, 'trailing partners' of international professionals, anyone who re-locates even temporarily, but also for those who never leave 'home'. Heidegger's discussion of 'the unheimlich' provides guidance in formulating an inquiry that has relevance for all modes of human being.

Not being-at-home as an existential – Heidegger and the unheimlich

Heidegger proposes that the human being (Dasein) drifts along groundless, yet the uncanniness of this 'floating' is concealed by the protective obscurant of our self-assured usual interpretations of things (MR:170)⁹. As long as we can remain convinced by the taken-for-granted appearance of life, we create the impression of ground, covering over the uncanniness of existence. This analysis proffers uncanniness as the primordial facet of our being rather than as a developmental pathology. It is a phenomenon toward which *we all* must adopt a responsive attitude of some kind or other, and *perhaps* our early experiences and our given cultures have an impact upon our original tendencies to respond in specific ways. The importance of early environment is explored later since parental and family relations frequently arise as significant in the co-researcher interviews. However, my subsequent discussion of early relations attempts to circumvent abstract metapsychology and avoid the psychoanalytic tendency to prioritise certain responses as preferable while demeaning other responses as pathological.

⁹ This section is based on references to 'the uncanny' and 'unheimlich' in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Joan Stambaugh trans. (1996, signified as S) and John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson trans. (1962, signified as MR), with the numbers corresponding to sections rather than pages. These translators variously translate Dasein with (Da-sein) or without a hyphen but for consistency I will omit the hyphen.

Living according to the familiar publicly accepted conventions offers a 'tranquillized self-assurance', a feeling of being-at-home, in which life is obvious, unremarkable, and taken-for-granted. But Dasein is pursued by its own uncanniness even in the most harmless and everyday situations. It is angst which 'fetches Dasein back out of its entangled absorption in the "world"' (S:189). Anxiety, or angst, gives rise to an 'uncanny feeling' in which the indefiniteness of the nothing, the nowhere, and the negated being-at-home, finds expression (S:188). Through angst, Dasein stands out from the unremarkably familiar and enters the 'existential "mode" of *not-being-at-home*' (S:189). Uncanniness, not being-at-home, is constituent of Dasein's structure, though not in the sense of 'thing-like' structure. Heidegger, like Freud, talks of darkness as one condition known to elicit this phenomenon. 'Tranquillized, familiar being-in-the-world is a mode of the uncanniness of Dasein, not the other way around. *Not-being-at-home must be conceived existentially and ontologically as the more primordial phenomenon* (Ibid, *italics added*).' The consumerist modern world offers an extensive inventory of pre-packaged opportunities to cushion the experience of uncanniness, when it emerges unbidden as part of our being. Most of these responses aim to return Dasein to the comfort of anaesthetised solidity. In contrast, it was my expectation that 'existential migration' tended to be (with individual variations of course) an expression of this uncanniness rather than simply a fleeing from it. My assumption was that this response is chosen because available modes of tranquilisation do not easily convince these individuals that life *is* as it appears, straightforward and meaningful. To some extent this expectation has been confirmed by the study, though not surprisingly, what emerges is more intricate and ambiguous than this. For example, as well as scepticism regarding the conventional, co-researchers also express desires to leave home in order to discover who they *really* are and to fulfil their potential, which reiterates Heidegger's suggestion that uncanniness confronts Dasein with the nothingness of the world in which it is anxious about its potentiality-of-being (S:276).

Awareness of the world's uncanniness originates as a 'call' from within Dasein itself. Heidegger asks '*What if Dasein, finding itself in the ground of its uncanniness, were the caller of the call of conscience?*' (S:276). The call is perhaps best conceived as an aspect of Dasein's primordial uncanniness, and its thrownness into a world that just nakedly *is*, a relentless facticity posing as 'home'. This is not a call that offers guidance, direction, or indeed any content; it is a deeper disturbing call from something so close and cold that it is unfamiliar and yet unmistakably one's own (both *unheimlich* and *heimlich*). Uncanniness *is*

thrown individuation as it is disclosed in this anxious call away from distraction in the world; a return to Dasein's potentiality-of-being. *'The call does not give us to understand an ideal, universal potentiality-of-being; it discloses it as what is actually individualized in that particular Dasein'* (S:280, *italics added*). This quote appears to indicate that Heidegger is open to the possibility of psychology as the ontic expression and thus evidence of the existential or ontological potentials constituting Dasein in the general. This may be the bridge between Freud and Heidegger, that while Freud focuses on the uncanny as individual psychology, Heidegger sees those same phenomena as also disclosing the being of human being itself.

For the individual, the summons calls one back by highlighting the possibility of embracing our thrown circumstances and understanding this as the given nothingness that founds us. The calling *back* points *toward* a potential in which Dasein accepts itself as it is and regains itself from falling into lostness in the distractions of the world, but in so doing, there is an experience of guilt for that lostness. In this discussion, both guilt and conscience (and perhaps unheimlich/uncanny) do not have a usual ontic, everyday meaning, but rather an ontological one (S:289-95). We all fall and we all fail to realise ourselves. Anxiety can point to liberation from meaningless possibilities in order to take up those which are 'authentic' but it also reveals our unheimlich situation, from which there is no liberation.

What relevance could Heidegger's thought have for those who choose to leave home for the foreign and unknown? Are voluntary migrants attempting to address their experience of unheimlich groundlessness by continuing to search for a convincing tranquillizer, while paradoxically responding to the call of conscience in trying to fulfil their potential? We have yet to see if the 'existential migrant' is an existential 'hero' or if he or she is hopelessly lost in the dilemma of perpetuating the condition they are simultaneously trying to resolve. Does the search for alterity in the experience of the foreign, both attractive and unsettling, sustain a way of being that is open to, sensitive to, the call of conscience?

Is our search for home, our leaving and returning, comparing foreignness and familiarity, and perhaps never feeling at home even at our origin, all expressions of this anxious call 'from' and 'to'? Can we explore homelessness and unheimlich as the literal search for one's belonging on earth as well as the existential issue of confronting this as the ineluctable plight? If so, what inherently constitutes the *choice* to leave home for our co-researchers? My

analysis intimates that they experience a felt yearning to leave, a call to go out into the world – perhaps to live within some acceptance of the uncanny, anticipating a resolution that remains elusive. Are voluntary migrants, like myself, seeking a means to reduce the uncanny to the ordinary, temporarily conquering it only to thereby engender it; spawning an essential circuitous human dichotomy? Pictet suggests ‘Experiencing homelessness is a striving towards home’ (2001:45). Yet, a striving towards a ‘home’ that offers no-thing, no sustenance or ground, while simultaneously holding the locus of the demand to be *what* one is (including ‘who’ one is). This striving can be expressed in many ways, metaphorically or concretely, perhaps by buying and settling a ‘home’ to leaving ‘home’ altogether. Pictet asks, Is it a given of the human condition to experience a longing for something not quite within our grasp, call it home, God, the uncanny? A disclosing of Being, as an emerging into the light which brings us closer to others, the Other and ultimately ourselves (Ibid:45).

It is now my contention that a subset of voluntary migrants engage in such a process of ‘existential migration’, and thus grapple, either originally or as an unintended consequence of their relocation, with an expression of the issues outlined above. By eliciting the experiences of such migrants, with reference to their choice to leave, their experience of being away, their feelings of ‘home’ and their own self-understandings, I present the following thesis, which has evolved into a preliminary delineation of a new concept of ‘existential migration’. Conceiving this conceptual formulation as the prime task of the thesis evolved only later, through the interview dialogues and their subsequent analysis. Only after lengthy explorations of the narratives will I return to contrast the emergent concept with current discourses in relevant disciplines, concentrating on the philosophical views of the existentialists. However, in formulating the methodological practicalities in the next chapter I will temporarily abandon these philosophical preconceptions. In fact it was my experience that in designing the methodology, conducting the interviews, and analysing the transcripts, I had lost the question of ‘the unheimlich’ entirely. It surprisingly re-emerged again as I began to ‘cross’ the analysis with some of the existential philosophical themes, revealing concrete instances of the ‘strangely-familiar’ and of our primordial not-being-at-home in the world.

Chapter Two: A Phenomenological Approach

Why phenomenology?

The natural scientific approach, which is what we typically mean by ‘science’, is a *practical* and *particular* human construction. Its practicality is evidenced in products like the computer I’m using to write this thesis, or in medical procedures. Its particularity is less acknowledged, but resides in the fact that science is one way of *perceiving*, a way which prioritises a separate subject gazing across empty space at a static object. Science is a useful metaphor, not incontrovertible reality. Following a distinguished lineage (including the philosophers Husserl, Dilthey, Heidegger, Habermas, and more recently the psychologists Giorgi, Colaizzi, and Moustakas¹⁰), I will briefly argue that natural science inquiry is inappropriate to the project with which I’m currently engaged in this thesis.

The natural science approach idolises objectivity in its obsession with discovering and explaining the *one true world*. Objectivity in this sense equates with concepts of quantifiability, reliability, validity, replicable experimentation, with the inherent motivations of predictability and possible technical control which will inhere in all places, at all times, given certain specifiable conditions. Individual lived experience is irrefutably ‘subjective’, so terms like consciousness, intentionality, meaning, feeling, all had to be translated into discrete quantifiable entities in order to be investigated, or else be abandoned altogether. This describes the methodological orientation of positivism, expounding the central thesis that, ‘... only events which can be observed, or that only propositions which are (at least in principle) testable, have a claim to truth...’ (Ashworth, 2003:11)¹¹. Therefore, I would either have to reformulate the experiences of voluntary migrants into discrete quantifiable scales or questionnaires, for example, (in essence posing questions that presuppose the exploratory study I am attempting here) or if this were unfeasible I would have to abandon the topic as inappropriate for study.

¹⁰ See Spinelli (2005:128-142) and Ashworth (2003:4-24) for excellent general introductions to the emergence and evolution of human science inquiry.

¹¹ In *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1972), the critical theorist Jurgen Habermas rejects the positivistic claim that equates value-free knowledge with scientific facts. Empirical knowledge, according to Habermas, is formed by the human interests of those constituting it. The concrete person is also subsequently lost in the scientific subordination of the particular to the universal and abstract.

For all its concern with objectivity, the positivist scientific enterprise simply assumes and reifies the fundamental concepts harboured within the everyday language of our natural common-sense attitude to life. In response, the philosopher Edmund Husserl proposed the praxis of phenomenology, introducing meticulous conceptual analysis of our basic concepts in order to ground inquiry in philosophical rigour. Husserl, in order to examine what science is talking about, achieves the required return from premature abstraction to concrete lived experience. Ashworth (2003) indicates Husserl's premise that for psychology lived *experience* thus properly constitutes the point of departure for our investigations. This strategy has yielded implications that will be explored more in subsequent sections of this paper. For now let me differentiate that in counterpoint to science, human experiential agency and its diverse human meanings are key elements to any phenomenological analysis. Phenomenological approaches endeavour to comprehend the full experience of an individual life by making 'a methodological discipline of the everyday communicative experience of understanding oneself and others' (Habermas, 1972:163). The *observing subject and object* is replaced by the *participant subject and partner* (Ibid:179-81, *italics added*).

Such a 'human science' approach 'highlights our awareness that psychology inevitably involves the investigation and interpretation of *meaning*' (Spinelli, 2005:129), leading to intricate and nuanced forms of understanding experience. Within phenomenology there are perceptual/descriptive approaches and constructionist/interpretive approaches (see Ashworth, 2003:19). As will become clear, the method I adopt is a variation of the more constructionist existential-phenomenological or hermeneutic pole of phenomenology (I will use the term phenomenology to refer to the broad range of approaches which seek to inculcate Husserl's re-orienting mantra "to the things themselves"). Along with Habermas and Ricoeur (c.f. Ashworth, 2003:20), I contend that the interpreter, in this case me, cannot jump out of 'his own life activity and just suspend the context of tradition in which his own subjectivity has been formed in order to submerge himself in a sub-historical stream of life that allows the pleasurable identification of everyone with everyone else' (Habermas, 1972:181). This 'copy theory of truth', which is attempted by controlled observation in positivistic science, is jettisoned in favour of an approach based upon acceptance that not only are meanings always interpretive, but also co-constituted.

Within the tapestry of the current project is an undertaking to adequately convey certain

aspects of the human condition (for example the *unheimlich*) as evidenced in the lived experience of voluntary migration and its associated issues. A natural scientific approach, based upon the tenants of positivism, could not achieve the necessary pre-conditions of 'objectivity' and controlled variables to launch a similar investigation. For instance, how could I eradicate the influential interactive component of my person in the interview situation? Perhaps a computer screen with a set interview protocol might have replaced my human presence in an attempt to be more 'objective'. But how could I formulate such a protocol without again presupposing the entire study with my regime of questions? And what is the likelihood that the resultant transcripts would contain as evocative and surprising descriptions as the current findings, or that the co-researchers would have reported the interview to be so deeply emotional and meaningful? In accepting the inevitability of co-constituted meanings, I am also acquiescing to quite modest claims regarding the status of 'results' for such a study. If reality is indeed interpreted and interactional, then I can offer but one version of that reality, not a definitive conclusion peppered with irrefutable facts.

In order to study individual experiences of voluntary migration, it was incumbent upon me to tread lightly in order to encourage the phenomenon to reveal itself on its own terms. I needed a 'method' (or more accurately 'a way of being') that allowed me to support both my co-researchers and myself to exist from the 'inside-out', not as mere perceptions to be studied behaviourally by an ideal observer. Rather than causal explanations, I was seeking 'unconcealment' or the uncovering of aspects of existence that may have been eclipsed by received assumptions. This disclosing of being 'means the unlocking of what forgetfulness of being closes and hides' (Orr, 1978:5). As a being, man belongs to the totality of Being, so revelations of any man are revelations of Being. In Heidegger's (1969:39) words, man is distinctive only in his unique openness to Being, his ability to face his being and answer it. If we convert this to a methodological, essentially philosophical practice like phenomenology, we can ascertain a compatible conflation with the actual topic of exploration in the present study:

Transcendental-hermeneutic phenomenology, then, does not simply seek to lay out the general structure of self-interpreting being; it claims to force into view a substantive truth about human beings. Not only is human being interpretation all the way down, so that our practices can never be grounded in human nature, God's will, or the structure of rationality, but this condition is one of such radical rootlessness that everyone feels fundamentally unsettled (*unheimlich*), that is, senses that human beings can *never* be at home in the world. This, according to Heidegger, is why we plunge into trying to make ourselves at home and secure. Thus the conformist, everyday activities in which human beings seek to give their

lives some stable meaning reveal to Heidegger a flight motivated by the preontological understanding each human being has of his or her ultimate ungroundedness (Dreyfus, 1991:37).

However, it would be contradictory and hypocritical if I were to approach my interviews full of Heideggerian reflection. Even Heidegger needs to be suspended until afterwards.

Which phenomenology?

The preliminary literature review established a foundation from which to embark upon a phenomenological study with some confidence that indeed such a study was not only original but also potentially valuable. The next phase consisted of devising an interview protocol and the associated documentation required to carry out the research. The more in-depth consideration of what form of *analysis* I would use to interpret the resulting transcripts emerged only as the interviews were nearing completion. The rationale for this was to avoid unduly shaping the interviews around a methodology or form of analysis, rather than permitting the material to be freely generated and to subsequently inform how it would be analysed.

The interview itself was pared down to five fundamental and ambiguous questions, allowing each co-researcher to interpret the question idiosyncratically and take the interview in their own direction, within the confines of the general inquiry into 'voluntary migration' and 'home'. This semi-structured approach to interviewing was consistent with the intention not to obstruct the emergence of the lived reality of these issues, but to remain as intimate as possible with the co-researcher's own symbolisation of their individual understandings, as recalled from their actual life situations. Thus a certain *style* of phenomenology is reiterated throughout the study, indicating my response to the methodological question 'which phenomenology?'

At the outset, conceptualising the methodology as 'phenomenological' presents the dilemma of 'in what way phenomenological?' I've touched upon this question superficially above but I now need to explore more concretely what I want that term to mean in this context. Initially I confess that I was naively searching for a phenomenology that would be rigorous in the sense of exhaustively comprehensive, devoid of obvious assumptions, finite and true. Of course this is in variance with what evolved, and paradoxically (or perhaps revealingly) the antithesis of

respecting mystery and a sense of not being-at-home. Of course nothing could satisfy those initial criteria and I eventually accepted the nature of the kind of investigation I was attempting here: accepting those limits lead me to the converse antipode of the phenomenological attitude, namely that the phenomenologist is engaged in self-discovery as much as exploration about the experiential world of others. In the interview situation two of us are incontrovertibly mixed and presented as interaffecting each other - in this sense I am the twenty-first participant, implicit within each co-researcher's transcript. This mode of phenomenology embraces the rigorous intersubjective investigation of specific life interactions, possibly yielding 'felt recognition' in the reader of what has hitherto remained unspoken in his or her lived experience. In this view phenomenology is never complete; if 'successful' it offers a felt edge of exploration, at least in the embodied reader. It is an on-going process, not a representation.

Methodological comportment: Acknowledging interaction

Perhaps a clearer explication of the present approach results from contrasting it with more familiar and concrete methodologies and assumptions although referencing those here is a further departure from a chronological account of the project. Such clarifications actually arose gradually over the various phases of the research. In defence of my decision to present methodological clarification here, I am acknowledging that in reality this write-up constitutes a *return* after completing the analysis, including decisions on methodology, and a second literature review. By briefly prefiguring such methodological controversies that explicitly arose later, I am skipping ahead in order to highlight aspects of my decisions, which were in fact still inchoate at this stage. However, there seems little gain and perhaps unnecessary frustration in dragging the reader through personal obfuscations that were later mostly resolved when I could instead present a more coherent outline of my perspective by pre-gathering that eventual clarity here.

One influence on my work needs explicit early introduction as it permeates my self-understanding and influences my understanding of phenomenology. The work of the philosopher Eugene Gendlin is evident as an undercurrent throughout this project. His therapeutic method of self-reflection, called 'Focusing' (1981), constitutes both my own embodied practice of self-reflection as well as the foundation of my practice as an existential therapist. Focusing is a phenomenological process of attending to the feeling of our bodies in

interaction with our life situations and concerns. Paying attention to concretely felt responses to life can bring new insights beyond our usual biases and self-knowledge and can also lead to shifts in our experiencing. This way of being formed the implicit basis of my interviewing stance during this research in that my responses to co-researchers were consistently guided by my 'felt sense' of our interviewing situation. Gendlin's philosophical 'process concepts', which go far beyond simply explicating the possibility of a process like Focusing, also influence my philosophical and theoretical proclivities, both manifestly and in ways too subtle to explicate in this text. There will be references to Gendlin's work but for a thorough philosophical introduction, please see *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning* (1962) or his recent manuscript, *A Process Model* (1997).

Jonathan Smith's recent edited volume, *Qualitative Psychology* (2003) presents descriptions of various approaches to qualitative research methodologies including a chapter on phenomenology by Amedeo and Barbro Giorgi (Ibid: 25-50). Reflecting their somewhat naïve Husserlian optimism, the Giorgis' method remains orthodox regarding assumptions of one's ability to grab essences from the shadow side of life and bring them towards the light, although they are careful to limit their epistemological claims to presentations rather than actualities of 'reality' (Ibid:32). Theirs is a method designed to 'discern the psychological essence of the phenomenon' based upon the 'general dictates of science' (Ibid:27). The Giorgis proclaim that the 'world of the participant is subjective, but the means of capturing that world on the part of the scientist is intersubjective or objective' (Ibid:45). In this they are suggesting that the researcher should, of course, abandon a 'purely biographical attitude' and, in their language, take on the psychological attitude of his or her professional role as researcher.

I prefer to reverse their stated emphasis in part due to my scepticism regarding the so-called 'role-based' rather than 'person-based' intuitions of the researcher. The researcher is always a person and inevitably affects the co-researcher as such, before a word is spoken, or a professional persona is manifested. To try to address this impact by 'professionalizing' the researcher seems naïve even if it were desirable. The impression is that the Giorgis adopt this view at least partially in order to placate the natural scientific community by adopting a semblance of controlled 'objectivity' in the phenomenological process. In contrast, I prefer to highlight the variable of the mutual impact of the researcher/co-researcher dyad, celebrating

the essential interactional foundation of research interviews, and acknowledging the fertile crossing of phenomenology and autobiography.

The current study is probably closer to an 'interpretive phenomenological analysis' as presented by Jonathan Smith and Mike Osborn (2003:51-80), with similarities to the approach advocated by Clark Moustakas (1994). Areas of agreement include, the emphasis on research as a 'dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in that process' where the researcher's 'own conceptions' are 'required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretive activity' (Smith and Osborn, 2003: 51). The world is brought in; including the co-researcher's world of slippery self-understanding in the presence of the researcher who is simultaneously engaged in both self-reflection and attempts at other-directed understanding. These 'selves' are thought to be already a mutual environment in which the individual understandings emerge elaborated by the shared situation – they are not assumed to be separate, with the occasional self-other leakage over an otherwise scientifically convenient gap. The researcher is engaged in the further hermeneutic tasks of exploring various understandings and positing possibilities for revealing deeper implicit meanings for both researcher and co-researcher in relation to the topic under study.

Moustakas' explicitly hermeneutic approach to phenomenology (1994) acknowledges that there is a direct relationship between our descriptions of our experiences and the underlying dynamics or structures that make those experiences possible and meaningful. If we impose preconceived structured methods onto the person's descriptions, we are as likely to distort as reveal not only the experiences as they are lived but the deeper human dynamics actively underlying them. Moustakas incorporates the person of the researcher explicitly into the approach and terms it 'heuristic research'. The heuristic researcher starts with a question that, ...has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographical, yet with virtually every question that matters there is also a social – perhaps even universal – significance (Ibid:17).

Clearly the present study is not solely a self-inquiry nor exclusively autobiographical. It is an attempt to work phenomenologically while acknowledging, rather than trying to downplay or control, the inevitable (and beneficial) autobiographical component of such a study. It is 'heuristic' in the sense of being a '... self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences' (Ibid:18), yet does not subscribe to the more radical individualistic trends in heuristic research nor the prioritising of the

individual account over the shared features of the experience as it emerges. The present study is more hermeneutic than heuristic in the willingness to acknowledge considerations of the current world socio-political setting, and references to philosophy and literature. As presented earlier, the closest match from the existing phenomenological literature to the ‘spirit’ of the present study is probably found in the writing of Max van Manen (2002, 2001).

In *Researching Lived Experience* (2001), van Manen begins with the strident premise that ‘The things we are trying to describe or interpret are not really things at all – our actual experiences are literally “nothing”. And yet, we seem to create some-thing when we use language in human science inquiry’ (Ibid: xviii). He suggests that one’s research method should be in harmony with one’s being, in my case including the abiding personal interests that lead me to the profession of psychotherapy. Therefore, there is a personal ‘tonal context’ underlying the concrete methodology described later. The ‘tone’ is a foundational ‘felt sense’: a general *feeling* that guides decisions regarding the approach and the understanding of what arises from that approach.

Even so, in my preliminary presentation of this chosen approach I appeal to other recognised phenomenologists in an attempt to justify my form of phenomenology. This is one of many contradictions in writing a phenomenological study that is simultaneously bound by academic conventions. The convention of citing other works in order to situate or even defend an exploration of lived experience is, in a sense, ‘anti-phenomenological’ in its move away from the ‘thing itself’ and its appeal to authority, status quo, previously accepted understandings. But in another sense, what could ever be anti-phenomenological? By appealing to the work of other researchers I am revealing the insecurity of following my own experience, the doubts and lack of confidence of arguing what may be an unconventional perspective to an institutional setting, with the implicit power dynamics of writing a thesis for an advanced degree. Simultaneously I am acknowledging the point of human history in which I live, our current traditions and understanding of self, science, and existence, hopefully in a reflexive rather than reifying way (which itself reveals specific biases and values which are alive in contemporary culture but have not always been so and may not be so again in the future).

These issues referred to above anticipate themes that are described later, providing a superficial instance of the tensions between a sensitivity for freedom and the need to be accepted, for example, or the desire to be true to oneself and the desire to belong, themes

strongly evidenced later in the co-researcher interviews. At the same time another researcher may not have experienced such tensions in his writing, or different tensions. These specific tensions and my naming of them arise because in the writing of this thesis I am also eliciting and incorporating my own ontic variants of themes of 'existential migration'. In a sense it may be that in this prelude I am doing little more than bringing into the foreground the subtle but essential reflexivity of phenomenological writing.

Objective of the Study

The study consists of an attempt to gather in-depth descriptions of experiences of voluntary migration¹² during tape-recorded semi-structured interviews. The guiding intention of the interview design is to arrive at descriptions of this experience that would 'ring true' for others who have chosen to leave home to live in a foreign place. This incorporates an attempt to develop an understanding of the original motivation for leaving and the themes evident in the diverse subsequent experiences of those who left by applying a phenomenological analysis to each transcript and an existential discussion of the results generally. This research is the first reported study to ground theories and speculations regarding voluntary migration in an actual rigorous account of various personal experiences. After outlining some possible general features of what I come to call 'existential migration', the discussion will return to the question of how the present approach might contrast with conventional psychological and psychoanalytic understandings of migration in order to highlight original aspects of the findings. Finally, possible practical implications, for example in psychotherapy, intercultural research, ramifications for further studies, and contributions to current understandings in other fields will be explored, in the process further delineating the concept of existential migration.

Interview design and recruitment

The practical study design emerged gradually as a means to elicit experiences of voluntary migration structured around the emerging dialogue with each co-researcher and the topic of the research study rather than around a comprehensive list of set questions. The thesis

¹² Migration refers to geographic mobility from one country to another where the second is *experienced as* significantly different from the first and for a sufficient duration that the person engages in daily activities and is challenged to undergo some adjustment to the new place.

supervisor, Professor Spinelli, encouraged me to keep the interview protocol as simple as possible in order to enable each interview to take its own course and reveal issues that might have been masked by a more comprehensive pre-set protocol. This allowed each co-researcher to speak for him or herself without a battery of questions structuring their responses. In the open interview format eventually agreed upon, I would have to depend upon my skills as a Focusing-informed existential-phenomenological therapist to follow the co-researcher's emerging dialogue and to seek clarifications, open up experiences, much as I would do with a client. In retrospect it is perhaps not too surprising that more than one co-researcher commented that the interview experience reminded them of a therapy session, both in terms of the depth of dialogue and in the perception that it had carried forward some understanding of their experience of leaving home.

The study was advertised throughout the School of Psychotherapy and Counselling with potential co-researchers asked to contact the researcher by email. Upon first contact the potential co-researcher was sent an information sheet describing the study (appendix 1). If they agreed to be interviewed (all co-researchers who received the initial information sheet expressed interest in the study and were eventually interviewed), a meeting was arranged at which time the interview procedure was fully explained and any questions answered. A consent form was read and signed by each co-researcher (appendix2).

It is interesting to note that there was no difficulty in recruiting for this study. In fact there were so many volunteers that the notices had to be removed shortly after being displayed. Many co-researchers were recruited beyond the college through word of mouth of previous co-researchers who had found the experience meaningful, even inspiring. The popularity of the topic certainly offers the impression that there is an unmet need to explore this whole arena of intercultural migratory experience. Co-researcher selection was based upon the following guidelines:

1. Co-researchers in the study should have been away from home longer than one year and be either recently returned home or still in a foreign place. They should define their leaving home as *voluntary*, as opposed to involuntary exile or forced migration. There is an assumption that individuals who have spent at least a year away from home or who have attempted to return home and left again, will be more aware of their feelings regarding their leaving and are more likely to have had experiences that

encourage reflection upon the meaning of home. Since I was initiating this study with few concrete preconceptions and little evidence to support my belief that there was *actually* something to discuss in these questions, I at least wanted to find co-researchers who would be likely to be somewhat lucid regarding their experiences, even if they were entirely different than my own.

2. Some co-researchers should have experience of attempting to relocate home again or at least occasional visits home, as I assumed that such experiences of return would highlight implicit aspects of the original motivation to leave as well as the unintentional consequences of choosing to leave. This assumption was confirmed to some extent though attempts at returning home were less elucidating regarding the phenomenon of leaving than I had expected.
3. Co-researchers should be willing to engage in a study that may be personally meaningful and emotionally engaging and have the personal resources and social networks to support this process. It was made clear that the researcher was not able to provide on-going support to co-researchers, but many co-researchers were in psychotherapeutic relationships or training and all were able to use their interview experiences positively. This condition of participation was an ethical consideration although I was also prepared for interviews that were wholly positive or not especially engaging at all. I was thrown into the vast unknown of those first few interviews and relieved when significant phenomena began to emerge consistently.
4. Co-researchers must be familiar with and have access to email, or willing to learn to use email in order to participate in an on-going email discussion list. This turned out to be more difficult to sustain and email contact eventually was reduced to emailing corrected transcripts to co-researchers for verification and comment.
5. Though co-researchers were mostly recruited from a school of psychotherapy, or through connections with previous co-researchers, this was expected to be a strength of the study more than a potential sampling issue. Without exception, co-researchers were attracted to the study because they had already spent some time reflecting upon their experiences; consequently the interview dialogues were unusually deep in their subject matter, subtly nuanced and thoughtful. Though the co-researchers may represent a particular sub-population, the assumption is that they are unusual more in their ability to describe their experiences in depth than for any indication that their experiences are not representative of voluntary migration. This assumption requires further verification through replication although there is no obvious indication that co-

researcher experiences constitute a unique sub-set and since the study points toward the existential dimension, biographical diversity may be less significant than commonality. Though both are important and the tension between the two levels, ontic and ontological, is sustained throughout the project.

The interviews were originally attracting more applications from females than males so I specifically sought interested males for the last two interviews. In the end there were twenty co-researchers, five of whom were men. They ranged in age from nineteen to fifty-eight years old, with the majority of co-researchers in their early to mid thirties. The original home countries included the United Kingdom (England and Scotland taken as separate cultures), Germany, Holland, the former Yugoslavian states, Australia, Greece, Poland, Ireland, the United States, Argentina, Columbia, Latvia, Sri Lanka, and France. This information is provided for interest only, as there was no assumption, nor later indication, that gender, age, or originating culture had a *significant* impact upon emergent themes, though these factors presumably impacted meaningfully within the specifics of personal narratives.

The Experience of Interviewing

Rigour in the co-created phenomenological interview is demonstrated by the intention to explicate and remain aware of, so far as possible, the researcher's preconceptions and contribution to the interviews. Lowes and Prowse (2001) maintain a Heideggerian stance by acknowledging that both co-researchers and researcher are already in the world and interpreting that world, and this is impossible to bracket (or *fully* explicate). The researcher's preconceptions and interests are thereby inextricably bound in the generation of 'data'. This acknowledges that every interview response incorporates the speaker's interpretation of the previous statement, thus both researcher and co-researcher experiences are reflected in the transcript. If the researcher is engaged in a study of a topic that is of personal relevance and interest (as it is often argued should be the case in phenomenological research) then it is unrealistic if not arrogant to assume that the researcher can bracket this during the study. An emphasis on 'connection' is especially important if the topic is emotionally engaging and attempts at bracketing might be misconstrued as coldness, lack of empathy, or experimental distance. In place of attempted eradication, it is good practice to chronicle the researcher's preconceptions, experiences, and views, not only during the interview stage, as I did, but also during the analysis stage, which I attempted while living alone in Budapest (see later

section). During this self-reflection my preconceptions changed and new impressions emerged. However, it should also be noted that a Heideggerian approach to interviewing does not mean merger between the two people, there remains a genuine interest in the other, *their* perspective, experiences, and *their* way of being-in-the-world. Simply, there exists no presupposition that individual being can be explored in any pure form, without the interaction of being and world, on both sides.

Interviewing cross-culturally¹³, as was evident in this study, may present some dilemmas (Mullings, 1999). For example, the traditional interview considerations contrast being an 'insider' against being an 'outsider'. Insiders are researchers who study a group to which they belong, and supposedly therefore have an advantage because they are able to use their knowledge of the group to gain intimate insights. Outsiders, by contrast, can supposedly be more objective and might be confided in by virtue of their lack of association with the group being studied. However, these binaries freeze the positions of the interviewer and interviewee while being an insider or outsider is a dynamic that can change over and over again during the course of an interview, depending upon the facet of the experience coming to light. In my research, being an 'insider' in terms of voluntary migration was addressed explicitly by interviewees as an advantage, a symptom of the lack of discourse about their experiences of migration and gratitude for a rare opportunity for in-depth discussion. However, with each co-researcher there were issues on which, by virtue of my gender, home culture, values, etc. I was an outsider listening for the experience as it was lived from their side. During the interviews, a degree of trust and openness was engendered and we often found 'positional spaces' that were not based upon identifiable indicators of in and out-groupings. Working phenomenologically supported the development of these complimentary positionalities by prioritising the interviewee's understandings while acknowledging our felt inter-connections.

In writing up and interpreting the research study, power is almost uniformly invested in the researcher. The researcher decides what quotes to use to support their argument, and what aspects of the interview are not emphasised. The theoretical or philosophical frameworks used to explore the implications of the study are also chosen by the researcher, influenced by the researcher's reading and own life experience. One way of addressing this is for the

¹³ What constitutes one's culture is open to question in this case – does being a voluntary migrant, or 'existential migrant', constitute as significant a part of one's culture, one's constituting identity, as country of origin? Later comments suggest that this may not be too far-fetched an idea.

researcher to engage in a reflexive attitude of self-disclosure in the text, which I attempt to do. I have also sought co-researcher verification at all stages.

This section of the write-up combines what is traditionally labelled 'methodology' and 'results'. In a phenomenological study of the type I am attempting, it does not make obvious sense to separate one's approach from the subsequent on-going responses of co-researchers. Both remain interconnected and in constant interaction during the entire research phase. In describing what I actually *did* with co-researchers I must also refer to their reaction in order to convey the active coming into being of the study. It is often in the response to an intervention (question, clarification, contradiction...) that the intention and context of my intervention is clarified. In this way there is mutual clarification which undoubtedly impacts my phrasings in the next interview and so on...

Instigating the study from an origin of personal intuition rather than a conceptual basis within existing research discourse introduced a growing uncertainty as I approached the first interview. In the opening few minutes I might discover that either my questions were purely autobiographical and did not engage other voluntary migrants, or that indeed this is a fruitful research topic into untapped human experience. Into the mutual anxiety of the first interview, I asked 'Nina'¹⁴ the opening question ('Can you tell me about the circumstances of your leaving home?'), ambiguous and ephemeral as it was, and sensed my growing excitement when she responded with little hesitation,

Um, yes, I've been thinking about this question. What I always thought was the reason I left home was because I didn't get space to develop myself in terms of the context I was in. I had to, I was, friends and (inaudible...) expected me to be a certain way. But if I think back, it probably was more, I never really felt at home in my birthplace... (Nina:1)

Nina's response encouraged me that the lived experience of leaving home comprised a continuing concern to *at least* one other person, not only me. It suggested that motivations for leaving might be informed by a need for personal space, impinging expectations, and a ubiquitous sense of not really feeling at home in the original 'home'. These were all issues that had felt resonance for me, and eventually were to be repeatedly confirmed. Moreover, by the third interview I felt confident that an unexplored mystery was unfolding; patterns and

¹⁴ In the text and appendix all co-researchers' names and identifying information have been disguised and the country of origin omitted except where the co-researcher requested its inclusion. In one case, to further disguise identities, a fictitious participant, 'Francios', was invented to cross specific aspects of two co-researchers to further preclude accidental identification.

themes and dilemmas, most of which I could relate to personally though many of which I had not previously elucidated for myself began to emerge. That long-incubated embryonic sense that began to stalk my awareness during those two weeks in Asia was being substantiated. There was indeed *something* inscrutable and inherent within this process of leaving home; a mystery revealed by its cogent capacity to evoke profound and conflicting affective responses.

Each interview generated a coherent biographical narrative that I needed to follow and comprehend in order to invite the clarifying and deepening explorations that would take us beyond what was easily recounted. The fact that I am also a voluntary migrant, evident in my Canadian accent, was commented upon as ‘helpful’ in opening up and discussing difficult experiences because my perceived similarity of experience rendered an assumption of increased understanding. Many co-researchers expressed their reluctance to reveal formative aspects of their experiences of leaving and their on-going predicaments regarding ‘home’ to anyone who hadn’t had a similar life experience.

As each question was asked, the interviewee/co-researcher was given as much time as necessary to answer in any way he or she desired. In turn I explored these responses in a phenomenological manner¹⁵, similar to an existential-phenomenological psychotherapy session (see Cooper, 2003, for descriptions of this approach). The duration of the interview was from one to two hours, with most interviews lasting approximately an hour and a half. The interviews were transcribed professionally, resulting in transcripts of 14-20 pages of dialogue each. The immense amount of generated data was likely due in part to the open design of the interview, allowing the co-researchers to explicate their own stories, but I also perceive the transcript length as a comment on the unacknowledged significance of the process of voluntary migration and the felt need to reconstruct the process in an explicitly dialogic narrative.

Examples of Interactions

¹⁵ Including guiding principles of bracketing my conscious assumptions, not presuming what content was central and what was ancillary (i.e. horizontalisation), asking naïve rather than theory-bound questions (descriptive rather than interpretive), and being guided by the unfolding dialogue as it developed between us. Hopefully this attitude has been adequately presented in the text up to now.

The final protocol (appendix 3) included the following questions, asked explicitly in this set order unless the co-researcher spontaneously began to address a question before it was asked (as happened on more than one occasion). In that case I would prioritise the interviewee's narrative order rather than my own:

1. a. Could you begin by relating the circumstances of your leaving home?
b. As you reflect back to when you left home, why do you think you *really* left your home?
2. a. When you reflect upon the time since leaving home, what's it been like for you?
b. Do you think about returning home?
3. What does it feel like for you to talk about these things?

The first question was designed to elicit an open-ended description of the process of leaving home, as each person conceptualised that. Responses to this question frequently expanded to take up half the interview time. It was not uncommon for co-researchers to begin by talking about the first time they left home, for example leaving for university, and then to sketch their subsequent comings and goings to the present. As interviewer, I did little more at this stage than check I'd understood the synopsis by summarising and reflecting back, or by picking up on one aspect of the story for clarification, for example 'So when you were at school as you were just describing, were you living at home at that time?' These paraphrasings, summaries, and requests for clarification were enough to encourage the co-researcher to fill in much of the detail of the circumstances around leaving home, often resulting in a 'deepening' of affect in the narration. This first question also generated creative imagery depicting the interviewee's early environment, family circumstances, and social habitat.

My interventions were inevitably informed by my interest in this topic, so although my statements and requests followed directly from the co-researcher's discourse, they were doubtless already skewed to elicit information of relevance to the general topic of the study. For example, at the beginning of her interview, one of the co-researchers, 'Christine', was talking about the various factors influencing her decision to study in England rather than closer to her native country. She mentions her father's ethnicity, the courses on offer at the English university, many things that might be of interest if pursued. However, it is the following statement that I pick up on, 'And so the decision came probably through different factors, one of them being I didn't feel very at home at school, I didn't like the environment so I didn't want to do what the majority of people were doing...' In response I ask 'So around the age of 17, *something* was going on that you didn't quite feel at home?' This

encourages the co-researcher to focus in on those experiences that pre-dated her leaving and could give information about the underlying motives for it. In this way the interview was very much a co-construction, a meeting of co-researcher story and researcher interest. It is also worth acknowledging my specific use of language. In all interventions, conditional and tentative language was used, with specific use of *pointing* words like ‘something’ or phrases like ‘something about that...’ This encourages the co-researcher to delve further into the unreflected or unspecified aspect of what they have just said. It points *down into*, rather than *onwards away-from*. In the above example, rather than selecting a facet of the statement to expand upon, (‘can you name the other factors that influenced that decision?’) I employ the word ‘something’ to implicitly invite the co-researcher to find her own opening into what may lie just beyond the edge of what she has previously been able to say about this experience. This proved an effective form of dialogue for eliciting descriptions that were atypically fundamental in meaning and revealing to both parties. This form of interaction is based upon existential-phenomenological psychotherapy and the previously mentioned method of experiential listening and self-reflection called Focusing (Gendlin, 1981). The movement in self-understanding supported by this style of interaction was evident when the question was asked again after a period of dialogue (Question 1 part b), ‘why do you think you *really* left home?’ In response to this second asking, Eva, like many co-researchers, does not want her motivations for leaving reduced to one fixed explication, however she exhibits an affective shift that many co-researchers experienced by now moving from recounting superficial biographical details to haltingly presenting the unknown edge of more personally experienced urges,

P40 – Well, it may have been a kind of intellectual answer, but ah, but there was something going on, as I said, on this less articulated level, that as I think about it now and knowing myself the way I do now, knowing something about myself that I didn’t know then, I think it was a way of compensating, well it’s not the only reason, it’s one of the reasons, a way of compensating for the lack, lack of something. I’m not really sure what that something is, but I felt deficient in some ways, very separate from the world of others, disconnected, and there was a lack in the emotional sense, in the emotional sphere of my life, there was a lack of something. That connection that would make my being with other people meaningful to me ... Because if I had had, let’s say... fulfilling connections with others that would make me feel solid enough, fulfilled enough and happy enough as I was, maybe I wouldn’t have had that desperate need to go out there and look and search for something else, if that makes sense? So that could be part of it.

Or another response, from Peter, when asked why he feels he *really* left home:

P36 – (pause) I think I would have gone mad (Laughs). I can't imagine not, I don't know. I think I always imagined it would happen, I go back to the village and I'd drop in and see people who'd just stayed there, and stayed in that village and they've all lived there, I never, ever, ever thought that I would do that ever. I always thought that I would leave at some point. Part of it was beyond my choice really, it was just inevitable.

The second set question of the interview protocol is also purposefully vague and general. It concerns an overall review of the time since leaving home, 'When you reflect upon the time since leaving home, what's it been like for you?' Co-researchers often used this portion of the interview to convey, in some detail, their various experiences, usually highlighting the depth of the pain of leaving and being away as well as the immensely positive aspects of their choice. For example, Peter's response to being asked how it's been for him since leaving:

P41 – Much happier (Laughs.). So much happier, and it's what I always fantasised about, I supposed, as a forlorn child or a teenager, that when I grew up it will be better, I will be freer strangely... People imagine their childhood as being the sort of freer time, but I was so careworn as young Particularly as a teenager, so I just thought I would [be] kind of much more independent, so it has been, again a sort of release really.

In this excerpt we hear the decision to leave as a positive long-awaited response to difficult childhood situations, difficulties that could be taken *prima facie* as evidence for psychoanalytic interpretations but which transpire as significantly more complex than existing theories allow. Other responses incorporate descriptions of positive aspects of leaving while also acknowledging intricate and subtle indicators of loss, for example, Renata:

R73 – I mean, I think there are a lot of you know, pay-offs... but I feel that, not having home is difficult, and you know ... I feel comfortable because I'm in the company of strangers, and I'm a stranger myself, but then on the other hand, there is this whole element which you are taking for granted when you are at home, and which functions without you having to do anything about it ... I think it's about having this network of friends, family, relatives, all this army of people you met throughout your childhood and school years and university years, which existed even if you haven't really been in contact with them, when they were there, and not having them around you is sometimes quite difficult, I found, because you know, in fact you don't want to really communicate with someone, you just want the feeling to be a part of it.

In contrast to the above responses, which evidence the positive while taking some account of the concomitant sense of loss, some co-researchers emphasised the difficult experiences since leaving, for example, regret and loneliness (though interestingly even these co-researchers would make the same choice again), for example Inez:

P61 – At times I've felt I wanted to go back, it's not easy for me to live here. And I felt I paid for having left the man who wanted to give me everything. I see that man in a different light now. Not in a judgmental way but, I destroyed him when I said I'm not going back. And it makes me realise that people have loved me, but I don't think I will go back. I can't cope with this sort of family ... I just can't.

In Inez's response we hear some of the tragic experience of being 'caught' between the difficult decision to leave home and live in a foreign place, and the perceived impossibility of return. The emotional intensity of recognising the life left unlived was conflated in some cases with a sense of exile, and was acknowledged in all but one interview. The second part of that question 'Do you think about returning home?' was designed to gauge where the person was in reference, not only to their original decision to leave, but also in terms of their imagined future. Again, the responses were diverse and unexpectedly emotional. Without exception each co-researcher had given this substantial thought, with some having unsuccessfully attempted to return, some imagining a return or in the process of navigating their return, while for others it was clear they would never go back. But for everyone it was an issue, for some even a *threat*. Below are a few responses to the question 'Do you think about returning home?'

Sarah, P29 – Yeah. A lot. Short term. (we laugh knowingly)... But then again if you said to me you'd be living in London for the next ten years, I'd baulk at that as well, I wouldn't want that either. I still hold this image of being a perpetual traveller ... the other thing that comes up that I've been thinking of is, is that it's kind of like that England is more complicated, a more complicated culture. And sometimes if I went home, that would be easy and wonderful, but there's something wrong with easy and wonderful... So anyway, I have this image that every now and then I think of the sunset and twilight and a beautiful sunny day on the beach, and the water, and the people, you know, a wonderful sensuous place. Something about that's easy, and it's got to be complicated, tough.

Graciella, P36 – ... that's my question for the last ten years. That's MY question. My calling, my mantra. I don't think about it. It's always there but I don't think about it. (pause) ... I think [in reference to returning home] oh it would be really nice to have someone who we speak the same language, tell me the same things my father used to tell me, or I could tell him the words my mother used to tell me when I was little.

Marta, P68-69 – Hmmm. I bet everybody cries here? I bet everybody cries at this? ... Do they? But now I feel I couldn't do this to myself again. What I did then... I haven't got a map - who would I be? I don't even speak the language anymore (emotional). It's a very small place [at home], it's a nice life [there]....

Martin, P55 – From my perspective today, I think I will never go back to live there. I might go back for some periods of time knowing that I have the freedom to leave, but not going, moving for good. No way.

The last question, ‘What does it feel like for you to talk about these things?’ was initially designed as an entry into a period of Focusing. The intention was that I¹⁶ would guide the co-researcher in a short session of paying explicit attention to their bodily felt experience of the interview. In some cases a Focusing-like period of self-reflection upon feelings did occur at this point. However, it quickly became clear that to explicitly incorporate even a brief Focusing session at the end of such an evocative interview would prolong the experience by at least another half hour. Since the ‘hour-long’ interviews were already lasting 1 ½ to 2 hours, I felt that this was too arduous. Nonetheless, this last question elicited some of the most revealing information regarding the depth of feeling around the topic of leaving home. This depth seems to challenge the more cursory accounts of voluntary migration in the literature, where it is suggested that choosing to leave is unproblematic at least in comparison to other forms of migration. Also, these responses overtly attest to the positive impact of having the opportunity to discuss what has remained for most a solitary choice, with little or no affirmation of its personal, and I would argue existential, profundity. It seems to suggest that there is a role for therapeutic sessions incorporating phenomenological exploration of the experiences of ‘existential migration’. In order to prefigure Chapter 4 and the move into a more evocative discussion of emergent themes, below I offer a number of interviewee samples exemplifying responses to the question, ‘What does it feel like for you to talk about these things?’

Sarah, P31-6 – I think about it all the time actually... I do feel quite shaky and quite raw, like you know, yeah, quite unstable or shaky, not in a dramatic way but that’s how I feel now... sometimes when I feel very very alienated here, I think (laughs) ...I’m in exile... I feel like I might go and bawl my eyes out now, I feel quite teary...

Eva, P79 – Um, well it’s quite inspiring. I feel it is initiating something. And it wasn’t until I started talking and reflecting on my reasons for leaving that it’s come together for me. So, I felt excited, not very emotional, more excited because I realised one thing or two, and it’s quite something for me, also it might be more emotional and I don’t know if it’s because I’ve closed myself off, or decided I’m not going to go into that now, so it’s yes, more excited than sad or whatever ... I feel very very comfortable. Humm. I feel that in the middle. Just comfortable. No tension. A kind of vibrating in a very gentle way, like the sea on a hot day, yes. No big waves. That feels OK.

Anna, P48 – Well, I selected what I would say, in an interview, to keep it to a level, but there were points that were hitting me, deeply, like oops, and then dive out, and that was what I found very useful for today and that is what I found very difficult.

¹⁶ I am certified to teach Focusing and experienced in guiding beginners in this process. Some of the co-researchers also had some knowledge of Focusing.

Patricia, P35 – (pause) Well, it felt comfortable. I didn't expect it to be ... I was worried about being made to intellectualize things a lot ... I like the way that you sort of went deeper and deeper. To really look at something ... because I don't think that I've really verbalised that before ... That's a bit frightening you know, very frightening to actually say that was what I was afraid of.

Martin, P63 – It's quite interesting to talk about it from that point of view, because actually in my therapy as well, I have never actually focused on leaving home, as such ... not from this point of view, so it's very, it's not just interesting it's made some new connections for me about how things happen. I think we've managed to go quite deep in all things for me, probably in some sense as deep as I could go at the moment. It feels a bit sort of, loaded the whole thing, but it's good to talk about it, good to think about it and sort of get more of the whole picture.

Inez, P80 – [Pause] I never had the opportunity to put all this together, especially the circumstances, the transition, because that's the transition, and that's one of my issues in my course. The language of transition, which is never anywhere, this language, the shift, the sudden shift ... It's impossible to put into language I suppose ... I think you manage very well to get to the point, to the core of my experience. It's not easy to tell it. So thanks. ... I feel safe, ... I learned many things that perhaps were in me, ... and I thank you for that.

Peter, P55 – It's nice to really talk about it in a sort of condensed period of time, you know the year, and the dates, the chronological order, about various themes and issues ... I don't often have a chance to sort of, sit down and talk about things in such depth.... It was sad... I don't find it upsetting ... I find it emotional. I don't find it joyous either; I find it a fascinating conversation.

Marta, P93-6 – It feels great. It feels overwhelming, (emotional) but it also feels liberating because why have I not thought this before? ... It actually feels much better. ... Yes, it's soothing actually.

Carl, P45 – There was a time earlier on ... I was trying to say something and all that was actually coming up was emotion, it was quite powerful in a sense. Yes, it's painful, that's the best way to put it ... but yes, I find it awfully painful and there's times when I do actually, actively make myself cry about it, ... But yes, it's painful because very often it feels as if it's unnecessary, if that makes sense?

Having offered a description of the interviewing process, with examples of interviewee responses, the next chapter will comprise discussion of the mode of analysis followed by concrete examples of this analysis in practice. After clarifying what constitutes the analysis phase, I will return in Chapter 4 to the co-researchers' narratives as thematised through the process of the intervening analysis.

Chapter 3

Analysis and Assumptions

Assumptions regarding the style of analysis

During the analysis phase of the research project, the methodology of phenomenology itself begins to emerge as another manifestation of the general topic of migration and home. Like each co-researcher, the phenomenological researcher has left the known, his home, and embarked upon a journey into unknown territory, perhaps settling briefly, yet yearning for a deep connection, a conclusion that never comes and, in some cases, trying to accept that. As a phenomenological account, this project is a venture into the unfathomable, away from the known concepts and sustaining certainties of science or theory, at best clearing a source for a path that leads a little further on, or a little further astray.

Max van Manen (referred to earlier) depicts phenomenology as an experience of humility and depth. I would like to add to this that it might also be a transitory experience. Phenomenological ‘essences’ might be more like waves that arise on the ocean than boxes that we stumble upon in the dark. Though the interviews I present are permanently fixed by print and audio, they are the result of what arises between two specific people at a specific convergence in our lives. At that temporal intersection the two of us meld a shared situation, constituting the environment in which we both further experienced our interaction. The interviews generate transcripts that remain metaphoric accounts, pointing back to the lived experiences being narrated as well as to the possibilities and limits of our specific interaction. By ‘metaphoric’ I mean that language *points* rather than *fixes* – a word, in its pointing directly to an aspect of experience affects that experience, shapes it, but the experience simultaneously remains more than just the words, without which the words themselves would have no meaning in their situational usage. There are many ways, not just one way, to express something, to ‘point’ at something eager to enter saying, but the pointing must be right enough to touch what it refers to directly – not just any saying will be meaningful. An experiential shift tells us what is meaningful and what is not, at any moment. The interviews were guided by my valuing of such experiential ‘carrying forward’, facilitating new shifts in understanding for the co-researchers. Again, this experiential perspective on phenomenology

betrays my indebtedness to the process philosophy of Eugene Gendlin (see especially Gendlin, 1973, 1977).

As previously stated, an implication of this understanding is that I assume the meanings that were generated *during the interviews* may have arisen differently with another researcher. The validity of what did arise on these occasions can be seen in the co-researchers' accounts of 'movement' during the interview. Without exception¹⁷, each person experienced a shift in the meaning of his or her understanding of leaving home. Though each person lived their self-understandings further, each did not commence the interview with the same initial self-understanding, suggesting that taken cumulatively, these interviews may serve to elucidate the different dimensions of 'existential migration'¹⁸ as a dynamic process.

As is increasingly apparent, along with Gendlin's philosophy, Van Manen's phenomenology is taken as a convenient gathering point for the salient sensibilities inherent within my approach: namely an interweaving and inter-affecting of hermeneutics and intersubjective heuristics, with the intention of evoking the reader's felt response. Van Manen reminds us that in phenomenological research, writing is our method and if research writing is conceived as a *reporting* process rather than a *poetic* one, imbued with values of methodological objectivity, abstract systematising, and the conservative respectability of 'hard' science, we may lose the nuanced fecundity of qualitative insight. 'Method can become a 'law' and the work sterile, method can kill a piece of qualitative research' (van Manen, 1997:125). This doesn't mean that a phenomenological text should become so gaudy that it distracts attention onto the written page itself and away from the lived experience being described. The text should point repeatedly in order to let something 'shine through' (Ibid: 130). That is the intention of this study, following in the vein of evocative and expressive approaches to phenomenology as described by Todres (1998), and Willis et. al. (2001), with a focus on immediacy and aliveness, an instance of re-living rather than re-reporting.

¹⁷ I exclude from this comment the one co-researcher who did not fit into the category of 'voluntary migrant' since he was brought to a foreign land (England) by his parents at the age of five. He was invited to participate without full knowledge of his biographical circumstances, which emerged during the interview. However, his experience serves as a useful foil to the experiences of the other nineteen who more clearly exhibit aspects of the phenomenon of 'existential migration'.

¹⁸ I will endeavour to avoid any implication of a 'phase or stage theory' of existential migration and while I will on occasion use the term 'existential migrant' this is a *useful fiction*, a shorthand, and not to be confused with a classificatory term, or worse, a diagnostic label. The rationale for these limitations will be discussed later.

Transcript Analysis

My guiding intention during the analysis phase is to reduce the overwhelming volume of data inherent in the transcripts to manageable units and themes that will fulfil expectations of sensitive descriptive transposition rather than abstract speculative interpretation. I have endeavoured to remain as close as possible to the co-researchers' own accounts for as long as possible through the stages of increasing generalisability. This is in contrast to the approach advocated by the Giorgis (2003, referred to earlier), which strikes me as prematurely abstract in its move, at an initial phase of analysis, from the co-researcher's own language into the slightly oppressive third person of generalised psychology. The Giorgis follow a four-stage process beginning with a careful reading of the description (interview transcript in the present case), followed by the formation of meaning units from a careful re-reading of the transcripts. It is acknowledged that the meaning units do not exist as such, but are constituted by the attitude of the researcher and would vary from researcher to researcher. This is not of crucial importance to the Giorgis since what matters is 'how the meaning units are transformed, not their size or their comparison with other researchers' (Ibid:33). The aim of the transformation stage is to reveal the psychologically implicit, or unarticulated facets of the experience and to generalise them so that they are not so situation-specific. This culminates in the final phase, where the 'essential structure' of the experience is derived from the transformations and presented in psychological language.

In deviation from the above, the following analysis of transcripts merges, hopefully in a coherent manner, methods consisting of adaptations of various recognized phenomenological orientations (Stevick, 1971; Colaizzi, 1973; Keen, 1975; Moustakas, 1994; c.f. Moustakas, 1994; as well as Smith and Osborn, 2003) but informed by the more expressive and evocative approach advocated by van Manen (1997). My intended outcome from this style of analysis is detailed descriptions retaining some essence of the individual's voice while facilitating comparison across individuals at a modest level of abstraction. In so doing I perceive that aspects of the common existential dimension may be revealed by creatively overlapping and combining the slightly obscured but still present remnants of the biographical.

The following steps of analysis were carried out while I was on 'sabbatical' in Budapest for three months. The decision to relocate to a foreign place and live there alone had two motivations: firstly, a desire to re-sensitise myself to the experience of being in a foreign

place and to chronicle that experience while simultaneously working with the co-researchers' similar experiences, and secondly, to facilitate a space where I could devote my time exclusively to the PhD analysis, which had been on-going on a part-time basis previously. On both accounts, the intention was, as Moustakas puts it, to immerse myself in the experience, at a lived level as well as in my concentration on the material. The effect of this relocation will be documented briefly later.

Step one: Immersion and incubation (from Moustakas's heuristic approach, 1994). The professionally transcribed interviews¹⁹ were re-read while listening to the original audio recordings of the interviews in order to correct and amend the transcripts. There were technical difficulties with some of the recordings where verbatim was inaudible, these are signified in the transcripts by [inaudible] or [...]. I compared the transcripts to the recordings as quickly as possible after the interviews so that inaudible sections could be filled in by my recollection of the interview, at least broadly, if not word for word. It was felt that none of the main points made by co-researchers were lost or obscured significantly by the technical difficulties. After the close and detailed reading of each transcript, each was then emailed back to the co-researcher to be checked and commented upon. Few co-researchers offered corrections, and some indicated a reluctance to re-read the interview at all. When all twenty interviews were transcribed, checked with the tape and corrected, emailed to the co-researcher and returned, the analysis moved onto the second step. Step two onwards was carried out in Budapest.

Step Two: I re-read each transcript in its entirety and then again, line-by-line read more closely for explicit 'meaning units'. In this way each possible meaning unit was contextualised within the fundamental meanings of the interview as a whole. Each sentence was interrogated as to what it might reveal about the co-researcher's experience. The reading was guided by my felt sense of when a meaning shifted for the individual, even subtly, and this shift in meaning was contemplated through my understanding of the entire transcript and my memory of our interaction. At this point there was caution about leaving out information that appeared idiosyncratic or not especially linked with the topic under exploration. As the analysis progressed and it became clear what meanings were emerging, it was possible to be

¹⁹ As mentioned previously, I personally transcribed the first two interviews in order to appreciate the difficulties of this stage of the transcript preparation.

slightly more discerning regarding what could be excluded at this stage, although it was also true that previously excluded meanings were, on occasion, *retrieved* when it seemed that other co-researchers might be expressing something similar. It was also at this stage that any vestigial hopes of being comprehensive were discarded and I acquiesced to the human limitations of such a study²⁰.

However, the tendency at this stage continued to be inclusive. Each meaning unit was numbered under the heading that encompassed it, either the question it was in response to, or a general topic that it was an instance of. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions (too vague to be made sense of) were eliminated after repeated confirmations that they made no inherent contribution to the individual's meaning. Each transcript was analysed through all the stages, up to the listing of themes, before turning to the next transcript. I chose this procedure rather than, for example, completing the meaning unit phase for all 20 co-researchers and then moving on to the next phase of analysis for all 20, because the analysis entailed entering an individual world in some detail and to complete that process through all the phases enabled me to remain immersed in the individual's intricate presentation and inimitable meanings. Again, initial transcripts were analysed in a more conservative way than those that were worked with later on. The analysis of later transcripts was inevitably informed by all the previous analyses, enabling more accurate discernment of which expressions were constituent for understanding the experience, individually and generally, while admitting the possibility of error and oversight. For example, from Eva's transcript we see the following construction of meaning units:

²⁰ From this one set of transcripts there might emerge myriad 'outcomes' just by re-positioning my reading even slightly (not to mention the variance that would arise from another researcher's reading).

Transcript:

Eva, P2 – Right, I'd have to say that the circumstances seem to have been prepared over a period of a couple of years at least. One year before graduating from the university, in '80, '81, the idea of leaving the country, I got the idea at least a year before I really actually left the country, and I was in the third year and I spent my holiday in the UK, met other people, and really felt very resistant at that point to come back to my country, but I knew I had one more year to complete, so I did come back to finish my final year of studies. And I spent the whole year planning and getting ready emotionally to leave the country. So, it's not something that happened overnight. It was planned and fully expected, and I just couldn't wait to leave the country for various reasons, and the actual circumstances were, as soon as I graduated there were no jobs for me, so the prospects of getting employment, a job, it really wasn't very good, and although I was in a relationship I decided, well, it's getting very difficult to find [inaudible], and also there were difficulties at home. So it was a way of getting away from all the difficulties related to living and in the family. I left the country on 7 July, which was a very memorable day, 1981, and I just didn't care about anything, what I was leaving behind, so, yes, that's all I can say for the moment.

Meaning Units:

The circumstances of leaving home:

1. I prepared to leave over at least a couple of years.
2. I got the idea at least a year before actually leaving, in my second last year of study.
3. I had spent a holiday in the UK and met people but had to return for my final year at university.
4. I spent the last year planning to leave as soon as I graduated, I couldn't wait.
5. Leaving was a way of getting away from a lot of difficulties at home.
6. I still remember the day I left, the date and I didn't care about anything I was leaving behind.

It is obvious here that although information is unavoidably excluded, the meaning units remain closely tied to the original language of the co-researcher, in the first person. One intention at this phase is to reduce the transcript to a more manageable length, twenty transcripts of approximately twenty or more pages each was insurmountable given the time constraints and frame of reference of the current study. This is a different process than the one described by the Giorgis, in which they moved immediately from the transcript to third person generalised descriptions of the experience. I had a number of reservations regarding generalising into the third person at such a preliminary level of analysis. Paramount among these was the immanent loss of the co-researcher's voice and its evocative potential to re-call the interview presence for me. In addition, I was concerned that details would be minimised before I could discern whether they would be significant or not. Transforming the whole transcript into numbered meaning units was guided by my feeling of having gathered all the important aspects from each 'section' of the interview. As mentioned previously, this 'felt sense-informed' means of proceeding was an important feature of the analysis, and compatible with the overall evocative/expressive emphasis of the study.

Step Three: This step involved re-reading the meaning units and 'clustering' them according to similar topics. This step was pre-thematic. The clusters could not yet be called 'themes' as they were not necessarily named but just grouped according to stated and 'felt' similarity. This clustering included sensitivity to the original context so that the 'same' expression at different points was not necessarily assumed to be expressing the same meaning, and thus a 'similar' expression could be clustered in multiple places. Again, the clustering of meaning units and their subsequent thematising blurred as more transcripts were analysed and there was a growing familiarity with the process. However, this clustering step was maintained for various reasons; as a review of the meaning unit step, a chance to consolidate some meaning units together, and a chance to see themes begin to emerge while remaining still with the co-researcher's language, in the first person. During this step, the researcher's voice was lost in its explicit appearance in the transcripts in that the questions and requests for clarification that lead to certain meaning units were no longer explicitly incorporated. For example, again, the beginning of Eva's transcript which we saw earlier:

Meaning Units:

The circumstances of leaving home:

1. I prepared to leave over at least a couple years.
2. I got the idea at least a year before actually leaving, in my second last year of study.
3. I had spent a holiday in the UK and met people but had to return for my final year at university.
4. I spent the last year planning to leave as soon as I graduated, I couldn't wait.
5. Leaving was a way of getting away from a lot of difficulties at home.
6. I still remember the day I left, the date and I didn't care about anything I was leaving behind.

Clusters:

Preparation for leaving

1. I prepared over a couple years to leave for England as soon as I graduated.
2. I read English authors and watched English films and put a lot of energy into learning English in order to have possibilities for leaving.
3. I imagined what England would be like and the kind of life I could have there.
4. Even in my early teens I was making study choices that would support my leaving. Leaving the country, getting out and not coming back, was the important thing from early on.
5. I was taking control of making it happen, not waiting to see if it might happen.
6. I spent a holiday in the UK the year before I planned to move there.

Although the language remains intimately connected to the co-researcher's words, the organisation of the material has begun to bend toward the researcher's specific interests and task. In this case there are other meaning units from slightly further on in the interview, which have been incorporated under the cluster heading 'preparation for leaving'. This cluster title is a shift from the original 'circumstances of leaving home', which is an abbreviation of the interview question as it was asked. At this point the title change reflects the individual's experience rather than the question it was in response to. However, as was emphasised earlier, the content is assumed to be highly interactional and not at all the product of 'subjective' solipsistic reflection. The researcher's interests remain implicit in all the steps of the analysis by having shaped the content being analysed, as well as the process of the analysis. The clusters might be viewed as invariant constituents of the experience (for this person). Though still rather amorphous, they are grouped together to prefigure core themes of this individual's experience, though not explicitly thematised yet. It is still easy to match the statements at this stage to the actual expressions in the co-researcher's transcript and in this sense the method is similar to the stage described by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), Van Kaam and Keen (1975) (cf. Moustakas, 1994: 120-1). However the clustering is an extra stage that is not explicitly used by these researchers. I felt strongly that themes could only be ascertained *after* visual clustering, still in the co-researcher's own language. To move to generalised themes in the third person *before* clustering seemed to involve an implicit

conflation of procedures: clustering+thematising+generalising, obscuring much individual richness and incorporating excessive speculative introspection on the part of the researcher.

Stage Four: It is only in stage four that more psychological and generalised third person language is introduced. Themes are generated from the clusters, usually conflating different meaning units into more general statements capturing specific aspects of the experience. These themes are generalised enough to approach an approximation of ‘textual description’ of the ‘essential features’ of the transcript though relationships between themes are usually not themselves thematised (though they are noted in places, for example where a co-researcher describes the value of independence and then describes the need for support, these themes are noted as being comments on each other). This was the most uncomfortable stage of the analysis for me, as it introduces the most speculation and the most distance from the co-researcher’s actual statements. Though the felt sense of the original whole continued to guide the formation and wording of the themes, I felt that this was the furthest level of abstraction possible in the analysis without losing the evocative sense of the experiences described. Therefore, the aspects of each theme were listed separately as points under the theme and not consolidated further into fully-formed set descriptions for each co-researcher (either Individual Textual Descriptions or Individual Structural Descriptions) or (worse) a composite description for the whole experience under study. This was maintained as a point of departure into the writing phase, where the expressive and evocative attempt to highlight and reveal the lived experience could call upon the collected themes (and their elaborated sub-points) as inspiration. In the writing, eventually something similar to a composite of experiences of ‘existential migration’ tentatively emerges. Following is the continuing example from Eva,

Clusters:

Preparation for leaving

1. I prepared over a couple years to leave for England as soon as I graduated.
2. I read English authors and watched English films and put a lot of energy into learning English in order to have possibilities for leaving.
3. I imagined what England would be like and the kind of life I could have there.
4. Even in my early teens I was making study choices that would support my leaving. Leaving the country, getting out and not coming back, was the important thing from early on.
5. I was taking control of making it happen, not waiting to see if it might happen.
6. I spent a holiday in the UK the year before I planned to move there.

Themes:

1. Preparing oneself to leave home for a foreign country

- Learning a language, reading books about a foreign place, seeing films, can all help prepare in imagination what the foreign experience might be like.
- Wanting to leave can influence early study choices and take a lot of energy and commitment. A holiday abroad can also support leaving preparations.
- Leaving the country can seem so important that nothing is left to chance; one must take control of making it happen.

The essence of the co-researcher's experience is maintained while willingly transforming it into less individualised experience. At this stage, to retrieve the individual, and much of their evocative metaphoric language, one must return only to the previous stage, where their actual voice and determining descriptions remain mostly in their own words. The themes however are crucial as they result in a manageable handle for each person's experience that can then be compared to others' experiences, concluding with a clustering of themes *across* co-researchers (discussed below). Each co-researcher's supporting elaborations of each theme are later used to 'flesh out' the themes that emerge in common across co-researchers in the write-up. Elaborations particularise the source meaning of the theme, thus avoiding misinterpretations and mis-conflations across co-researchers. Specificity thereby constantly sustains the more general features that emerge as components of the experience of 'existential migration'.

Stage Five: The final stage in preparation for phenomenological writing is to cluster the emerging themes for all of the twenty co-researchers together in one list. This is analogous to the step of clustering meaning units but in this case the 'meaning units' are in fact co-researcher themes and the 'clusters' are groupings of those themes across co-researchers under new 'headings', which become section headings for the writing phase. There are approximately 10-12 themes per co-researcher, generating a list of over 200 themes in total to be clustered according to commonality between co-researchers. Each individual theme remains coded to the co-researcher who expressed it, to enable ease of frequent referencing back to the individual experience it emerged from in order to refresh the original thematic meaning (Appendix 4). Therefore, each new 'meta-cluster' heading (formed by grouping similar individual co-researcher themes together) is supported by listing points under that heading that retrieve the individual elaborations originally listed under the themes represented. For example, Eva's three points above could be woven into a short account of her preparations to leave for a section entitled 'The process of leaving', and likewise with

other co-researchers. In this way the clustering of themes across the cohort is built upon, and remains grounded in, individual living experience. However, at every stage there are creative transformations, not just transpositions, meaning for example that cluster headings may change or be combined if at a later stage previous distinctions no longer fit. Also, in addition to the list of clusters, I also gathered paraphrased comments from each co-researcher regarding their feelings of the interview in order to implicitly and explicitly incorporate their affective responses (see Appendix 4, bottom).

At this stage descriptive writing can begin. As researcher, I have felt ‘possessed’ by each individual’s experience in turn and my task now is to try to point to the common and diverse in these cumulative experiences for the reader. This pointing, hopefully, engenders a multiplicity in the reader’s response, which together approximates a holistic felt sense of ‘existential migration’, beyond its idiosyncratic manifestations. Since such conceptual rendering is the aim of this project, a *major* part of the thesis is devoted to the presentation of the individual stories constituting each theme. Only after this presentation will I ‘cross’ the developing concept of ‘existential migration’ with literature and research in other disciplines, further elaborating what constitutes its originality.

The writing stage: This stage is based upon van Manen’s description of phenomenology as evocative writing (1997: 30–4) though adapted for the peculiarities of the present study. As researcher, my deep personal concern with this topic has inspired my intention to explore the experience *as it is lived* by others and myself. In the hopes of re-awakening basic experiencing, I moved beyond conceptualising the topic and far beyond my own initial intuitions through interaction with these twenty co-researchers, and others, and through the intensive sabbatical period in Budapest. The essential themes which have emerged for each person, and the collected themes across co-researchers, need deep reflection – distinguishing between the appearance and what grounds that appearance in experience, attempting to bring the obscure and evasive into nearness. Phenomenology is the *art* of bringing onto paper, into speech, something previously silenced and in shadow. This requires rewriting and creative use of language, but tied to faithful renderings of co-researcher experience. Van Manen warns that there are many temptations to be sidetracked, to wander, speculate, settle for preconceptions, be self-indulgent, or collapse into abstract theories. Therefore the writer must maintain a strong and oriented relation, returning over and over to the themes and even earlier stages of the analysis to assist this orientation. In other words, balancing the writing by

zigzagging between specifics and deeper universals, parts and whole. It is necessary to step back and look at the total project of writing in a revealing way as well as be deeply involved in the details of the specific context (van Manen, 1997: 34). The written component of this thesis (such a small part of the thesis as lived!) has been distilled through three full edits, however, the process of 'purification' can never be complete and probably introduces unseen impurities in each purgation. The next section offers a brief insight into my months in Budapest in order to make manifest the life context in which the entire analysis took place.

The Budapest Months

In consideration of the current research, the topic for investigation arose from reflection upon my own lived experience, most ostensibly from my trip to Asia. However, the greater context for that experience includes the fact that for over fifteen years I have continued to live in a foreign land (the UK). Therefore it could be assumed that I embody sensitivity to issues of migration and home and this was confirmed by the co-researcher's experience of my empathic understandings during the interviews. Moreover, as I perused some of the interviews in preparation for their analysis, I realised that many of the co-researchers were drawn into accounts of their *original* home-leaving, arriving in a foreign land where many of them had little command of the language and did not understand the social codes. Apart from a year in Oslo in the mid-80s, I had no experience of negotiating a non English-speaking culture apart from brief holidays. In addition, my original confrontation with the new and confusing social codes of a foreign culture has been subsumed within now subtler mixes of familiarity and unfamiliarity. Therefore, I felt an impetus to rekindle those initial feelings and decided that it would be a powerful sensitising project for me to throw myself into that process of 'acculturation' while simultaneously immersing myself in the co-researchers' descriptions of that same process. Of course a temporary sabbatical, with the certainty of return, is radically different from immigrating to a foreign land with prospects of settling there, motivated perhaps by a desperate need to leave. In spite of this, for me the process revealed below was remarkably similar to the accounts presented in some of the interviews, offering a renewed awareness of quite nuanced meanings. I suspect if I had moved to Budapest open-ended, with the prospect of settling there, these initial feelings would have been similar but more intense. From the beginning I knew there was an end in sight.

I arranged to live in an apartment in the centre of Budapest for three months while working intensely on the analysis of these transcripts. I had never been to Budapest and could not speak a word of Hungarian, which I was assured was an especially impenetrable language. I knew no one in the city, except to a perfunctory extent the couple I was subletting from, who kindly oriented me during my first three days there. After that, I was left alone – with a booklet of public transit tickets, some information about the famous local baths, and a sense of how to find my way back to the apartment again if/when I got lost. As anticipated, it was a powerful experience though the exact impact it has had on my reading of the transcripts, identification of meaning units, and description of themes, is impossible to separate out and clearly discern.

While in Budapest I intended to keep a record of my day-to-day life and encounters and to some extent I accomplished that. The fact that I often felt resistant to writing in the diary was itself significant, though the first entries were actually made even before I left London. As I sat down to fulfil this commitment to record the process of living in Hungary, I became increasingly aware of this reluctance to record what was happening. I felt hesitant at highlighting the deep feeling process I was undergoing, as if I was anxious about bringing it more fully into awareness, especially in the context of my isolation from human interactions and surrounded by the mammoth task of analysing the same process. This reluctance on my part made me consider that perhaps for other voluntary migrants there was also a necessity to maintain distance from difficult reactions and this may reinforce the tendency towards silence regarding their experiences in the new land. Perhaps without a promise of shared understanding, it is too intense to reflect upon and converse about difficulties that revolve around such primordial issues as isolation and belonging whilst centrally inhabiting them.

The process of ‘migrating’ began when I decided to go, and certainly was well under way by three or four weeks prior to my planned departure. This is reminiscent of the descriptions by co-researchers, one of whom packed her bags a month before leaving home and left them in full view beside the front door. Experientially, migration begins long before leaving home. While finishing off my work in London I already formed a firm image of what my Budapest apartment would look like though I had never seen a photo of it. I tried to vary the image so as not to be too shocked or disappointed when the reality turned out to diverge greatly, perhaps negatively, from the fantasy. I also found myself imagining a whole new life there, an opportunity for a different way of living. It was a new beginning and *everything* would be

different. Counter-balancing this positive anticipation were darker prospects: I would become isolated, afraid, unproductive, internalized to the point of sinking turmoil incarnate. I won't understand the language, which will accentuate my exclusion. I began to panic that my fantasized refuge and 'home' for beginning my exciting new life would be inhospitable and cold to the touch. These perennial hopes and simmering fears reveal that major themes in my life were already active in my anticipation. A whole imagined world was slowly being populated, giving me *something* to respond to rather than the radical emptiness of the complete uncertainty of not being able to picture anything. So I left for Budapest with a feeling for what it would be like to live there, with scenes that I had already 'lived' in preparation. I arrived with memories of a place that I had never set foot. My first evening in Budapest I wrote,

Walking around the city I have both the excitement of a new place, already searching out where I will find some belonging... and also already rejecting the place. The buildings are not pretty enough, the place smells of third world diesel, the people are too attractive or not attractive enough, the apartment is too small or too big, too quiet and claustrophobic or too public, noisy, and intrusive. Looking forward to being on my own and also afraid I'll spiral down into a subjective shell cut off from everyone, like a zombie walking the streets isolated and unable to touch or be touched by the sensual world.

In this first entry there is a palpable expression of the ambiguity, the true ambi-valence of voluntary migration. Here choice is lived as agonising doubt coupled with accusatory responsibility. These themes are reminiscent of the interviews as well as resonating with my own past memories of movement into new cultures. Possible understandings of this predicament will be explored later. At this point in the thesis I am sketching my experience in Budapest in order to offer the reader a felt sense of my state while I was interacting with the analysis of the texts. As you will see, my experience closely parallels the narratives of many of the co-researchers and so reinforces the sense that moving to Budapest during the analysis did accomplish a sensitization to their experiences. Or did I see in their descriptions only what I was open to in my own present experience? To what extent did my experiment skew rather than reveal? This question is worth contemplation and is perhaps best addressed in future research on this topic, though co-researcher verification of the results suggests that the analysis avoided being colonised by my own self-perception.

My felt experience during those first few days was characterized by both optimism and sorrow. I was finding it difficult to slow down and be with my experience, like there was nowhere safe enough, no corner deep or dark enough where I dare let my attention leave the

surface world for the inner world of meaningful connection and bodily feeling. By the third evening the scales of ambivalence had tipped slightly. I felt more excitement but also more longing for an anchor in terms of something or someone familiar.

I have just gone for my first Hungarian beer in a local tavern frequented by a friendly student crowd. I am beginning to feel that I can find a way to be here, but still this opaque image of myself as a ghost on the edge of the crowd, not really here, or not really seen, not able to break into the Hungarian world because of the language that surrounds them and excludes me. I didn't speak to anyone all evening and awkwardly ordered my beer using sign language. Physically I feel like my body is weak, it doesn't know how to be well here, or strong, or that it's not allowed for me to feel strong and centred without appearing arrogant. A strong foreigner is a despised foreigner. I find myself pining for friends, that having another human with me, a little world in English, would make *everything* possible, perhaps even motivating me to learn the few words that I will certainly need to survive here for 3 months. And how crazy that I should be wanting to be here with the people I left only 2 days ago – people I was so willing to abandon for blissful solitude.

It is at this point that I commence the task that had brought me to this city. I set up my computer and begin to organize my work on the transcripts, including the style of analysis I will employ. I realize quickly that it is 'a very strange almost eerie experience' reading others' accounts of settling in a strange land while I am simultaneously in a similar foreign situation where language isolates rather than connects. I find that even the simplest daily tasks, shopping, banking, taking a tram, are consciously reviewed as to how they can be accomplished without words or with few words. Walking down the city street provides few clues as to what lies behind each shop door and 'today's menu' is a complete mystery. I find myself intrigued and exhausted, vacillating between my refuge in the courtyard apartment and the attraction and excitement of the alien environs waiting to envelop me.

Strange experience being possessed one after another by these people I've interviewed. Sometimes feeling they are describing my exact experience as I sit here in this lonely city with such a sad history. I think it's an amalgamation of my own solitude resonating with their narratives, contextualised by this potent airless space. Perhaps related to this intensity, I've chosen to acknowledge my reluctance to engage with being here, feeling like I don't want to learn the language and feeling ashamed and guilty about that, feeling that I don't want to go out and having to push myself to go out and meet people. Total ambivalence; attracted and indifferent to being here, and also imagining London so differently from this perspective, visualizing more possibilities for how I could live there.

By the second week I was feeling excited and also drained by the work. I was not drawn to being reflective about my own experience; it was too seamless. Around this time I was also waking up early in the morning with a feeling of simmering resentment. Something in me felt maimed, hobbled, unable to reach full throttle, and this feeling comes tinged with a tendency to blame others (Hungarians, the world). I was having vivid dreams, with themes of loss,

regret, inconsolable sorrow that also strangely brought a sense of relief. I felt I was descending into a vigorous internal world populated only by me and these disembodied interviews, locked in a mutually reinforcing echo of homelessness and isolation.

In the absence of companionship, both my dreams and my waking desires constantly reinforced the importance of relationship in my life. I had by now at least encountered some fellow foreigners out in taverns. I found it odd how we gravitated to each other, complicit in our marginality, and how our conversations were a mix of our own statelessness combined with subtle criticisms of local culture. I was left on these occasions wondering if being dislocated gave us a feeling of inferiority that we were trying to console by disparaging the status of belonging enjoyed by the native population. As I neared the end of my three-month stay, I wrote the following in my diary, feeling nostalgic and waxing lyrical at the thought of leaving,

It is another beautiful warm evening. I noticed as I started to walk across the bridge that there were more people than usual wandering around, kind of a festive atmosphere I thought, perhaps a boat has just moored and the passengers are disembarking and making their way back to the nearest tram stop. I walked down through the park where I usually sit listening to music with the old ladies in the afternoon. It was nice being by the river, with a cooling breeze, after the stifling city heat of the past weeks. I bought a beer and as I walked back I gazed upon the usual sites; an old yellow number 6 tram crossing the bridge, the dark shadows of Margaret Island, the castle and parliament buildings lighting the river banks and hills into the distance. I will miss this place, and I know already I'll romanticize it far beyond reality.

I had imbued some sustenance from the mutual recognition that developed between the local shopkeepers and myself. They greeted me, laughed at my attempts to speak Hungarian and seemed to enjoy our charade-based communication. There was pleasure for me in being 'made real' through recognition. I had become familiar with a small circuit of town that stretched from the Danube to the ring road and I realised how I worked this familiar neighbourhood to established some sense of mastery, even if over a very small locality. When it came time to leave Hungary I was deeply sad. Synchronistically, my departure coincided with the Hungarian national day of celebration. From early morning there was the deafening sound of planes strafing the Danube, mixed with music from loudspeakers, and massive crowds walking down to the river's edge. It felt such a juxtaposition for me to have my small leaving unbeknownst to anyone in the midst of such a massive shared event. I couldn't shake the feeling that I wanted to say goodbye to people I couldn't even have said hello to; local shopkeepers, the helpful staff in the DVD rental shop, the waitress at the Blue

Tomato, etc. As I left it came to me that living in this strange place was like feeling both ends of a magnet at once – the irresistible pull at one end and the invisible repulsion at the other. So far I have not returned to Budapest. I want to, and am afraid to. Waiting for my plane I wrote these final few lines,

The world calls us to bring it to life. It needs human being to lift it to its feet, and simultaneously our living implies lifting the world, to accomplish that we need each other. When the world calling and the respondent being 'match', a feeling of seeking is satiated and the human feels 'at home', for a time. But perhaps at times the call can be too strong, or the seeking-implying in the individual is not responded to, leaving the person feeling deeply invalidated and disqualified. There is a basic desire for completion, from self and world, to connect and flow, but these moments that allow us to genuinely feel 'at home' are transitory and fragile. Home is our aspiration.

Chapter Four

Toward a Phenomenology of *Existential Migration* Through a Description of Emergent ‘Themes’

A Note About Themes

In the present context, themes are conceived as co-constituted, as *constructed*, not discovered. To reiterate: none of the following ‘themes’ can claim the epistemic status of a distinct object. Themes result from a co-generation of implicit experience - ‘somethings’ emerging intricately from ‘nothing’, confirmed by a felt resonance for the people involved (researcher, co-researchers, reader). Experience, for example in the interview situation, rises in interaction, with an intricate mutual implying, a finely ordered texture that can be pointed to through the naming and describing of a theme. But it would be misleading to suggest that these ‘abstractions’ from experience, these manifestations from the whole, are merely arbitrary. They may manifest and be distinguished in various different ways, but not in just any way. If these themes were purely arbitrary, the preceding research would have been unnecessary and inconsequential. We could have just asserted something and it would have been so. There must be a felt resonance, an acknowledgment that the human is a ‘responsive order’ constantly inviting and interacting-back with the world²¹. These themes together signify one schema for mapping a moving landscape, which will vary from person to person, time to time, and context to context, a kind of schema revelatory of existence itself.

As a strong claim I would suggest that the interaction of co-researcher experiences and my self-reflective autobiography, within a phenomenological attitude, have ‘extruded’ some significant process features of what I term ‘existential migration’. As a weaker claim, every manifestation at least reveals *something* about the fundamental possibilities that have allowed that manifestation to arise. Even if a theme only ever manifests once, it still expands our understanding to a new edge of the overall region of that respective experience. These themes constitute one of many possible sets of themes that could bring to nascence the experience under study. This particular set of themes is a reflection upon the biographical experience of the 21st co-researcher, myself. However, again I am adamant that these themes are not

²¹ See Gendlin (1997) *The Responsive Order*, or Gendlin (1997) *A Process Model* for a philosophical discussion of ‘interaction’ and ‘responsiveness’ that goes beyond the scope of my task here.

arbitrary or haphazard – their descriptive naming occurs as a consequence of thoughtful crossings of holistic experience and the ordinary language and concepts at our disposal. Themes arise at the crest of ‘interactional waves’ between our ways of saying and what is forever more than what can be said. Each ‘wave’ is added to the said, elaborating and extending what can be said next. In this sense, phenomenological *research* is phenomenological *process*; on-going, building on what has gone before, a re-threading of personal life, psychology, literature, social science, and philosophy, but never to completion. This task is different in quality from phenomenology that seeks to pass “essential” fixed slices of experience from brain to brain. Useful as that certainly is, here I am attempting to nudge something whole into being, passing it from body to body, where at the most it is felt and acknowledged, and possibly carried further without being captured.

I have designated the most common themes as follows²². You may notice that their nomenclature reveals a further process of transformation and combination, partly due to the changing nature of my understanding of the meanings of each theme and partly in deference to the space limitations of the thesis. However, these themes remain inclusive of the data listed in appendix 4:

- ✎ self and identity
- ✎ belonging
- ✎ valued characteristics and sensitivities (space, independence, freedom, choice)
- ✎ wider life perspectives (philosophical or spiritual outlook)
- ✎ openness to experiences of difference and foreignness
- ✎ significance of family relations and home circumstances
- ✎ explicit issues of home and returning home
- ✎ an overview of the process of leaving: adapting, unexpected consequences, paradoxes

This listing may suggest to the reader that each theme is self-sufficient and discrete, so again I reiterate that each theme is implicit in the others, refining our understanding of one affects our understanding of the others. By briefly dealing with each separately, I hope we will approach a more holistic *felt understanding* of the intricacy and variation constituting an experience of ‘existential migration’. A definition of the term ‘existential migration’ will be

²² See appendix 4 for a listing of themes assigned to co-researchers so it is possible to trace themes back to the constituent elements from each interview.

germinating throughout this chapter and the final section will offer a first person account of this process based upon the preceding descriptions.

The discussion presented under each theme heading is an amalgam of the experiences across the cohort. The common features and themes are summarised in the text as generalities of the experience of voluntary migration. Then individual narratives are offered to support these statements and to reveal the diversity and divergence masked by the generalities. I am attempting to establish equilibrium between the evocative power of specifics and the theorising and research potential of the shared. The unique always offers some revelation of the shared and the shared is always implied by the unique, making it possible. It is my intention to try to consider the underlying 'existential' dimension of being-at-home and the *unheimlich* without losing connection with the rich variety of how this dimension is realised in the course of an individual life, as evident in the interviews. My intention is that the study would be an example of an interchange between shared and unique, experiential and symbolic, thus hopefully revealing rather than obscuring a little of what is implied in both dimensions.

If the writing is 'successful' as phenomenology, it creates a world that cannot be reduced to the text, it offers an opening for the reader's own self-reflections, to carry forward his or her own unreflected experiences of 'home and not-at-home', 'belonging and never quite belonging', 'the world of mystery and the mundane', 'freedom for possibilities and suffocation of potential', 'independence and loneliness', and 'yearning and loss'. But what is the conventional status of such an approach? In van Manen's words,

Some may be sceptical of the rigor and depth of these texts. Admittedly, as human science researchers we should be modest in claiming special status for our insights. In point of fact, all interpretive phenomenological inquiry is cognizant of the realization that no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final, no insight is beyond challenge. Therefore, it behoves us to remain as attentive as possible to life as we live it and the infinite variety of possible human experiences and possible explications of those experiences. At the same time, there is no denying that this phenomenology of everyday life is a deepening experience for those who practice it. And phenomenological inquiry has formative consequences for professional practitioners by increasing their perceptiveness and tactfulness... For the writer, these reflective experiences may even have the effect that they put one's entire existence into question (2002: 7-8).

Van Manen suggests that to read the phenomenological text merely for its surface message is to miss the life meaning it attempts to evoke. As I have hinted, it appears to me that to be a

phenomenological text, it must open a space in the addressed reader where that person can dwell in their 'felt sense'²³ of their own responsive being. The text is not meant to assign unit measurements to carved-out experience, or to proffer fixed conclusions, but to lure the reader into a version of the experience that is being explored. In van Manen's own words, '... the reader must become possessed by the allusive power of text – taken, touched, overcome by the addressive effect of its reflective engagement with lived experience' (2002: 238).

If the felt response determines the veridical status of the text, then there exists the possibility that for me as writer this text touches and moves me, but for you as reader, it remains superficial and dead. Just as certain literary texts and autobiographies move some and not others, certain phenomenological texts will address themselves to one or other but not all. Though it is not possible to adequately explore these issues in the present thesis, this preface hopefully sets a context for a study that verges more on the descriptive, possibly even evocative (as far as this might be possible and appropriate), than on the psychological in its more conventional natural science sense. However, hopefully this does not imply that the study lacks rigour. The task of evoking and pointing towards experience, especially of the significant kind under study here, requires no less concentrated gathering, discerning, and conveying than any randomised controlled experiment.

Trying to discern themes is a dark unsettling experience for the researcher in that it *possesses*, as suggested in the Budapest diary, and it 'draws one down'. It is a search for words that promise to describe, motivated in part by the desire to cling to something, even briefly. How does one relay that to a reader? This is phenomenology 'not as a controlled set of procedures but more modestly as a "*way toward* human understanding" (van Manen, 2002: 249, *italics added*).

It is in this writerly space where there reigns the ultimate incomprehensibility of things, the unfathomable infiniteness of their being, the uncanny rumble of existence itself... Various philosophers have described this uncanniness as the realm of the *il-y-a* in Levinas, the *es gibt* in Heidegger, *wild being* in Merleau-Ponty, the *Real* in Lacan, or the *khora* in Derrida – it is the frightful allure of Existence itself that fascinates the writer and the artist but that cannot be spoken. Levinas describes *il-y-a* as something that resembles what one hears when holding an empty seashell against one's ear (Levinas, 1997). As if the emptiness is full, as if the silence is a murmuring, as if one hears the silent whisper of *the Real* (Ibid:243).

²³ This is a term from the work of Eugene Gendlin and will be taken up briefly later.

The truth that phenomenological insights are not complete, are later added to, contradicted or amended, is not embarrassing, but expected. However, it is clear also that phenomenology is about the lifeworld, it is not mere armchair speculation in the sense of removed meditative philosophy. It requires engagement for the back and forth interaction between the ontic and the ontological, the conceptualisable and mute responsive life. According to van Manen, the themes of the lifeworld, at its most general, include: death, life, being, otherness, meaning, mystery... which are universal across cultures and history. Other fundamental 'existentials' (as distinct from particular themes of specific phenomena) include: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality) (van Manen, 2002: 110).

It all seems somewhat absurd until we begin to discern the silence in the writing – the cultivation of one's being, from which the words begin to proliferate in haltingly issued groupings, then finally in a carefully written work, much less completed than interrupted, a blushing response to a call to say something worth saying, to actually *say* something, while being thoughtfully aware of the ease with which such speaking can reduce itself to academic chatter (Ibid: 7-8).

Although there are some introductory comments and a few speculative interpretations, the following thematic descriptions remain accurate as pooled approximations of the actual narratives. This facilitates the reader's ability to form for him or herself a 'felt sense' of the diverse and contradictory experiences of voluntary migration. *In this way each reader is empowered to have, at the centre of their understanding, their own actual experience rather than another's concepts, by which to evaluate, elaborate, or contradict other's theories, including my own.* This is my fundamental strategy – to attempt to put experience at the centre of this inquiry, rather than an unexamined theory or hypothesis. This means that even those who have not embarked upon 'existential migration' will have some possibility of extending my own ideas, providing us with welcome novelty and conceptual diversity in our attempts to understand the process presented below. This form of 'theory-building' is based upon Eugene Gendlin's "Thinking at the Edge", a method arising from his philosophy of the implicit.²⁴

²⁴ A very good introduction to Gendlin's theory building is found in the recent *Folio, A Journal For Focusing and Experiential Therapy*, Vol.9 (1):2004.

Emergent Themes:

4.1 Self and Identity (10)²⁵

Introduction

Regrettably, a theoretical exposition of concepts of 'self' and 'identity' as found throughout the history of philosophy and as proposed in contemporary psychology, remains outside the remit of this thematic discussion. As a phenomenological researcher I am primarily interested in the way co-researchers use these terms in their current situation, what they want words to mean *in our dialogue*. Though these terms remain indeterminate in the interviews, co-researchers use them to articulate sophisticated experiential meanings that are subtly nuanced. From amalgamating common features across the twenty co-researchers, the impression is that 'self' points to a *demanding potential* that is immaterial and unfinished. Demanding in the sense of calling to be lived out, pulling the person forward into those situations that might realise certain aspects of its promise. *A 'self' forms as a personal responsiveness to life interactions*. There is 'something' that *is* responsive world interaction. Perhaps what is ordinarily termed 'self', in the sense of a set of habitual responses or 'personality', could be considered the gradual deposition into the world of the 'residue' of such interactions. In the interviews, one's surrounding environment is seen as having a crucial influence but not a totalising and deterministic one. For the most part, the environment, especially the familiar home environment, impinges upon one's attempts to let a self unfold in its unique way. Therefore, existential migration can be a 'self' protective act in the sense that leaving constitutes a *search for space* where a self can unfold and respond interactively and thereby be 'discovered'. Half of the voluntary migrants interviewed explicitly described requiring a combination of space and relationship, almost reminiscent of a therapeutic relationship²⁶, in

²⁵ The bracketed number with each theme title indicates how many co-researchers *explicitly* expressed an aspect of this theme in their interview, though many themes are implicitly ubiquitous.

Throughout the following text, Kumar's comments are selectively omitted when they obscure rather than elucidate the 'constituent theme'. The rationale for this is that Kumar was referred to the study by a colleague and only during the interview did it emerge that his biographical details did not fit the remit for inclusion in the study, as mentioned earlier. Nonetheless his interview has been analysed and offers an interesting counterpoint to most of the other co-researchers.

²⁶ It raises an interesting possibility concerning the apparent preponderance of voluntary migrants in the professions of psychotherapy, psychology, coaching, and related professions. For example, is there an attraction to these professions because the qualities of these professional or therapeutic relationships approximate the ideal space-relationship for the expression of the 'self'?

order for their sense of self to develop. Such sensitivities are evidenced repeatedly within elaborations of the other themes.

Co-researcher Narratives

Since references to 'self' are ubiquitous in the transcripts, in this section I have unrepresentatively avoided many direct quotes in favour of brief summary narratives in order to emphasize the themes more clearly. In subsequent sections there will be more substantive quotations from actual transcripts to exemplify the themes.

Commingled with the sense that one is different from others (explored in a later theme), there is an onus to develop a sense of self that protects that inherent difference. From early life many co-researchers report a self-perception of 'difference' informed by, for example, the contingencies of atypical family and childhood experiences, the dawning realisation that one's personal attributes and sensitivities are uncommon, the gradual acknowledgement of same-sex attraction, etc. It is clear that experiencing such difference can create a trajectory distinct from the prescribed development of peers, resulting in an increasing distance between self and given world. What is less clear is that there is already something in the way these differences are experienced that suggests sensitivities to self-and-other interaction that is highly attuned. One is set apart as having a different identity, in some sense a less naïve one, as though life events have caused one to grow up too fast, see too much, lose an innocent belief in the taken-for-granted presentation of things.

There seems to be a paradoxical relationship with the world in which the world poses threatening influences on developing one's self while also offering the only possibility of its development. One's nascent identity needs to be kept safe from being swamped and contaminated by convention and expectation, but simultaneously that identity needs to linger in relationship with others as a precondition of its own emergence. There is a tension in belonging to an environment while also needing the space to protect one's identity from the 'impinging influence of the familiar' in order to safeguard one's unique 'inheritance' of potentiality. Affirming the converse aspect of this same dynamic, it seems that a foreign environment can offer the required distance to make apparent the magnitude of one's

commonality with the original culture, allowing a degree of identification which was threatening to acknowledge while in that 'home'²⁷ environment.

One strategy for protecting the emerging self is to build up psychologically defensive layers between self and environment. However, this can lead to isolation (as opposed to independence, which is relational), and if we become too isolated we lose the interpersonal element in self-formation. Patricia has described this lack of relationship as threatening a loss of connection to existence itself. Her compounding fear was that if anyone caught sight of her in that state of isolation they would see that there is nothing there, the fear being that she might become permanently associated with that nothingness. Co-researchers inferred that their existence could feel like a precarious balance between the two extremes of being imploded upon by the other and being isolated into disappearance.

In early life and adolescence, Peter had to be cautious about his contact with the world. The world offered disappointment, puzzlement, and rejection, while providing little in the way of protection or support. He found that he had to 'close down' in early life, when escape was not an option, and only when he left home was he able to contemplate a more open re-connection with his environment. He used travel to try to 'shock himself' into connecting to the world again. The total unfamiliarity of foreign places, including extreme or even brutalising situations, was sought in order to break himself open, 'kick myself alive', to return to a more fluid relationship with life. Being able to cope with such foreign or difficult experiences was also significant in developing his sense of self-worth. This worth is constructed from the characteristics necessary for coping with a strange place; independence, meditative non-attachment, and the ability to meet others without losing or sacrificing oneself. There is a cycle of self-reinforcement and progression implied here since once a sense of identity begins to take root through development of self-worth, you don't have to protect yourself so much, reinforcing one's abilities, extending the ease of navigating the strange, in turn bolstering self-worth. As described in a few interviews, this cycle can even lead to the identity of voluntary migrant as admired 'other', possessing the characteristics envied by those who remain sedentary. But it is an ironic twist of circumstances, when a struggle to exist is

²⁷ We have yet to define what we mean by home, but obviously it is not the simplistic and unproblematic home as familiar, safe, cosy, supportive, ideal sanctuary from the strife of the world.

misinterpreted as an expression of ‘heroism’ by some of the very people who contributed to that initial struggle in the first place.

The ubiquitous primordial motif of the ‘hero’s return’²⁸ is evoked in many of the accounts given by co-researchers. After a difficult journey of self-discovery and worldly adventure, these individuals express a desire to return home to a welcome that entails some recognition of their achievements and an indication that their struggles and the person they’ve become is finally respected, even if still misunderstood. To some extent this is a self-protective measure of the type: ‘I can be who I really am now that I have world-recognition, they can’t pull me back into their pre-formed expectations now that they have to recognise how much I’ve exceeded them’. The wide world certainly offers more alternatives than the small pool of roles usually available in any locale, especially in more traditional cultures. For example, for a woman from a traditional South American family, returning with an education might allow the new possibility of being respected as self-supporting and financially independent from men. New possibilities might exude from a personage who’s no longer entirely tied to the caprice of the homeworld. Expectations aren’t as automatically imposed when the person who returns is recognised as a mix of familiar and strange (which in fact, they’ve always been but it was not previously acknowledged).

Rather than a set identity grown from a specific place, the possibility emerges that living in various cultures may offer a more fluid identity, combining the complexity of not quite fitting in anywhere with the freedom of not carrying a fixed national identity. Likewise, this sort of development can relax the individual’s yearning for acceptance by the home culture, allowing a freer assimilation of *particular* aspects of that identity. Camilla notices that while living at home, she was so consumed with the effort to fit in and belong that she could never relax into a feeling of being-at-home. Only after she left for London could Camilla return to her home environment and identify with it in a looser, less crucial way. She had not only developed her own self-confidence while away, but had also come to accept her identity as ‘outsider’. Paradoxically, identifying as an outsider and finally meeting others who didn’t fit in, seemed to give Camilla the ‘belonging’ necessary to generate the possibility of ‘choosing herself’ rather than feeling pressured to conform to a rather oppressive homogeneous environment.

²⁸ For example, as described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949, New York: Pantheon Books)

Despite the implication that geographic relocations might constitute adaptive responses to questions of minority identity, our 'where-ness' apparently remains intricately connected to self-identity and thus future becoming. Not knowing *where* to locate can be very unsettling and confusing because it carries the implication of not knowing who one is. Being unable to piece together a self that feels contiguous and proximate can lead to a crisis of identity, exacerbated by the constant question of 'where should I be?', in other words, 'who should I be?' and 'which life should I lead?' One attempted solution is to try to live more than one life, but this is unsettling and ungrounding, not to mention impossible. For the 'existential migrant' the question of identity is intricately bound up with, and compounded by, the felt need to relocate, to travel, to go. And this relocation itself is an expression of how deeply felt is the question of identity.

As a contrast to the experiences of those who chose to leave, one co-researcher is dealing with questions of identity which arise from being brought here to his 'adopted' country as a young child. Kumar grew up in Britain and acknowledges how much his daily identity is British, yet on a deeper level he feels intimately affiliated to his native country. Though he is isolated from the way of life back home, for example not knowing the language and customs are practical obstacles to return, this does not lessen the feeling of being rooted there, nor the hope that return remains possible. Visiting his ancestral village, Kumar immediately felt a strong emotional connection and a birthright to family land. This property symbolised his anchoring in his native land and he worries that to sell it may sever his link there. He does not believe he could ever re-integrate fully into life back home, but he imagines a compromise would be to live in an ex-pat situation because his terms of reference will always be so different from most local people. This is in stark contrast to other co-researchers who shunned the ex-pat environment as claustrophobic, inauthentic, and based upon the valuing of similarity over difference. Kumar concedes that he enjoys the special status, the exotic and unique aspect, associated with claiming this mixed identity in the UK. Kumar's identity dynamic is based upon group (ethnic) belonging rather than the more individualised struggle of the other co-researchers. Unlike them, Kumar has not heeded a 'call' to venture away from the known to find the mystery of self. His 'problem' is of a different nature – he seems engaged in kneading the multiplicities of two cultures into the requirements of one life.

From the point of view of those who embark on an 'existential migration', to be totally identified with one's own culture can prevent one from self-developing, from growing up and being open to challenges. Total assimilation can be experienced as stunting in its emphasis on predictability and conformity. Staying in one place can result in being fixed by the environment. Exposure to other cultures lessens restrictions, allowing one to experience various beliefs or views without having to become totally identified with any one. People are always more than the fixed roles societies offer. And for some reason, these particular migrants seek to realise that 'more'. For such a person, it can be intensely irritating when others assume one's identity based upon accent, country of origin etc, thereby nullifying one's difficult journey for self-definition. There can be a tense and resentful relationship between the so-called 'existential migrant' and the environment that would seek to define him or her, creating a perpetual feeling of at least subtly never belonging anywhere.

Summary Points

- ✚ There is the view that one's 'self' is actively created in interaction with one's surroundings and therefore the environment can either support or obstruct development of one's potential. The call to realise one's self-potential overrides most other considerations, including the need to belong. In this sense, migration can be a 'self-protective' choice.
- ✚ Moving to a foreign place fosters flexibility to develop oneself according to an 'inner call'. In the foreign place even one's identification with the home culture can be explored without it opening the door to a flood of homogeneity that would obliterate what is different and unique in one's self.
- ✚ It is difficult to maintain a balance between the threat of implosion and arid isolation. Balance requires a combination of space and relationship that was not experienced in the home culture.
- ✚ There can be a desire to return home after achieving a sense of self that is fluid and complex (and perhaps successful), while also sure enough to withstand the pull of identification experienced in the home environment.
- ✚ Finding oneself 'rootless' can result in a fragile sense of self that is constantly unsettled and restless and seeking respite.

4.2 Belonging²⁹

Introduction

Closely linked to the multifaceted issue of identity, and in this instance approximating its converse, is the question of ‘belonging’. Who I say that I am is a reflection of my response to who *they* say I am. This section will describe the duality of belonging, the warmth and security of intimate human connection, complicated by further examination of the oppressive shadow of conventionality, pressure to conform, and suffocating expectations.

There was a general recognition among co-researchers that positive human relationships could ground a person and provide a sense of ‘belonging-to’. Individuals anticipated that belonging would incorporate the experience of being ‘seen’, feeling understood and accepted, and being given the space *to be* without the burden of others’ demands. It is the felt sense of being cared about as the person one recognises oneself to be. However, this ideal belonging was rare in the experiences of the twenty people interviewed. The lack of this type of belonging can apparently result in a sensation of rootlessness, the lack of concretely relating to the world, living without the feeling of solid connections with others.

Voluntary migrants seem likely to embody incompatible needs; to yearn to belong yet also to *have to* escape the type of belonging offered because it feels suffocating and entrapping. This theme of belonging is therefore built around the tension inherent in the process that ensues when one desires to belong, but then experiences claustrophobia as a result of the implicit impositions and demands of the ‘*conditional* belonging’ offered. This process generates a desperate need to escape, for some it even feels like ‘running for one’s life’. It is significant to note that *if* others *perceive* the environment as this intrusive, their response is usually markedly different in that they still choose to remain. Co-researchers most frequently report that others in the family, especially their siblings who inhabit ‘the same’ environment, seldom leave and seem to negotiate conflicts *within* a feeling of being ‘at home’. In fact what initially appears to be an invasive environment where no one would flourish, turns out to be more mysterious, and the question eventually returns more individualised, of the form ‘so why did *you* leave?’ Rather than examining the individual psyche or a dysfunctional

²⁹ This chapter conflates two themes, one on the importance of belonging, mentioned extensively in 13 interviews, and the other on the experience of being trapped and suffocated in a place, mentioned explicitly by 9 co-researchers.

environment, the mystery seems to be located in the *interaction* between individual self and shared surroundings.

It is common for many of the co-researchers to recall feeling that they *never* belonged at home. For some, as long as they can remember they felt that home was not their place, as Graciella describes it, 'it was where I was *put* to grow up'. For others, there was a specific period in their development when it dawned on them that they could not stay, often because their actual way of being was not understood or not welcome. In the latter situation, usually this person was 'the one' in the family who didn't quite fit in, never *felt* accepted, and always stood slightly apart from the sense of community. This experience, especially for a young person, is painful and confusing. In trying to make sense of not fitting in, individuals seem to alternate between explanations grounded in family dynamics (absent father and overprotective mother, but then needing to explain why siblings didn't also leave), and individual sensitivities (I have always valued my independence) in order to explain the plethora of experiences that detach *self* from available social matrix.

Many strategies are employed to try to cope with this confusing and painful predicament. For example, getting along with everyone is one way of trying to feel safe, less isolated and adrift, but paradoxically the strategy of trying to belong everywhere maintains the experience of not really belonging anywhere. This reifies the assumption that who one *is* (behind this disguise of malleability) cannot be accepted by the world one knows. The nature of the experience of not belonging raises fundamental and disquieting questions about the structure of life itself. Some of the co-researchers have found convincing answers in philosophical or spiritual domains (taken up in a later section), but for most the experience of never quite belonging has been hypostatized as a life given. It just is. *Explanations are post hoc*. Not belonging is the one experience that can be presumed. Such not-belonging is felt and expressed at various levels, in the arms of a parent, in the dynamics of the family home, with peers at school, in the local community, feeling marginal in relation to the cultural values and nation as a whole. Even at a young age, some co-researchers report identifying more with foreigners, and others on the margins. As mentioned in the previous chapter, flashes of affinity with the 'home culture' are more commonly experienced *after* leaving, as an anchor in the presence of the unfamiliar.

A functional definition of 'belonging' will appear gradually in the actual usage of the concept by the twenty individuals in their interview accounts given below. Initially, we can say that belonging refers to the felt experience that one is accepted; even one's difference is taken into account and welcome. In the context of this discussion, 'to belong' suggests being native to, to have a right of habitation, notions of equality and connection rather than feeling appendant. The environment one is immersed in and attempting to connect with also has an impact on the ability to feel belonging. More than one co-researcher explains that not fitting into a homogenous and conforming culture is a difficult and negative experience. For some reason many of these individuals, who arose from the 'same' earth as their neighbours, were somehow different, and recognised as such. It can feel quite hopeless when one is singled out as different and subject to marginalisation, teasing, or even violent rejection, while the actual reason for being outcast in this way cannot be pinpointed. Lest a spurious causal explanation be made, it is important to acknowledge that with each co-researcher, the experience of difference predates the experience of rejection. Even for those co-researchers who remained popular and actively included in their social worlds, the subjective knowledge of their difference seemed to create a second skin, wherein developed a more apprehensive perspective on quotidian activities. For those who cannot cover over or deny their difference, or ingratiate themselves successfully in various peer groups, the environmental response often seems to be rejection, the consequent message 'different is bad' compounding the problematic development in relations with oneself.

Co-researcher Narratives

Martin was perceived as different by his peers and thus consistently rejected from a young age. He feels that this experience eventually informed his feeling of isolation and alienation from his culture; he generalised the local peer rejection to the whole nation. Renata says it's obvious that she is a stranger when she's in London, but in her home country it was less obvious that she was also a stranger there. By 'stranger', she means whether a person feels part of the community or not. Although Renata describes herself as sociable, even from a young age she never felt part of the community. She maintained a distance from the group; she remained somewhat disengaged in order to make her own independent choices about who to connect with. Renata's need for space and independence (again, related themes that will be taken up later) was unusual in her home culture and part of the motivation for leaving home was an effort to find places or people where or with whom she could feel more integrated

while maintaining her own position. This point highlights the impression that there often seems to be an *innate* openness in these individuals, which they want to protect, but which is at odds with traditional or homogenous home cultures.

For three of the co-researchers the experience of being different and not fitting in was later complicated by the realisation that they were attracted to their own sex. This creates a powerful combination of two essentially secretive, individually-born processes. The awareness of 'deviant' sexual desires forming within an existing atmosphere of difference and not-belonging (nascent or explicit) creates a nimbus of secretive shame that only adds to its potency³⁰. For Peter, the realisation that he was attracted to men coincided with feeling alienated and objectified, reinforced by teasing at school. This exacerbated his feeling that he was not *of* the place – he felt tense, intimidated, and by grammar school, now in an all-male environment, Peter had withdrawn from almost all interaction. He was left feeling depressed, lonely, and scared, with no significant support at home.

In contrast, another gay man, Carl, experienced his home as a secure world of loving family relations in spite of his atypical tendencies, notably an unusually strong interest (compared to his family) in the external 'wider' world. There had never been any doubt in Carl's mind that he was loved and welcome at home, until he came out as homosexual. In Carl's experience, he had changed (or more accurately, *revealed* his difference) while the environment had remained the same. Though his fundamentalist Christian family said they could 'accept' him (after two unsuccessful exorcisms) he began to feel not accepted, inferior, unhappy. The previous assumption of home no longer functioned for him as a gay son and this signified a painful sudden shift from secure belonging to insecure homelessness. Carl felt he had not been prepared by his childhood to deal with this schism, and he muses that a difficult childhood might have made it easier to cope with change. To lose what appeared to be an idyllic childhood and simultaneously acquire a second-class status was traumatic.

Carl's response was to leave the country to search for an opportunity to regain a positive experience of home, to relocate where assumptions functioned differently and where he could perhaps regain a sense of balance, meaning, and belonging. This exodus cannot be causally

³⁰ I would contend that the process of 'existential migration' has integrated within it an element of secrecy, in large part due to its lack of social recognition, which has more than a passing similarity to the solitary process of sexual 'coming out'.

reduced to his coming out, his family dynamic, or the overall oppressive environment. It seems a multifaceted combination of these circumstances, in interaction with Carl's pre-existing curiosity and affinity to otherness. Even when he was much younger, Carl always wanted to travel. He often experienced the opposite of homesickness, in his native language this is recognised and referred to as 'far-sickness', a craving to go somewhere far away, away from the home environment. No one was surprised when Carl subsequently announced that he would do voluntary work in Asia, and he still periodically re-experiences this desire to go, to seek the space where he can breathe. When he visits home, he experiences a physical feeling of pain as he rediscovers again that this is not home for him. It was a major family trauma when Carl originally left and then worse when he explained to his parents that he would never return. Carl's pain is connected to the experience of returning to the place he remembers as an 'idyllic' (though in a sense illusory) home and knowing he will never belong there again because he can never again be himself there. No one, not even his closest childhood friends, understand when he attempts to explain this loss of belonging at home.

Inez also found that her burgeoning sexuality served to crystallise her predisposition to marginality. She felt she could not talk to others about the changes she was undergoing in adolescence. It was taboo in her family to discuss sexuality so the physical changes and emerging desires she began to feel indicated that she didn't belong in her family, or the wider conservative society, and this felt very difficult. She also went through puberty later than her friends and this lag added to her shame around difference, in turn affecting her self-confidence and ability to speak up for herself. She interpreted her physical difference as being ugly compared to others, and not fitting in. Inez's mother was very traditional and wanted to maintain the innocence of her daughters, which made them seem different from others their age. Feeling different is bipolar, both positive and negative, and for Inez the negative manifested when difference led to not belonging. The experience of puberty seemed to trigger a distance from peers and family and the larger society. But it triggered this because Inez already found she was in a peculiarly marginal position, exhibited in her aesthetic pursuits and her pronounced moral values and feelings of social justice. At night she began to dream of England, feeling that being isolated and different in a foreign land would be less painful than feeling it at home, and in fact these dreams functioned as a secretive private world. Many of the co-researcher narratives reveal that one can feel more lost and alone at home than in the most foreign and unfamiliar places.

A feeling of not-belonging where everything and everyone says one *should* belong, can result in a lack of confidence that one will belong anywhere. Camilla felt she had to belong somewhere and being in a marginal position in the family, she looked to the wider culture but the homogeneous hegemony of that culture excluded anyone who was not obviously and fundamentally 'the same'. Camilla's foundations were shallow. Her parents were immigrants so in order to really belong she had to disown the foreign aspects of her parent's identities. Sounding the same as others is an important dimension in belonging to the dominant culture; accents are an indication of belonging and difference, so Camilla undertook to cultivate the correct enunciation. Having to manage one's identity in a way that is not natural in order to mimic the sameness of a homogenous culture can result in uncomfortable feelings of being inauthentic, a phoney, fraudulent, of betraying oneself while never quite persuading the group whose acceptance one craves. This can leave a person with a compromised sense of self-identity further expanding the lack of belonging one was trying to assuage; the person potentially accepted is not even oneself. Camilla felt she had no right to be living in the place she was born, as she did not belong to the culture in the same way as others whose families were all interconnected and who could relate to each other in culturally prescribed modes. She felt shunned and desperate. This resulted in a sense that she had no home in the world at all and didn't even belong on the planet.

Based upon the interviews, we can see how experiences of not-belonging begin to crystallise around and reinforce latent and murky predispositions towards leaving. For example, Ben remembers that although he did not consciously conceptualise his leaving from an early age, he always knew he wouldn't stay where he grew up and he had an *innate sense* that he actually needed to get far away from home. Not belonging in any way, to family, social world, peers, friends, can feel so desperate that leaving the country feels crucial, like a necessary amputation. As mentioned above, missing this human connection in the intimate place where one is born is especially painful. Missing this sense of belonging is not in itself a predictor of existential migration - some who leave *did* have a degree of belonging and many who stayed behind presumably did not. We cannot assume that those people who stay at home, or who return home after brief foreign excursions, have an *unshakeable* sense of belonging, but presumably they feel less ambivalent and so perhaps less desperate, or they harbour greater fear of the unfamiliar, or they lack the prime valuing of independence or have less need of it due to the comparatively ample heterogeneity of their specific environment ...

somehow they seem able to find non-geographic ways of coping with inevitable fractures in belonging.

According to Eva even the slightest connection could be reason enough to stay in the country, but without that, there is no choice and no dilemma, *one must go*. One fulfilling relationship might add substance to a fugacious sense of belonging, thus pre-empting the desperation to search for belonging elsewhere. For her, leaving was in part a desperate search to find a place to belong and she now sees that as impossible – she is destined to be an outsider everywhere. Marginality becomes a part of one's identity but Eva feels it's possible to attain some acceptance of this. She has tried to welcome and accept the part of herself that will never belong.

Not-belonging is also a multi-faceted experience, including apparently positive aspects. For example, without the web of accepting connections that might constitute a feeling of belonging, it is easier to leave home, to explore and follow the desire for individual expression and adventure. The co-researchers' perceptions are that conformity to expectations is required to fit into the home culture and that can feel like too much of a sacrifice of the personal freedom to choose for oneself. Nina feels it is easier to live in an uncaring, unsupportive, and lonely foreign place in order to maintain greater freedom and honesty rather than conforming at home. Conformity means not being honest about one's own feelings or thoughts, in other words, pretending. In her case, independence is valued even more than the warmth of human contact, which can at times feel consuming, resulting in the experience of being overcrowded and concurrently effecting withdrawal.

Feeling judged by one's social group can impinge upon an individual's self-awareness and self-confidence, in turn enhancing the possibility of leaving home in order to develop more fully. Leaving for a foreign place can provide the opportunity to reinvent oneself as more individualised, less conventional, and to feel freed from a constraining self-image. Not belonging allows a kind of creative jiggle-room between self and environment. The challenge of living in a *very* foreign place, where there is no familiarity and no foundation for a sense of belonging, can even be experienced as joyful! It offers the chance to begin again, without having to compensate for the failures implicit in one's personal history. The difference inherent in being a foreigner in a foreign place can be perceived positively, while expressing

difference in the familiar home environment often leads to subtle and/or profoundly negative experiences.

Another aspect of not-belonging is the attitude of the individual towards the environment, sometimes explicitly described as rejection of the home culture, either at the level of family, town, or nation. Rita experienced daily life in her hometown as lacking any stimulation and she found it a stifling place to live. It would have felt unbearable to remain in such a provincial and isolated habitat, out of contact with the wider world. Rita's academic interests and liberal political views would have isolated her further in this environment and even now she chooses not to contact people who've stayed in her hometown in order to avoid repeating the experience of being ostracised. The only other choice that Rita saw as open to her in her home environment would have been to assimilate, censor her difference by adopting non-threatening and socially tolerated modes of expressing a watered-down dissent. But this was unpalatable. Many of her friends stayed or have returned to live where they grew up and Rita perceives most of them as trapped there. From their perspective, her settled peers perceive Rita's difference and comment that she's like a 'fish out of water' when she visits her own hometown.

Inez experienced her home society as violent, disturbingly unjust, with attitudes she could not abide. She was disillusioned by the lack of any sincere desire for change, and the overbearing importance of power. She saw no hope of having a meaningful life purpose if she remained in her home culture and she prefers the struggles of her foreign life, though it is suffused with distinct difficulties. Martin experiences his home culture as rigid in terms of norms and expectations. The choice facing him was to abide by these and feel suffocated or to become completely isolated in his own culture. Martin feels that his culture smothered the possibilities for exploring his potential. It is significant to him that his native language does not have a way of talking about enjoying life and he sees this as concomitant with the national mentality, which he rejects. For Martin, life is fundamentally about choice and can include potential happiness, not just moments of happiness in on-going misery. It is unclear what has allowed Martin and Inez to take such a variant stance to their own culture's assumptions but it may be that early experiences of not belonging or peer rejection supported maintaining a distance from the surrounding culture, permitting openness to other possibilities.

Not belonging was also an issue for Kumar, who was brought to the UK at age five by parents in order to offer him a better life. Though not an instance of voluntary migration (or existential migration), Kumar's problematic issues of identity and belonging suggest that at least some of the aspects described above have parallels in other populations³¹. Kumar's experience is that his difference stands out and defines him in each of his national contexts. In his native land he cannot speak the language and would be taken as British, yet back in the UK his race sets him apart. He feels he straddles two worlds and negotiates the divergent values of these two worlds. He feels in part blended into both cultures and simultaneously protruding. He needs both cultures to feel whole but paradoxically doesn't fit into either. This experience leads him to wonder if he'll ever be comfortable anywhere, or ever feel fully at home.

Kumar feels he can easily fit into the role required of whichever world he's in but there are moments of reflection when he's obviously out of place, for example when he realises he's in a room full of white British. He would describe himself as British but not English since he sees English as an exclusively white identity. He feels he's been very anglicised and ingrained into the social establishment of British culture while also being a person of colour, and he perceives this as an incongruity. For Kumar, there is a question of not-belonging partly based upon race; something is missing and his search for that missing piece increases his longing for his homeland. In his description we see the clear overlap between issues of belonging and identity, and in Kumar's consideration of resolutions to these dilemmas it is hard not to speculate that we are witnessing the future naissance of a process of existential migration.

Some narratives indicate a desperate need for acceptance of one's difference while situated within the home environment. However, other co-researchers have found satisfying relationships outside the family context or home culture – relationships which accept the individual's self-perceived difference, thus combining previously incompatible needs for belonging, personal space, and independent self-direction. These relationships seem to circumvent the conflict between the need for acceptance and the need for independence that can result in behaviours such as justifying oneself, retaliatory rejection, and defiance. At

³¹ Though it is premature and misleading to speak of 'populations' rather than processes. This term, like that of 'existential migrant' is employed purely as shorthand in the text.

home, acceptance and valuing of individuality seem incompatible, whereas belonging in a foreign environment does not inevitably generate this conflict. It's *as if* the 'acceptance' required at home is a different modality of acceptance. The home environment seems to call for a specific quality of interaction for it to feel like acceptance. Perhaps the pre-existing history of disappointments, like the originary feeling of not-belonging, needs to be compensated for, necessitating a different threshold of acceptance for the interaction in the home environment to acquire felt conviction. This is one of many speculative possibilities raised by the overarching scope to the present project. As will be apparent, this project spawns countless potentially fertile research leads that regrettably must be left unexplored here.

In his adolescence, church activities provided Martin with a sense of shelter, security, and acceptance within an overall environment that was otherwise hostile. He was very religious but exposure to comparative theology at university and recognising his *deviant* sexuality both constituted severe challenges to Martin's faith and he eventually had to give up his strong beliefs; a loss which he found deeply disturbing. He had to prioritise his own natural sexual feelings above his religious convictions as they were incompatible, but it took years for him to restructure his life along new perspectives. Eventually, after relocating to London, Martin has found the kind of relationships he was always looking for and this has been very valuable and therapeutic for him. This healing process has lead Martin to increased self-acceptance of his own difference, from which Martin is able to accept and forgive the limitations of his home environment, including feeling nurturing towards those who bullied him, and towards his mother who had rejected his sexuality. Martin believes that this transformation in him is due mainly to the important relationships he was able to develop in Britain. He has felt valued and accepted with these others, developing trust and reciprocity. For the first time he is able to feel free rather than suffocated in a relationship. Feeling valued by others in this way has allowed him to experience himself as valuable. Here again it is apparent that the separation into themes of 'belonging', 'identity', and 'relationships' fragments the essential wholeness and interdependence of these experiences.

As indicated above, despite the yearning to belong with its implied acquiescence to others' expectations, social norms and conventions can be experienced as completely suffocating. There is a tension between resisting other's expectations and ending up isolated or even rejected, and trying to meet them (fitting into society) and losing one's sense of personhood

and self-direction. From the point of view of these co-researchers, fitting in and belonging, no matter how prized, incurs a hefty sacrifice. It is not uncommon for the individuals interviewed to attempt to resolve this dilemma by residing in two or more locations, for example, having another house in the countryside, or in another country. This provides a place of escape, and though the exact meaning of this remained mysterious, it seems that *dual belonging* may offer a degree of support and acceptance while maintaining enough relational distance to allow for a sense of independence. Or for some a resolution consisted of balancing intrusive belonging with solitary breaks in foreign places. For most co-researchers it was unthinkable not to have this other place as a refuge to escape to, or at the very least to have easy access to frequent international travel. However, always going back and forth, between connection and solitude, home and abroad, can make life feel fragmented and lead to a desire to connect everything together in one place. Then again, having everything in one place would compromise the essential ability to choose when to be with others and when to be alone – there would be less opportunity for self-regulation between solitude and being with others, generating those same feelings of panic and suffocation. It can feel crucial to maintain one's own freedom of choice regarding the responsibilities and demands of relationship.

For Patricia, living alone in an isolated place on the edge of the city offers a solution to this dilemma since others need to make a special journey, requiring an agreed arrangement, to visit her. In this case being with people becomes a personal decision, requiring an invitation, no spontaneous 'popping by'. Patricia finds that the transition from solitude to the social world requires time to 'crank oneself up'. The more time spent alone the more protective layers build up and the longer it takes to make the transition back into relationship with others. In Patricia's case, she links this experience with her original home environment, where she was not allowed to be alone long enough to dwell in her private inner world without the imposition of the other. At that time, this sense of inner privacy was her escape, her 'other place'. Unlike others in her family, for some reason *Patricia needed this*. This 'other place' constituted an approximation of her early life situation when her family lived between two 'homes' with neither really being 'home'. Since then, she has tried to find a balance between *wanting* everything in one place and *fearing* it. In this, Patricia expresses her version of a common theme - the difficulty of reconciling the need for connection, belonging, relationship and the need for solitary respite from those demands. Patricia's siblings do not understand this dichotomy.

For Martin, feeling suffocated is like belonging too much, not having the individual space he needs any more. This experience often happens in a relationship that is too close, where he can feel like someone is parasitically feeding off him and he needs to protect himself. For example Martin needed to get away from his mother, and his home culture, in order to re-establish relationship with them. He finds it scary to contemplate his life if he hadn't left his home country. He anticipates that his relationship with his mother would have deteriorated and that emotionally he could not have developed as much as he has from being away. If he had to stay, Martin feels he would have continued to feel suffocated by the array of cultural attitudes, especially the expectations of men. He anticipates his gay identity would have been narrowed down to a purely sexual expression. His feelings of inferiority, isolation, and worthlessness would have continued since he would not have had access to educational or developmental opportunities to counteract them and support his own growth. Martin describes his experience of suffocation powerfully as feeling like being tied up, restrained, someone else dictating his choices and it can bring a physically felt lump in his throat just to name this experience, making it difficult to breathe. He had a history of severe asthma in his home country and he feels this medical condition is an expression of his feeling of suffocation; it has not recurred since moving to London. In leaving his homeland, Martin feels clear that he was really looking for something basic about existence itself, not something as superficial as just enjoying life, since that possibility had not even occurred to him yet.

While young, Graciella's parents travelled frequently, often apart. Graciella was able to mould this situation so that she could construct a space *between* her parents that maximised her freedom. She was able to be herself in this interstitial space and thus avoided being trapped in either parent's world. Graciella began to develop this space potentiality from *nothing* into a *free space* where she could experiment with her identity without the impingement of the family context. She knew how to be the person each of her parents, and grandparents, expected her to be, and adopting these identities made her feel like a foreigner in each of those contexts. But the space in-between was lonely; Graciella was alienated from the places where she could have connection with her family. She was allowed access to all of herself only in the neutral interstitial space she had created, but that space was ungrounded and provided no direction for her. All she knew was that she had to escape the known alternatives, and that situation occasionally recurs in her life.

If escape and the potentiality of travel were not possible, co-researchers imagined either that they would end up in conflict with their environment, or that compliance with other's expectations would result in just withering up and perishing. This highlights the depth of the feeling about both the opportunity of travel and the threat of settled life. Travel can offer magical experiences in place of the lack of spontaneity, lack of joy, and loss of magic experienced in the everyday settled world. Returning to a structured societal routine can be a shock, eliciting resistance. Commitments to one exclusive world, the boredom of daily life, inter-dependence of habitual relations, can all generate a feeling of being cornered. Escape is partially a fleeing from the ordinary and everyday concerns which are experienced as petty, close-minded, and repressive. Settling in one place would require integrating extraordinary travel experiences into an ordinary daily life.

However, *some* conventional choices, like academic study, which eventually facilitate further freedom, can approximate a form of palatable 'sedentary adventure'. In such cases, the motivation to persist can be strong enough to persevere through strong feelings such as fear, not belonging, wanting to escape, in order to finish a course of study that's providing new avenues of self-understanding. The choice to remain can feel like a decision to invest in oneself and in the case of one co-researcher, like one's 'last chance'. As mentioned earlier, actively exploring different milieus and areas within one's locale, as well as frequent holidays abroad, can give the breathing space needed to settle temporarily without feeling suffocated. Perhaps as an artefact of the sample of co-researchers, there is an indication that rather than just journeying out into the world, it is also possible to journey inward, for example anchored through personally relevant intellectual studies. Again, this raises further avenues for future research. In any case, it becomes apparent that belonging is not a simple positive – negative dichotomy.

Both belonging (implying settling) and escape (implying travel) are complex experiences; both experiences simultaneously imply alluring and threatening possibilities. In summary, strong sensitivities to the suffocation of belonging seem to encourage these individuals to escape geographically. Even without any exposure to other cultures or places, some of these co-researchers imagined that leaving was the route to fulfilling possibilities and escaping incompatible modes of being. It can be easier in hindsight to see one's process of planning and taking positive steps to rescue oneself. In the midst of desperate action the experience is too close, and in most cases too insular, to consciously reflect upon it. However, the

interviews did seem to provide a reflective space, in fact an example of the non-intrusive relationship and respect for difference that these co-researchers seek.

Summary Points

- ✚ **'Belonging' is viewed with intense ambivalence; the attraction consists in the warmth and connection with others, while the repulsion is experienced as an oppressive demand to conform to the conventional and disown one's potential.**
- ✚ **Ideally, belonging would incorporate acceptance of who one truly is and the space to be that person. However, co-researchers usually experienced a more conditional belonging, based upon 'fitting in' and this was too much of a sacrifice.**
- ✚ **Co-researchers were very sensitive to experiencing expectations as oppressive and claustrophobic. They also often perceive their home culture as too homogeneous or provincial – indicating that the process of rejection can go in both directions.**
- ✚ **Narratives reveal that individuals experienced themselves, and were experienced by others, as different and this was at times a source of their feeling of not-belonging. The feeling of difference was not a *product* of being rejected, but more clearly *predates* these responses to the individual's difference.**
- ✚ **It was not uncommon for co-researchers to say they *never* felt at home in their home environment. This informed their leaving and often they were the only ones who left – siblings and friends usually stayed. Those individuals who originally felt a sense of belonging but later left when there was a shift in their belonging, eventually report experiences similar to those who never belonged.**
- ✚ **It is very common for co-researchers to reside in two places, have a country house, or travel frequently, in order to have a place to escape to. This seems to be one resolution of the need to belong and the need to remain apart and independent.**
- ✚ **Continually escaping can eventually limit one's self-investment in terms of personal and professional development. Some co-researchers were exploring ways to settle, at least temporarily, in order to pursue education for example. It seems that both leaving and settling incur potential threats to developing self-potential.**

4.3 Valued characteristics and sensitivities (space, independence, freedom, choice) (19)

Introduction

Independence, freedom, choice, and space, are intricately interconnected, to the extent that separating them into these terms makes conceptual but not experiential sense. *Each demands and implicates the others.* In the interviews this was often expressed by asserting that feeling independent and free permits choosing for oneself, but independence, freedom, and thus choice, require a sense of physical 'space' because for these individuals physical space is a requirement for psychological space. These aspects of existence were explicitly addressed as

indispensable by nineteen of the twenty co-researchers. As values and sensitivities, these will be taken together as an overlapping felt matrix³², rather than as distinct themes.

Though these values were consistently expressed as positive, one co-researcher also suggested underlying secondary motivations for independence; that it can signify 'retaliation' for the felt rejection of not belonging. The necessity to be independent due to environmental disconnection can undergo a re-evaluation and become a prize of independence, demonstrating that the support of others is not needed anyway. In this sense, self-reliance is partly a prophylactic against being disappointed and rejected and as such implies some ingredient of emotional pain. However, even in such cases, the prevailing sense was positive; independence, freedom, choice and personal space are valued and intrinsic to life.

Independence can be prioritised over familial attention, the warmth of long-standing friendships, and the assumed comfort of a home world. In comparison with those who never leave, there can be a feeling of pride from having the courage to escape the comfortable and the given, to carve an independent life out of nothing. The home environment and its surrounding cultural context can be experienced as limiting individual potentials, for example due to conventional expectations, condoned prejudices, and available gender roles. The home culture can be intellectually and spiritually suppressive for someone who experiences her or himself as different. These limitations are unacceptable to the individuals under consideration here. For them, such restriction generates a need to expand, or as two co-researchers expressed, the need to 'search for a tribe' within which one might encounter similar souls and a sense of belonging without contraction. The themes in this section reveal what co-researchers are eager to point out; that even when family difficulties exist, they may not be the primary motive for needing to leave home, and certainly never the *sole cause*.

Co-researcher Narratives

It feels important for Rita to pursue her own sense of direction rather than conforming herself to other's agendas, fashions, or fads. She cannot see any meaning in a life that is not self-directed, in which one takes responsibility to control what one *can* control. It feels important

³² Gendlin refers to this concept of a whole with 'inter-affecting' parts as an 'unseparated multiplicity' (see Gendlin, 1997).

to her not to be stifled by hierarchies and to resist mainstream discourses, not to give into the conventional and the received. She recalls a pivotal early memory of her mother telling her that she didn't need to believe the nun's religious teaching at school because she was not Catholic and this instilled the idea that authorities didn't have to be believed, one was free to discern things for oneself. At the end of life, Rita would like to look back and see that she's followed her passions and done interesting things, this is a constant refrain supporting her life choices from early life to the present and into an imagined future.

For people who prioritise their personal freedom, there are limits upon how flexible one can be in adapting to imposed rules and demands while remaining authentic to one's own values; if one's individual freedom is not respected, one gathers up one's convictions and vacates. The action of leaving can both express freedom, as an instance of it, and protect the personal space of freedom for a future of independent choices. For co-researchers who have described freedom as a primary value, losing freedom can elicit deep panic, to the extreme of approximating a spiritual death. We've seen these sentiments reflected in previous sections and they are omnipresent in the interview transcripts themselves. Again it is apparent that 'themes' are artificially extricated strands from a woven whole.

Giving up a settled life for solitary travelling and living alone in a foreign place requires trusting one's own 'voice'. Co-researchers report the possibility of 'hearing' and trusting their unassailable need to travel even when this choice has not been modelled in their surroundings. This suggests an ability to accept the call into the foreign that issues from nowhere other than one's own self. Travelling can be an experience of being free, fending for oneself, looking after oneself, and being challenged by the differences in the world. It can feel very empowering to direct one's own experiences and these journeys can form the highlights of one's life; co-researchers often referred back fondly to such adventures. At the same time travelling can teach much about the limits of one's independence, the requisite balance between solitude and companionship.

Parents can respond in a manner that interferes with the development of personal responsibility and independence, which usually seeks its first full expression in adolescence. Carl's parents tried to protect him from the transition of leaving home and taking his own personal responsibility. He knows his parents would like to maintain him in their 'safe little world', however he cannot adapt to this. It was crucial to Carl that he became financially self-

sufficient and set up his own home, to have his own space. His experience, corroborated by other co-researchers, is that physical space allows mental space. It allows one to be one's 'own master' by securing unencumbered space and time to work through a process of decision-making without incursions that would truncate the self-directed nature of this process. Patricia also wants to feel that she is responsible for her choices and having her own independent territory convinces her that she has made her choices freely and can stand by them. Having physical space gives her the sense of being equal to others and thus able to control her own destiny.

Sarah also found that in her family wanting freedom was always an issue and could only be won grudgingly through conflict and resistance. When moving to London, she experienced a 'heady' sense of being able to do what she wants. She doesn't have to worry about who she is all the time, or constantly battle against being overwhelmed. Freedom is highly valued by Sarah, again because it gives her the space to decide for herself, and making choices *is* the theme of her life. Having a choice and making it for herself is experienced as wonderful, whether it's a bad choice or good is less relevant. Predictably, Sarah does not react well to being told what to do. She needs the experience of being involved in decisions that affect her, but having had a say, she can then carry out the decision even if she disagrees with it. However, if decisions are imposed upon her, she rebels – she perceives that the only possible response to external imposition is to fight for her freedom.

Even as a young child, Renata valued having her own separate space and played games with her sister using chairs and blankets to concretely create this for herself. By the time she got her own bedroom in the family home it could no longer satisfy her growing need for space. This lack of space and its concomitant lack of freedom meant Renata could not feel at peace in the family home. She could only define herself negatively, by resisting others impinging upon her. Renata coped with the lack of space by engaging in many activities in the locality and spending little time at home. Meeting an English-speaking group in her hometown offered Inez choices she'd never experienced in her protective family environment. This group offered a new world where her views were sought and valued. This external interest in her own world was the opposite of her upbringing, where she was taught to do what she was told, which she acquiesced to in order to belong. She now realises that freedom is more important to her than belonging. Being able to choose for herself feels crucial in its implication of personal responsibility and independence. For Inez, freedom involves being

accepted as she is, with the possibility of real dialogue, whereas belonging is imposed and ritualised, with no possibility of real meeting.

Specific environments can pose greater challenges, even threats, to these values of independence, freedom, and choice. For example, environments that are couple or family-oriented can feel like a burden and may be avoided by people who value their individuality and independence in the way described, even those who themselves have children and partners. An ex-pat community that tries to maintain the homogenous home culture also highlights feelings of restriction and imposition, recreating the original painful experiences of not fitting in, being different, not embodying their expectations while being assumed to be one of them. Apart from Kumar, co-researchers that mentioned ex-pat communities did so disparagingly. Fiona found living in an ex-pat environment unreal, frustrating, and dissatisfying because there wasn't enough encounter with the local culture and therefore inadequate exposure to difference. She had left home in order to engage in the larger cultural context, to express her desire to be active socially, and the ex-pat situation recapitulated those original limitations, which she could not accept. When in a limiting or entrapping situation, Fiona's first response, like Sarah's, is to become active and struggle to change the parameters, expand the boundaries, regain a sense of freedom. If the limits cannot be extended, she must move on. This was how she experienced her own family as well as the ex-pat community.

Issues of freedom also came up in reference to the question of whether the person ever considered returning home. Those who considered this option did so in a very specific way, so as not to recreate the original feelings of suffocation. Though many co-researchers feel clear that they would never return 'home' to live there permanently, some, like Martin, could image returning for a set period knowing he has the freedom to leave. Although he does not miss his home culture at all, he would like to be able to visit his family more often. Likewise, Martin needs the freedom to think he might leave London at some point; that he could go to any country in the world. Having the freedom to *consider* that possibility allows him to feel he is making his own choices, like he is proving to himself he can make any choice he wants to. For Martin, like Sarah, choice is fundamental to life, it allows him *to be*, to live life rather than just exist. He feels he has learned in the UK that there is such a thing as actually enjoying life and this has been a formative and guiding discovery for him. Martin will likely

stay in London for the present because of the valued relationships he has developed here, relationships which finally balance the need for connection with the need for space.

The first experience of foreign travel can be pivotal as a realisation of long held dreams of independence and freedom. It can be a relief to feel one is able to fulfil those young ambitions to be adventurous; a whole exotic world thereby opens to exploration. Peter loved his first experience of foreign travel and sensed a self-appreciation for his ability to be independent and to adapt to these strange environments, languages, difficult situations and people, in a way he hadn't been able to at home. Peter's newfound confidence was essential in his choice not to pursue conventional forms of life, which he had hitherto experienced as painfully restricting. His first experience of foreign travel suggested that there might be a place where he could feel comfortable, presenting the possibility of fitting into a loose social nexus. Travelling allows freer choices about one's identity, what one brings and what one leaves behind. Travelling is the *living of difference*. It provides an insight into what is diverse and what is common in human life. For these individuals it offers a bigger picture, a new repertoire of choices, and reflective space.

For Francois, moving to a foreign place is partly about challenging himself by facing the unknown and unpredictable to see if he can survive. This experience is one of constantly rising above the known into something unknown and Francois perceives this strategy as a source of character development. Although succeeding at this challenge is clearly meaningful for him, it is not clear what actually constitutes that meaning, apart from its developmental side-effect. In order to *feel his being*, Francois needs to be challenged (reminiscent of Peter's desire to 'kick himself alive'). As soon as he's adapted to the foreign place, he needs to find something new to struggle with, a new place or project. It does not feel good enough for him to be in his 'comfort zone' (this theme is also expressed by other co-researchers). In order to develop his capacities and continue his personal growth, he constantly requires the challenge of the new – comfort is stagnant. Francois says his individuation is about physically removing himself from the familiar in order to feel 'fresh air' again. Interestingly, he now feels he has adapted to the UK, so going 'home' currently feels like going to a place that is foreign and strange *and* familiar. In this sense the 'new foreignness' encountered in going home might offer a glimmer of the kind of challenge that as the 'familiar home' it couldn't offer to the younger Francois.

Looking back at his home country, Francois denigrates the way that his countrymen live in an unaware and self-involved way. Such existence appears to him as a meaningless cycle of school/work, earning money, going home, watching TV... There is something about mundane conventional life that feels tranquilising for Francois and he speculates about the dreadful unhappiness and disfigurement he would have experienced from staying in his home environment. He could not have accepted being a stunted version of who he is now. Francois was inspired when confronted by new experiences at university, making him develop his own thinking and awareness. It 'woke him up' and now in order to stay awake Francois feels he needs to keep contacting difference, one way to do this is to keep 'flying away' to new places. This affinity to difference will be further explored in a later section.

Some of the co-researchers have never endured a restricting situation long enough to know what that would entail. Even the invitation during the interview to imagine that possibility often elicited discomfort. Though it is imagined as threatening and frightening, there were indications that staying and confronting restrictions might beget that elusive feeling of peace and perhaps engender new expressions of freedom. Opportunities that necessitate remaining settled for a period (for example, academic study as previously mentioned) can feel like an anchor and be both feared and appreciated at the same time. This suggests that repeated geographical movement may not be the only mode of expressing the cherished values under discussion. For example, many of the co-researchers expressed strong values of fighting for the oppressed, and social justice. This could be perceived as an intersubjective counterpart of their own need for independence, choice, and freedom – their own experiences of these values are enhanced, even intimately connected to, other's *possibilities* of actualising them (whether the possibilities are taken up by others or not).

Rita's advocacy for the underdog is another expression of creating space inside the environment by taking a contrary view to her own social group. She has never understood why western culture is considered paramount, and she contradicts the assumptions of her original culture by consistently siding with traditional cultures, for example, always wanting the Indians to win in westerns, supporting the Palestinians, expressing a sensitivity to the plight of the oppressed and unfairly treated. Rita has used her career to speak on behalf of the oppressed and dispossessed in various capacities. This sort of critique and rebellion has been an aspect of her experience from an early age but it is a mystery to her where this sensitivity

comes from. Again, perhaps it's in part another expression of her sensitivity to freedom, choice, and self-determination³³.

Summary Points

- ✚ Self-direction (self-creation) in life prevails over the importance of belonging, security, and certainty, so much so that anything seems worth sacrificing in order to maintain the freedom to choose for oneself.
- ✚ Conformity to the conventional is avoided at all costs – life is meaningless unless it is self-directed.
- ✚ Independence and choice require space from impinging environmental demands. Physical space is a prerequisite for the reflective space within which self-direction manifests.
- ✚ Encroachment upon one's personal space (physical-reflective) elicits responses of resistance and defence. If the constraint cannot be addressed and personal space expanded, the individual will seek another environment.
- ✚ Leaving protects freedom and independence while also being an expression of it.
- ✚ The loss of freedom is deeply distressing, approximating the death of the 'self'.
- ✚ To follow the call to independence, freedom and choice, one must trust one's own voice, and have a degree of self-confidence.
- ✚ Moving to a foreign place and international travel are archetypal situations for expression the above needs. The challenge of unfamiliar situations offers the possibility of continuous development while the comfort of the familiar is felt as stagnation.
- ✚ There arise indications of sedentary approximations of the values under discussion, for example 'inner journeying', academic studies, and social activism.

4.4 Wider Life Perspectives – Philosophical and Spiritual Outlook (7)

Introduction

There are overt and unequivocal references to spirituality in the interviews, and there are also implicit and inferred allusions to the transcendent within various life experiences. Seven people made explicit mention of 'wider life perspectives', incorporating a spiritual or philosophical understanding of life. It is not for us to diverge into examining various definitions of human spirituality – that would take us far from the phenomenological task in this chapter. Dictionary or academic definitions are not especially relevant, instead we are guided by the co-researcher's actual use of the terms spiritual and philosophical and my

³³ As an aside, Rita points out that others can be envious of her way of living. This manifests mostly around the amount she is able to travel. She sees the envy as a confrontation between her way of living and more conventional ways of life and others seeing her doing things they want to do themselves but aren't able to manage for whatever reasons.

distillation of this topic from the transcripts. However, depending upon one's definition of spirituality, this brief section could also be considered as a spectral continuum with the next section, which explores 'openness to difference'.

The explicit references to spirituality include being intimately engaged with the restlessness of spiritual quests or understanding existence through existing spiritual beliefs and traditions. Implicit wider perspectives were also evident in less tangible ways, for example, a need to be expansive, open to the 'more' of life, following a 'calling', being attentive to the mysterious transpersonal core of life and oneself. This theme was also expressed commonly in the negative, not being able to conform to the manifest forms of settled life, as they were perceived as too conventional, mundane, too evident and even profane. For some co-researchers this revealed a bias that obvious 'available' forms of life are spiritually vacuous, leaving something 'deeper' unaddressed and unlived.

Co-researcher Narratives

Common sentiments in the transcripts suggest that leaving home expresses an existential facet of life – a difficult to express but clearly felt need to expand beyond the place where one is *put* to grow up. The need to leave is itself *mysterious* – for me it constitutes a major question uncovered by this phenomenological investigation. To speculate: perhaps this proclivity is embedded in inborn sensitivities, an underlying openness in one's being, a predestined path in life, incompatibilities between the vagaries of the self and the hardness of the environment, or a continuation of the travails of a previous life... There is no one answer to this question and some co-researchers wanted to safeguard that mystery, and many of them seemed willing to live with a curious '*I don't know*'. Nina's perspective is that life can be thought of as governed by a 'calling' and this can be trusted as a guide to one's choices. It's an intuitive sense that seems to connect the self and the larger world, an invisible web within which individual lives are choreographed within life as a whole. This raises a question of how much the individual needs to make conscious decisions (apart from the constant choice to heed and trust this calling) and how much things will unfold along lines that are predestined or the product of transcendent interconnections. Nina feels that travelling out in the wider world exposes a person to the deeper mysteries of life in a way that remaining settled does not.

Graciella and Anna explicitly linked their migratory biographies with their spiritual understandings. For Anna, even at a young age, she chose to dedicate her life to living in foreign cultures that teach spiritual practice rather than following the conventional life choices of her own culture. Spiritual yearnings lead her on a quest to foreign cultures, isolating her from others in the home environment who did not share this need. That sense of isolation was experienced as painful and fortified her predispositions to leave her home. Why should she feel this strong need that others seemed oblivious to, why should *she* be different?

There are a number of sacrifices entailed in the spiritual quest. For Anna it involved releasing her family connections and abandoning her education in exchange for enduring years of isolation and travel. However, she has no regrets about her decision, it was what she 'had' to do. Graciella also understands her leaving home as part of a larger spiritual predestination linked with a belief in Karma. She believes she was born to leave in order to work through issues of 'home'. From this spiritual point of view it makes sense to ask why did Graciella choose to be born to those specific parents in those circumstances? She believes she needed to gain courage from those circumstances before she was ready to journey out into the world. In this sense there was a match between what Graciella needed from that situation and what they needed from her. She needed to be like a butterfly for them, so from this perspective there was never any contemplation of not leaving, it had to be this way for life to unfold as it should.

As an adolescent, Ben sought experiences of difference through culturally uncommon psychic and spiritual beliefs. It took a concerted effort for Ben to make contact with this form of difference, but it was a necessary source of nourishment in an otherwise uniform environment. This need felt like an innate compulsion for more conscious living. This attraction to the psychic sphere addressed an aspect of Ben that was impoverished in his contact with the surrounding environment, peers, and family. Ben's chosen career as a psychotherapist is a more developed reflection of that urge to know about the world and not just accept inherited beliefs. This attraction to mystery is similar to Ben's perpetual need to experience the unfamiliar through travel and living in foreign places. The seduction of a place, or ideas, can be temporary and then Ben needs to explore again, and he mentions that he has yet to explore the East, where he anticipates deeper esoteric difference may await him.

Peter was always attracted to what he did not understand; an affinity to anything mysterious and to what remains unknown. This included his experience of himself as emotionally incoherent and thus a mystery. For example, Peter continues to wonder about his sense of alienation and what that's really about in his case. He finds it can be strangely comforting to experience mystery in the world since it matches the mystery he finds when he explores himself. This comfort arises from the affirmation that mystery is an acceptable part of the world and therefore he is acceptable. Since Peter experiences himself as an enigma, being in a mystifying foreign place creates a match between the external world he experiences and his own being. This 'match' is like a kind of equivalency that makes him feel at home. For Peter, and I would argue perhaps for all of us, *feeling at home is the experience of this interaction of the inner and outer matching in idiosyncratic ways*³⁴. For Peter, the nearest experience of home is this intimate communion of mysteries. He finds it comforting to feel himself in perspective with the whole universe and the impermanence of everything. These experiences embody the spiritual dimension within the possibility of feeling at home in an unfathomable world.

This perspective of 'spiritual mystery' can also arise within the process of returning home, as was evident for a couple of the co-researchers. Fiona feels that some aspect of her leaving home to explore the world is connected to the on-going historical experience of diaspora that is an aspect of her home culture. Part of Fiona's spiritual journey is to find her individual place in that historical narrative. Her appreciation for the aesthetic experience of her homeland remains stronger than her connection to any other landscape in the world. The actual place in her homeland that feels like her place of origin has strong connections to her mother and ancestral generations rather than her own biographical upbringing. In that ancestral place Fiona experiences a sense of recognition and completion and discovering it feels like finding the piece to a puzzle. The experience of returning 'home' has opened Fiona to speculations about cross-generational healing, returning to address psychological difficulties not only of ones' own, but also of parents and more distant ancestors. Her mission in this regard has an intuitive feel to it, which engenders speculation as to whether there is an emotional memory of attachment to place that is transmitted through generations in an almost 'homeopathic' or genetic way.

³⁴ This will be taken up in the last section as a major conceptual development of the current study - home as interaction, rather than home as place or 'inner experience'.

Summary Points

- ✚ Leaving home can be the expression of a spiritual quest that cannot be undertaken within the confines of the home environs.
- ✚ Exploring the world can be guided by an 'inner calling' that seems to be a manifestation of an intuitive connection to a transpersonal dimension.
- ✚ Some co-researchers explain their migrations as discernible components of the teachings of spiritual traditions and practices which are not native to their home cultures and which therefore are the source of further isolation and marginalisation.
- ✚ Travel is a valued mode of 'conscious living', keeping a person aware of surroundings and preventing a slip into habitual and less mindful ways of being.
- ✚ Seeking out contact with unfamiliar and mysterious cultures offers the experience of a 'match' between the mystery one finds within one's own being and mysteries of the world. This matching between person and world can generate a temporary feeling of being at 'home' in the world, belonging. This suggests a new definition of 'home' as *interaction*.
- ✚ The return home, after years abroad, can express a spiritual dimension signifying reconnection and psychological healing of self, or family, or even addressing historical dilemmas within one's culture (for example forced migration).

4.5 Openness to experiences of difference and foreignness (15)

Introduction

Throughout the interviews, co-researchers articulate a consistently pronounced affinity for alterity, in the guise of curiosity about difference, attraction to the foreign and unfamiliar, coupled with disdain for the known and familiar. For the majority of these individuals, their incessant regard for the foreign and unfamiliar manifests their difference from the prevailing social and familial environment. This obvious difference tends to elicit rejecting attitudes from more 'homogenous' cultures, therefore *an attraction to difference sets one apart as different*, instigating a response from the environment that reinforces the desirability of associating with other people in other places. The following section describes various modalities of expression of this dynamic and the attendant abhorrence of homogeneity. It also touches again on personal experiences of being designated as 'different' and the commonly associated pernicious consequences.

The impression is that there is a pay-off as well as a price to pay in being different. Along with the painful discomfort and confusion of not-belonging, almost from birth it would seem in some cases, there is also a notion that being different connotes being special and preserves

one from the mundane meaninglessness of conventional living. Kumar, the one co-researcher who is not a voluntary migrant, again serves as a significant contrast to the others. He expresses an opinion that people have an innate attraction to similarity, rather than difference, and while this discrepancy may serve to distinguish a process of 'existential migration' from other modes of being, it subsequently reveals that even within the affinity to difference there exists a tacit attraction to similarity at least in the tendency to seek people and places who also celebrate 'difference', within which not-belonging *is* the form of belonging.

Co-researcher Narratives

Ben provides an eloquent and representative description of many of the nuances encompassed within what I am terming 'attraction to difference'. Consequently, I'll commence with a prolonged outline of his self-understanding and experiences of difference.

Ben grew up in what he describes as a very homogenous place, where he lived in the same house until he left home. Within this sea of similarity, Ben remembers valuing any source of difference, like the rare racial differences in his school classmates. At this age he already enjoyed travelling to other parts of his native country and felt that other places were objectively more interesting than his home. He could not understand why anyone would *choose* to live where he did. It was always disappointing to return home. Ben needed to get away from this familiar world which rigidly set his identity. He longed for an environment within which he could re-invent himself. The life he anticipated at home was laid out before him, school, job, etc. in an unsatisfying and predictable way. Ben consistently emphasises the liberation he felt in finally leaving behind everyone who knew him, and their constraining preconceptions about him. When he moved away, he felt free to realise the difference within him, transforming his appearance, beliefs, and his experiences, as celebration of his liberation from the home environment.

Growing up, Ben exhibited his sensitivity to difference in various ways, most notably his search for unconventional psychic and spiritual contacts. However, the possibilities of foreign cultures first became apparent as a result of his meeting with a group of foreign students when he was 19. He was tremendously excited by the challenge these students offered to the concepts and assumptions of his own upbringing. The idea of disparate cultural manifestations galvanised Ben's affinity to difference, peaking in his departure from his

home culture. Though he had not always consciously considered leaving his home, interestingly, he also never even entertained the possibility that he would stay. Meeting these students gathered Ben's nascent but enduring life trajectory.

Ben migrated to France, which was the pinnacle of his early adult experience, partly because it challenged the puritanical values of his origins. He states that France was a more appropriate 'match' for his own values than his home culture, so paradoxically the foreign country, by being different from his home culture, was actually more similar to 'Ben' as the person he felt himself to be. Herein discloses the understated motif of similarity within the attraction to difference – affinity to difference often harbours a search for a subtle mode of similarity in which one might dwell freely. This incorporation of 'sameness' within an attraction to difference is shared by a number of co-researchers and has more than an echo of the interaction of the heimlich and the unheimlich; the presence of the familiar in the strange and the strange in the familiar. This will be explored more in Part Two.

Ben wonders if he had grown up in France would he be attracted to America instead, the suggestion being that his sensitivity to difference is in part a construction in opposition to the prevailing culture, no matter which culture. He admits that he likes being different, to stand out and get attention in a positive way, so the attraction to difference can be thought of as partially an incorporation of the exotic in order to achieve a special status. For example, Ben mentions returning home with his foreign partner and his partner receiving more attention because he stands out as comparatively more different than Ben and Ben finds that usurpation from his special status to be uncomfortable.

For Ben, a main attraction to Europe is the close proximity of a cluster of differences, in terms of the menagerie of values, lifestyles, and especially languages arranged across the continent. We will see that linguistic difference has also been a significant motivator for other co-researchers. Ben loves the accessibility of moving from one language world into another just by going down the road or hopping on a train. He expressed excitement about this in the interview, but again, it is mysterious to Ben why this should be so exciting. He is able to recount many examples of experiences of crossing borders into a new language but the underlying *meaning* of his excitement is evasive. To speculate, one possibility may be that each language creates the possibility of another world where things might be completely different again. Ben is reduced to expressing this excitement in tone and gesture, saying only

that he experiences something magical about the proximity of these cultural transitions. He speculates that perhaps an aspect of the attraction of this multi-linguistic environment is its contrast with his more 'monochromatic' culture where minor differences are within an overall cultural sameness; a sameness that Ben did not value.

Ben's social nexus in London exhibits myriad difference by being very international. However, again underlying these obvious differences are fundamental shared values of tolerance and a liberal outlook. Though this similar perspective on the world is a necessary aspect of belonging to this group, where each person originates from is inconsequential, except that there must be cultural diversity. In the interview, Ben wondered if existent basic similarities reduce the disruptive effects of apparent differences. But this interpretation negates the obvious *positive* values he associates with difference (of a certain kind). It strikes me as plausible that certain foundational similarities allow valued differences to coexist safely, combining a sense of belonging with diversity, exemplifying the sought-after *acceptance of difference*. This highlights the fact that difference, and being different, is preferred when it signifies acceptance but not when it elicits rejection. So it is not surprising that Ben is exhausted by repeatedly having to overcome negative assumptions about him solely because of his birthplace. In his social world, Ben's home culture implies negative values, forcing Ben into a position of having to *prove* a *basic similarity* in outlook in order for his difference to be accepted, establishing an uncanny inversion of the values inherent in his difference-similarity dichotomy. Ben must demonstrate his allegiance by distancing himself from his home culture, in essence saying, my values are your values – I'm not one of *them*, 'betraying' his culture of origin.

Uniquely in his family, from an early age Carl made strong meaningful connections with friends outside the home. When some of these friends did not fit with his family mores, his parents banned them from visiting. Carl experienced this as a conflict between his own openness and his parent's preference for homogeneity, creating a difficult choice for him between loved parents and loved friends. In these divided loyalties, Carl realised the value he placed on the security of his idyllic family life clashing with his identification with marginality and the world outside the exclusivity of his home. Carl's later experiences of homophobic discrimination sensitized him further to difference and to the position of the disadvantaged. His growing awareness of worldviews that pose alternatives to his safe family enclave instigated explicit questioning. In response his parents attempted to silence this

emerging voice and Carl found that very painful. This accentuated his own experience of marginality within the home, increasing his identification with others who are different or foreign. Carl hypothesises that people who are 'different' have somehow been 'opened up' by life's betrayals, opened by experiencing a context in which they don't belong, and consequently living with the threat of things falling apart. This openness to life manifests by making a person question fundamentals about life, queries about meaning and purpose - why are we here, what should we do, how should we live? This encounter with 'openness' is not easily understood and Carl suggests that it could equally be conceptualised as a *closing down* to the possibility of taking part in superficial conventionality - a kind of impaired ability to be contiguous with one's context, with quotidian society.

Growing up in a homogeneous white conservative Christian environment, Rita conveys a pronounced attraction to non-similar people, places, and values. In her hometown, Rita was disgusted by 'small-minded racist attitudes' and partly as a challenge to these attitudes she had a Black boyfriend while still living at home. Rita's academic and career choices certainly reflect her personal sensitivities to difference. She seeks out new situations, new horizons and international projects through her career as an anthropologist. This accords her frequent opportunities to travel and be exposed to cosmopolitan worlds diametrically opposite to her upbringing. She now supports many marginalised and vulnerable people in other parts of the world. It is a mystery to Rita where this proclivity to otherness and social justice comes from. She continues to choose to live in places that are culturally very mixed and vibrant, worlds within worlds. Rita is more comfortable in Muslim cultures, apparently rejecting similarities to the culture she was born into in favour of foreign cultural expressions. At the very least she feels more 'at home' in heterogeneous 'cosmopolitan' environments than the homogeneity she knew as a young person growing up in England. We could speculate that this is consistent with the previously described affinity to space, freedom, and independence – diversity offers more fluid possibilities for identity, less restriction or pernicious pressure to conform to one monolith.

While some co-researchers present narratives that lucidly exemplify general themes within many of the different interviews, there remains significant diversity within each theme. For example, Kathy's transcript portrays a particular emphasis within this sensitivity to difference and foreignness. As a young girl, Kathy had positive experiences of travelling across country with her sports club. Her experience of travel incorporates bonding with like-minded people,

a combination of being with similarity while encountering difference, which is a dynamic that continues now in migrations with her husband (he and Kathy share a very similar outlook). As with other co-researchers, Kathy can't locate the meaning of her love of travel, except that for her travel constitutes a form of escape. This is escape from the ordinary everydayness of life. Travel constitutes a break from the stresses and boredom of routine daily living. She is constantly pulled towards the otherness of unfamiliar cultures, places, religions, people, but she does not understand the basis of this attraction. Also, like Ben, Kathy finds most of her friendships are with others like herself, internationalists and mixed-culture couples.

Kathy describes her experiences in terms of definable personality characteristics, for example: fondness for difference, deep curiosity, flexibility, needing challenges, and not tolerating boredom or ambiguity. Kathy was unique in the cohort in her difficulty of dealing with ambiguity, namely the incomprehensible or inconclusive in life. When she goes to a new place she needs to find out the rules of that place in order to reduce ambiguity. In this way she sees herself as flexible because she can adapt to different environments, yet perhaps in a sense she is also inflexible as this adaptation is rule-based, rather than founded on attitudes of toleration and openness to the unknown. The repercussion of this style of 'adaptation' may be the boredom that Kathy experiences when she has understood a place, conquered it, and then needs to move on.

There is a cyclical manifestation in Kathy's curiosity of different cultures and her low tolerance of boredom. By adopting the local rules of conduct, she reduces the ambiguous to the boring and then needs to escape again. Once Kathy 'masters' something it loses its appeal and she moves on. This is noticeable in her professional life and in her frequent relocations. Moving to a new culture and learning a new language offers the needed new challenge. The everyday things are experienced as wearing and soul-destroying whereas big challenges are relished. Kathy describes herself as very goal-oriented, creating higher and higher goals to see where her limits are. She is competitive in her pursuit of goals, especially in sports and business because these, more than academics, imply more public recognition, which for some reason seems more valuable than the more private satisfaction of individual scholarship or spiritual development. Kathy acknowledges that in these proclivities she recapitulates the cultural values of her home country. It is worth noting that in all the material that has arisen from these twenty interviews, there will be great diversity, not only due to biographical

details and individual idiosyncrasy, but also from the inevitable influence of the original, and usually rejected, culture. We all start from somewhere³⁵.

For many of the co-researchers, frustration eventually surfaces in response to the less desirable aspects of a new culture. It is disappointing when many of the negative attributes one was circumventing through emigration return one by one to haunt the person in the new context. Kathy has felt this in every place she has lived, gradually experiencing the place as too homogenous, middle-class, conformist, small-minded, or lacking in spontaneity, expression, and dynamic energy. She begins to dislike a place for aspects of the culture that diverge from her own personality, i.e. for its difference, and these specific disparities between self and surroundings can feel repressive. Kathy recognises that the way she and her husband live in a place is 'cold', maintaining maximum freedom from the local culture, nonattachment and anonymity, but thereby also foregoing the support of the local culture and any potential sense of belonging. Aspects of Kathy's frustration with a place may be an expression of this maintained distance. In the end perhaps for some of us no one place is 'good enough' and constant mobility is the best alternative.

Curiosity has always been fundamental to Kathy's self-experience though again she does not understand the source of this. Curiosity is expressed through the variety of her travels, her studies, her ability to speak different languages, and her range of different careers. Kathy expressed a desire to be less curious so that she could be satisfied with settling down and having a simpler life. This suggests that her curiosity and her need to understand remains in most part specifically outward-directed. She seems to be able to abide questions about herself that she has not found answers to; why is she attracted to difference, why is she so curious, why can't she tolerate ambiguity, why does she need to have a place of escape... Kathy describes herself as a 'global nomad', a contemporary term in the new service industry of 'international relocation consulting'. Perhaps the sense of contradiction in her descriptions indicates a discrepancy between what I am calling 'existential migration' and what she terms a 'global nomad'. Superficially at least, existential migration signifies a deeply felt searching or yearning that expresses and addresses something in existence itself. The global nomad appears less purposive in his or her movement, more motivated by superficial curiosity and conventional values, however tinged it might be by a genuine need for *escape*. I will illustrate

³⁵ A discussion of the impact of our starting place is taken up in Chapter 6.

this further at the end of this chapter where I will offer a brief sketch of existential migration. In any case, there is a combination of certain similarities and a felt difference between Kathy and most of the other co-researchers, at least on this theme.

Like Kathy, Sarah also perceives herself as exhibiting a highly developed ability to adapt to difference, but for Sarah there is danger in this. Being adaptable can destabilize her capacity to take a stand, undermining her values of independence and choice. Sarah notices that she finds a way to adapt by finding something good in even the most difficult situations. She adapts to her current life events and only recognises that clearly afterwards, when she has greater perspective. Sometimes removing herself to a neutral place allows Sarah the *space* to evaluate her adaptations. It is interesting that Sarah regains the greatest clarity in perspective from contrasting her own experiences with friends from her home country, in effect ascertaining and evaluating her current difference from comparison with a fundamental (though past) benchmark of similarity. For Sarah encountering difference generates a valued complexity to life, though it also infers a threat to maintaining her own identity more than an open space to discover it.

Valerie experiences discomfort in situations where she is the only one who is different and doesn't fit in. She feels inferior and frustrated at not understanding the subtle queues of a homogenous group, even when ostensibly the same language is being spoken. This experience of foreignness can be so extreme and alienating that, like Camilla, she can begin to feel she doesn't belong on the planet. Not feeling up-to-date and fluent in any one language can affect one's sense of belonging anywhere, making it easier to live in places where there are many non-native speakers so that one at least 'belongs' in this shared 'incompetence'. Valerie notices that her feeling of foreignness is comparative – feeling less foreign around someone who is more foreign than her, and feeling more foreign around someone who is totally native, this applies even in the place she grew up. To some extent, then, the experience of being foreign is supported by one's own assumptions and comparisons but being a foreigner can also be a label applied from the outside, even at home.

In Valerie's experience, if she actually *feels* at home in a place, the label of being a foreigner is easier to accept. As an immigrant to Europe, Valerie's mother attempted to deny her own foreignness by adopting the host culture when Valerie was a child. This seems to have been a significant process for Valerie to witness. Valerie has not attempted to 'homogenise' herself

as her mother attempted to do, and consequentially she feels like a broken jigsaw, a mixture of places and cultures, an odd person of bits and pieces from everywhere and thus nowhere. Her mother downplayed her own cultural origin to the extent that her children did not even recognise her cultural difference or even her racial difference. Such denial of difference may give the message that fitting in requires homogeneity, concomitant with anticipation of rejection of difference.

Co-researchers who are not native English speakers described learning the English language as an exciting entry point into a different world. For example, Inez found it very challenging when she was confronted with not being able to understand an English-speaking group visiting her country. Their use of English enchanted Inez as it seemed to offer a more empowered form of expression and greater self-confidence than her native tongue. Inez felt that English offered the possibility of saying things she valued which she couldn't express in her indigenous language. The challenge to communicate was exciting, confronting Inez with experiences of another world, a world she found more attractive than her familiar world. She was so inspired to explore the world of English that she decided to leave her home, family, and fiancé, to study in the UK. In this case, language is the medium of the attraction to otherness. Inez experienced her own language as subdued, reflecting her place in her home and social environment. To her, English was the language of power and equality, and learning this new language symbolised freedom from her own world and its values. It was a doorway into larger possibilities, as it is the language of the world. In meeting this English-speaking group, life for Inez suddenly became divided between the excitement of foreignness and conforming to the expectations of her native society. For the first time she was able to consider a choice between two forms of life. As Inez compared the two worlds, she found that the foreign group offered a sense of 'true' belonging, excitement and vitality, and an experience of the magic of communication, which she had never had in her home environment. Her home world felt stifling, reserved, and conservative, a straightforward life of acquiescing to traditional expectations.

Marta was also attracted to the UK because she wanted to live in an English-speaking country. Language was a very important part of her desire to stay, though she's not sure why. She liked the difference of English, its cleanly spoken pronunciation compared to the difficult sounds of her own language. It seems easier, more fluent, controlled and appropriate, whereas her native language is a struggle and it's hard for Marta to even speak it now. The

impression is that speaking good English was a part of fitting in here, and of leaving behind the aspects of herself that are best expressed by her native language. However, recently Marta has come to resent this adaptation to Englishness and the subsequent loss of her native 'self'. She no longer wants to adapt to the indigenous English society surrounding her. She gets emotional about the loss of her own language and her devaluing of it. After some years here, she feels that she now has some insight into what lies behind well-spoken English and she purposely swears to shock other English-speakers, to disrupt the pretence and stand out as different. Language can be a potent symbol for the appropriations and losses implicit in choosing to become a foreigner. Marta's feelings about English and her native language seem to be shifting as she ages and begins again to appreciate aspects of her home culture.

As hinted above, in addition to expressing an affinity to difference, many of the co-researchers have had to endure the reactions of their milieu to their own apparent difference. For example, dealing with the social stigma of being gay impacted significantly on both Peter and Martin. Peter fantasized about being gay in a foreign place, where it might be acceptable, or where he might find it easier to express his sexuality because no one knows him. For Peter, exposure to 'gay culture' was an alluring opening into an exotic international world compared to the conventional life on offer in his small city. For Martin, realisation that he is gay mobilised the explicit desire to leave his home country, where *any* difference was negatively perceived. Like Peter, he wanted to experience his difference in a foreign culture, where being gay might be more accepted. To have opportunities to live as a gay man, Martin felt he had to find a more diverse environment. He valued honesty over belonging, so as an 'out' gay man in a homophobic culture, Martin was becoming increasingly isolated.

Although Martin identifies some aspects constituting his difference from the prevailing norm, he still seeks an explanation for his difference, as if there remains *something* to be revealed that would be a satisfying answer. Examples of Martin's difference include: being younger than his classmates, often being too ill to play with peers, and an early awareness of his attraction to males. It is not clear whether these aspects of his difference can be named retrospectively as simply expressions of a predisposition to difference, or if they are really *causes* of it. It is not surprising that one of Martin's main questions was whether difference was OK. The message from his environment was that difference is unacceptable and he internalised this message and labelled himself as 'weird'. For Martin, foreigners were different in a positive sense since they represented a rich, dominating, controlling world, full

of choice. He had a very positive image of that world despite its harsh competitiveness. The suggestion is that strength and control are positive values in this difference. In contrast, Martin experienced his own difference as weakness; he could not stand up for himself or defend his difference. He feels this is due to an underlying assumption that he deserved to be punished for being different. Presumably if he had experienced his difference as acceptable, he may have had the conviction to defend who he was, thus reinforcing a more positive value to his own sense of self.

Graciella expresses a common sentiment when she explains that visits home leave her feeling both connected to her surroundings and also disconnected and foreign. For example, she is conscious that the relations between men and women have a specific quality in her country and it makes her wonder about the meaning of this for her future relationships. She has always had relationships with men from other cultures and they have always communicated together in English, their shared third language. Partly due to her dissatisfaction with this, she now considers that having a relationship with a man from her own country might have positive aspects. For example, she wouldn't have to explain or educate him about cultural nuances; they could take for granted some common cultural understanding, which would be a relief. Graciella also fantasises about the romance of being in a relationship expressed in her own first language, where she could hear and say the things she heard her parents say when she was young. She wonders if she would still have to hide herself and if she would still feel misunderstood in such a relationship. She realises that over the years she has been domesticated by other cultures and is no longer very typical of the temperament of her country of origin. It is not clear whether she interprets this as meaning she may not experience the shared commonality she once would have had in a relationship with a fellow countryman due to the manner in which migration elaborates the self in increasing complexity. Her attraction to difference has not simply transmuted into an appeal towards similarity and simplicity - it remains similarity within difference, or difference within similarity.

Eventually, in the interview Graciella concludes that it's not the place one comes from, nor other easily defined external characteristics that are *most* important. It's a vibrating and resonating energy *between* people that she longs for, and difference is not a barrier as long as it's difference within this deeper energetic connection. Graciella feels she can recognise this 'energy' in people and that these people form a kind of international *tribe*. She feels most

isolated and lonely when she doesn't have others of her 'tribe' around her. This is a theme that emerges repeatedly throughout the interviews; there exists a loose 'grouping' that does not recognise itself as a group, but the membership of which *recognise each other*. Individuals engaged in what I term 'existential migration' have a pronounced tendency to associate with others who have made similar choices, who 'vibrate with a similar energy'. Though Graciella considers the possibility that there is a similarity among one's countrymen that can enhance the depth of an intimate relationship, she ends up deciding, along with other co-researchers, that there is a more essential and intangible quality of 'tribeness' that is significant in choosing partners and friends. This shared ineffable sense of tribe provides some corroboration for the concept of 'existential migration' being developed here.

Offering a modicum of support to the act of distinguishing existential migration from other forms of migration, Kumar, who didn't chose his migration, offers a distinct counterpoint to the diverse commonality of opinions expressed by other co-researchers. Kumar believes that people have a deep innate affinity to the similar, which contradicts the complex dynamic of attraction to difference expressed by other co-researchers in the study. For example, belonging to his specific race offers him a kind of global belonging that is crucially significant to Kumar. He hasn't been able to formulate clear answers as to why this is important or why his identity remains so linked to his country of origin, even though he left there at the age of five. On the surface Kumar feels he has more in common with the friends he has grown up with in Britain, but his racial appearance is more similar to others in the land of his birth. The similarity he feels with others in his native land has the quality of a deeper connection, and he speculates that perhaps it's evolutionary, or genetic, but in any case there is a deep and crucial undercurrent there that Kumar feels he wants to connect with. Thereby, uniquely in this study, he expresses a strong definition of belonging as similarity rather than an attraction to the foreign, the unfamiliar, or the diverse. This is one of many aspects of the individual experience of migration that requires further study.

Summary Points

- ✚ Co-researchers display a marked affinity to otherness, the unfamiliar, differences in many forms and this typically sets them apart from others in their environment.
- ✚ There is a negative judgment towards conventional life choices and homogeneity.
- ✚ It is not uncommon for co-researchers to find their values better reflected in foreign cultures or other languages rather than in their own home cultures or families.

- ✚ Often these voluntary migrants coalesce together in informal international groups with pronounced cultural differences but with underlying similarities in terms of toleration and valuing diversity.
- ✚ There are themes of difference within similarity and similarity within difference which may relate back to notions of the *unheimlich* and uncanny.
- ✚ Personal difference is valued when it confers a status of being special but it is avoided if possible when it results in rejection.
- ✚ Continually encountering unfamiliar cultures is a way of remaining 'conscious', 'awake', and not falling into habitual modes of life that feel boring and predictable.
- ✚ Linguistic difference can also be attractive as it signifies a whole ulterior world and can serve as a gateway to experiences in other cultures.
- ✚ There is repeatedly the unanswered question of why these specific individuals exhibit these values regarding difference. It remains a mystery why, often in the midst of a milieu that values similarity, these people should deeply value the opposite.

4.6 Significance of family relations and home circumstances (17)

Introduction

It is with significant trepidation that I introduce one of the most frequently articulated motifs within these narratives of choosing to leave home, i.e. relationships with family, especially parents, and the general dynamics within the home environment. My concern is that in our current psychoanalytic-centric culture, it is facile to leap from familial accounts to past-present causal explanations, imposing meta-theoretical speculations onto complex lived experiences so automatically that we don't even acknowledge that we've left the ground. We have seen that the process of 'existential migration' encompasses something indeterminately 'given' *and* mysterious, interwoven with complicated biographical circumstances, and facilitated by the potential for travel.

Many of the co-researchers who mention the significance of their childhood experiences explicitly caution us not to become reductionistic in our understanding, not to narrow the whole matrix down to an archaeology of 'individual *defect*'. If certain early experiences were causally linked to choosing to leave one's home country³⁶, we should see a discernable pattern, but no such simplistic pattern emerges. Many people, including siblings of these co-researchers have difficult family experiences but never consider leaving their home culture. In fact most of the co-researchers continually strive for understanding from close relations

³⁶ Ignoring for the moment whether 'causality' is an appropriate treatise for human being at all.

who cannot comprehend their choice to leave. While early relationships are undoubtedly important, they seem more clearly to constitute interactions *between* persons who are each responsive in specific ways. This specific responsiveness in turn elaborates the further living of those interactions. I would contend that *our childhood relationships are as much expressions of our orientations toward the world as they are formative of them*. As exemplified in this thesis, there exist diverse and equally valid speculations that would totally invert a Grinberg-like psychoanalytic line of causation. That's not to deny the significance and the skill of their work, but to remind us that it is one orientation among many possible perspectives. Each perspective remains either workable or unlikely but always *metaphor* for that which inevitably remains more complicated and elusive than any linguistic representation. In the present section we will endeavour to remain *close to what the co-researchers themselves* say about the significance of their family relationships.

Co-researcher Narratives

For some co-researchers it seems as if parental instability can hasten a pre-existing inclination or nascent plan to leave home. Eva was relieved when her parents finally divorced, even though this precipitated a familial stigma in their neighbourhood, contributing further to the social alienation she felt. The resulting vacuum of care necessitated that Eva grow up quickly to care for herself, generating exaggerated feelings of independence and freedom without a counterbalancing sense of connection to others. Eva is certain that moving away was not an endeavour to locate and replace the missing stability in her own home life, but she does admit that she would have felt more grounded if she had secure family-like relationships that she could trust. Feelings about her national culture are closely connected to Eva's family relationships – but gradually these family relations are transforming, facilitating her feeling more at home in her own culture again.

The reaction of family members can have a strong bearing on the ease or difficulty of leaving home. Co-researchers reveal the intricate ambivalent feelings that underpin knowing that they need to leave home while also being aware that the home environment will not permit that leaving to occur. It can take too much courage to confront this head on and deal with the painful conflict, so other modes of leaving, posing as unplanned and accidental, transpire. For example, extending travelling plans or commencing a relationship with someone who lives in another locale can surreptitiously facilitate the necessary leaving without upsetting family

with the whole truth. This discloses the various layers of truth and concealment embedded within the complexity of our stories of leaving home. It was usual for co-researchers to begin their interview by presenting a *prima facie* straightforward account of leaving home to attend university or as a result of prolonging a travelling experience, only to eventually reveal a far less apparent rationale and deeper mystery to their leaving.

Patricia had to find a way to leave that kept intact her valued relationship with her father and also mollified extended family members. Patricia's positive experience of living in London had to be hidden from the family left behind. There can be a delicate negotiation by the voluntary migrant to keep intact the myth that the new place could never be home and that one's original home is always better. There can be desperate attempts to *try* to explain the need to leave to a member of the family who *might* be able to understand, though this seldom ends satisfactorily. Patricia found that her strong relationship to her father helped her to keep alive certain aspects of her relationship to the home country. When her father died, part of that relationship to the home country also died, and the death obviously reinvigorated reflection on her relations to 'home'. Patricia was not the only co-researcher who experienced the relationship to the 'home' culture as largely mediated through relationship to one or both parents, and vice versa, relationships to parents being equally impacted by one's feelings about the home culture. This phenomenon might suggest that both connections to family and to nation are expressive of a deeper orientation rather than one being determinate of the other.

It can feel unsettling and deeply intimate to recount events concerning one's family of origin and two co-researchers remarked that they monitored what felt appropriate to discuss during a taped interview. From this it seems that perhaps the narrative of leaving may be presented quite differently to different people, in different situations, with various rationales appearing at different stages in one's life. From the experiences of the co-researchers interviewed here, it seems likely that 'underlying reasons' for life choices may emerge (or at least be variously re-constituted) later in adulthood.

If no member of the family nexus has previously modelled foreign travel or migration as a choice, it can require considerable additional courage and confidence to take this radical step toward personal space and self-direction. As we've seen, creating enough physical distance from difficult family relationships can help one gain emotional space, inspiring the possibility of spawning a new perspective on life. For example, Christine felt a huge relief when she was

able to escape from the gravitational pull of her mother's orbit – this required settling in a geographic location far enough away to be free of her mother's influence, but close enough to visit and maintain satisfactory contact. Christine now realises that leaving home was partially to circumvent the encroaching duty of caring for her mother though that was not the most evident reason at the time. Her home environment did not allow open discussion of family problems, and Christine needed emancipation from the stifling effect of this communicative oppression. Even though geographically distant, continued parental contact and visits home felt supportive to Christine as she was undergoing the difficult transition into adulthood in a foreign place.

A relationship with a parent can be very difficult and painful without it being the primary reason for leaving home. In Peter's relationship with his father, the child-parent roles were reversed. This was very confusing for Peter as a child, to feel in competition with his father for his mother's attention, to feel intellectually superior to his father and yet also fearful because he sensed this was an inversion of what he should expect as a child. It was clear to Peter that his father was not comfortable with his fatherly role and this had a huge emotional impact on Peter. In turn he did not feel comfortable in his father's care and did not know how to cope with his father's inability to cope with him. It is debatable how much a conflicted parental relationship contributes to feeling uncomfortable in the home environment, but even now, Peter can still feel a kind of panic around his father, sending him into thoughts of leaving the country and Peter feels increasingly strained about that reaction. He requires clarity regarding what he wants from this paternal relationship, such that some relationship is maintained without causing further pain or necessitating continual escape - a mode of relationship-space explored previously in other sections. Peter feels that his father does not see him for the person he really is and Peter notices that he also changes to become someone slightly different around his father. There is no authentic meeting, father to son, or son to father.

Peter also feels largely alienated from the experiences of others in his extended family; that they do not understand him or want to, leaving him to assume the role of world traveller and academic in order to be comprehended and have any experience of belonging, however artificial. It is true to say that this lack of understanding is reciprocal in that Peter also finds this family-centred cosy home life frustrating, unfulfilling, and boring. Peter's personal feeling of family has always really constellated around his mother, although he recognizes

that there are unexamined layers of alienation between them as well. In general, Peter feels let down by his parents in their lack of awareness of his needs for practical support, their lack of understanding of his experiences, their apparent lack of interest in his projects and his life. It's as if they are frightened to really *know* their own son, which keeps the interaction superficial and alienates Peter further. It seems that his parents' inability to parent Peter as their child, to know how to nurture him or balance his inordinate sense of independence with expressions of care, has continued into adulthood and continues to be emotionally painful for Peter.

Peter always knew he would, and must, leave. He does not understand why this was inevitable for him; he declares that it feels beyond any motive or any rationale he could construct. He grew up with this internal sense, which served to further distance him from his surroundings and reinforce his dislocation from the environment. Although Peter makes it clear that his attraction to leaving was not reactive to a lapse in parenting, nonetheless, 'leaving' presumably incorporates relationship-centred motifs, for example, punishing parents for what they did not provide, and demonstrating that one is indeed able to live without them. Peter was cognisant that his 'escape' had to actually meet his needs; just leaving was not enough. Specifically, he had to seek a land whose foreignness would nurture his being. The foreign place must be alien enough to free him from any expectation that he *should* be able to adapt, in effect making it more likely that he could. Interesting that Peter actually felt he could cope in very alien places but actually couldn't manage the familiarity of his own home world. It can feel like a real release to be in a foreign world where the expectation is that one *should have* difficulties coping, whereas at home not coping constitutes '*maladaptation*'. Since leaving home, Peter has found the freedom from care and responsibility that plagued him as a child. He can now enjoy the dreamed-for foreign world that he had fantasised about, and consoled himself with, when young.

At the age of three, Kathy's parents had an acrimonious divorce and she was moved in with her mother and new stepfather's family. She felt this new home was not her home, that she was on the outside looking in, pushed out of her own belonging. In response, Kathy created places she *could* belong, in close friendships, with friends' families, in the social milieu surrounding sports; she created an alternative to having an ideal mothered and fathered home. Kathy kept herself busy in order to remain out of the house. At times she now wishes she could relax more and feel more settled in one place but doesn't think she could ever be that

way. In such an account it is tempting to perceive a causal link between Kathy's early experience and later lifestyle. But it is likely more complicated than simple cause and effect. There are convincing indications from various interviews that pre-existing sensitivities contribute to one's way of experiencing difficult family situations. Perhaps early environment lifts out our sensitivities to specific interactions while inhibiting other processes, influencing our subsequent readiness to develop certain potentials. Rather than stressing either a set personality or inhospitable family dynamics, I would like to propose that the *interaction* between being and environment is relevant in unfolding biography and in fact constitutive of both facets. The on-going dynamics are already, at an early stage, affected by and consist of our *mutual* responses and responses to responses, so that salient individual sensitivities and environmental circumstances are already intricately intertwined and continuously elaborated (not to mention cultural, social, and historical interactions). Of course this needs further research and conceptual formulation, but at this preliminary stage such an account appears more closely corroborated by the phenomena as expressed by these co-researchers.

In contrast to Kathy (and partially illustrating the conceptualisation outlined above), Inez had a central role in her traditional family – a secure home life bound by a loving mother and father. However, Inez felt herself in the role of 'the strong one' among the children, taking responsibility to attend to the wellness of others rather than looking after her own needs. As the eldest, Inez looked after her sisters, becoming invisible in the process (not unlike Kathy, but in a very different way). Inez left her family partly because it was difficult for her to show them when she was feeling troubled and weak and in her life now, Inez seeks the care and concern she didn't get in her family experience. Although she has a good relationship with her family now, she still doesn't feel she really exists for them. Inez expressed very strong emotions during the interview when she realised that by leaving home she was in fact *choosing to exist*. She was heeding a call to save her individual being from a life of ghostly servitude to other's expectations. *Choosing* her own existence is crucial for Inez and worth the conflict it caused with her loved ones. Subsequently, from her own painful experiences as a parent, Inez appreciates how difficult it was for her parents to see her go and she is careful to protect her own son from the burden she felt as a young daughter.

Rita cannot fathom why her mother insists that she settle into the conventional world and why she rejects Rita's unorthodox and rebellious lifestyle. After all, her mother also had an unconventional upbringing, but for some reason her response was to value the conventional,

which she continually tries to impose upon her daughter. This issue of whether to conform remains salient in Rita's relationship to her mother. One example of this is her mother's objection to Rita marrying a Black African man. Her mother's rationale is that she had not been allowed to associate with Black people when young, so why should her daughter flout a convention she was constrained by? Of course this reminds us that there may be ingredients of trans-generational dynamics infused within co-researcher's life choices.

Rita believes that if an adult child ever returns to the parental home, they are in danger of becoming a perpetual child and the world will shrink back to the childhood one, casting off all the accumulated experiences of adulthood. Her nightmare scenario is to be forced to return home due to a nervous breakdown and to be looked after by her parents. In that situation, Rita's cosmopolitan worldly life would be swamped by her mother's recital of the little occurrences of her own conventional life in the village. Rita recognises there are unresolved communication issues in her family, but seems to hold little hope of them shifting before her mother's death. Thus, the need to maintain distance from her family (conventional homogeneity) combined with the attractions of the wider world (stimulating diversity) keep Rita away.

Carl describes his childhood family home as 'too safe', enmeshed, anxiety-driven, though the lack of conflict contributed to an environment that felt nurturing during Carl's first sixteen years. However, in retrospect Carl feels he was brainwashed by this extreme exclusivity of home and family, based upon fundamentalist principles. His parents were trying to create a much better environment than they had experienced when young. They offered material opportunities, trust, and appreciation, which Carl feels sustained his strong sense of self. However, there were also difficulties in the family. It was quite a compulsive environment with the father suffering from depression, and despite the safety, Carl recalls always wanting to get away. He finds it interesting to wonder why he's always had this longing to go out into the world and what impact his early family dynamics had on his later choices in this regard.

Carl explains that when young, he bonded strongly with his mother, in essence taking his father's place when he was away on business. Carl feels this was not beneficial for him, to know so much about his mother's internal life at such a young age, and this immediacy amplified his desire to free himself by leaving. Unlike the rest of his family, Carl has also always had very strong and intimate relationships with friends outside the family confines.

Early in his life he developed the concept that family is something constructed and chosen, not defined just by blood lineage or relatives. He found his 'chosen family' relationships sustaining when his family position became unstable. When he travelled to Africa, Carl realised how crucial significant relationships are to his survival and he began to appreciate that it can be a scary process to build a new network of intimate friendships and 'family', in order to secure himself in a foreign world.

Fiona experienced quite an extreme if not 'uncanny' aspect to her early life. Her mother died when she was five and from then on Fiona was pressured to maintain a family façade that subsequent stepmothers were in fact her biological mothers. Fiona felt the truth needed to be exposed, partially because she found the secretive atmosphere unbearably suffocating. An eerie fabric of circumstances combined in her family: her father held a very respectable position in the community, the family moved frequently, and there was this secret history of death and remarriage. The family relationships were confused and distant, with little honest communication, warmth, or affection. Fiona's father was a good provider but not a demonstrative father. In-between wives, Fiona filled in the role of housekeeper and mother, taking care of father and siblings. The situation grew intolerable and like Inez, she realised she had to leave in order to exist as an individual being. Fiona feels that her attraction to otherness stems from her childhood experiences of resettling in an unknown place, surrounded by strangers, every five years or so. In her adult life, she notices that she is inclined to relocate after about four years in a place, suggesting that she now chooses a transience that was originally forced upon her. When she foresees the impulse to leave it comes as a passion or a compulsion and the longest she's stayed in any one house is nine years. This process of transience has a limiting side; Fiona feels she repeatedly puts herself back to square one, preventing strong roots from developing anywhere, a pattern that she relates to her early history of recurring temporary attachments though her siblings have not followed her example.

Graciella's family is disparate and large, incorporating many marriages and divorces. She found the complex family relationships confusing but felt a need to try to make sense of it all. This disparity led to Graciella wanting a more integrated life, and leaving home was a statement to this effect. For example, she sees her spiritual interests as an attempt to find her 'whole self' in contrast to her fragmented experience of family life. Graciella feels her reasons for leaving are complicated and may be partly related to her family. She felt she

needed to grow, to experience broader perspectives, and this was a positive reason. But she feels she was also making a statement to her parents. When she left, her expectation was that she would be away for a few years and then return, and this *homecoming* featured as an important aspect of her statement to her parents. She considers that perhaps her need to make this statement to them has drastically defined her life. Though the content of the message is not clear, her leaving is like the writing on the wall, it demonstrates something elusive and profound to her family. Graciella also feels that she inherited two important personal characteristics from her family experiences; courage and melancholia, and these are powerfully illustrated in her memories of witnessing her elderly grandmother sit by the front door with her bags packed waiting for someone to take her 'home'.

Like most of the co-researchers, Sarah makes it explicitly clear that she did not relocate half way around the world just to get away from her parents; however, it was a significant benefit to her to feel freed from their orbit of influence so she could discover herself. Sarah's experience of adolescence was difficult. Her father's dominance and her mother's violence left her with one choice - resistance. Her parents wouldn't accept that she was growing and changing so she had to fight their oppression or turn into something that she wasn't. She was unable to develop any *positive* space of her own; unable to develop according to her own interests and desires, and there was a sense of annihilation in this. She has realised herself as she is today solely because she has lived away from their intrusions.

Sarah is aware that if she ever moved back home she would have to deal with her parents and this would prove difficult, even now. Living in London pre-empts all that. When she visits home she is relieved she's not staying because it frees her from having to challenge the family dynamics. For Sarah this signifies that she hasn't really worked out the influence of these dynamics on her motivation to move so far away. Sarah and her partner recognise that their relationship is built upon their divergent early family experiences and the conflation of their different cultures, begetting diversity in their values and responses to situations. For Sarah a crucial difference between being with her partner or her family is that he does not insist on influencing her life decisions, and she values having so much freedom within relationship. Sarah thinks it's significant that she's chosen a partner who is the opposite extreme to her parents.

Marta feels her mother wants to direct her life, even colonise her thoughts. Her relationship with her mother was always intense and though her mother encouraged her to come to the UK, she did not foresee the side effect that it also freed Marta from her mother's control. It's as if Marta found herself in London and took advantage of the opportunity to express her need to self-actualise. Her sister remains in the home country, controlled and dependent upon her mother. At this point in her life, Marta is trying to achieve a positive shift in the quality of her relationships with her family, especially her mother. She would like to clarify something about their relationship but her feeling is that her mother is avoiding this; in fact afraid of what her daughter has to say to her. Marta is very emotional during the interview when she discovers this correlation between her leaving and her relationship to her mother. She understands that her mother had to cut off her feelings for her as a way of coping with her continued absence from home. Marta describes being like a little chick that was hushed a lot by mother hen. Marta's perception of her mother is altering significantly now - she sees her mother as elderly and no longer omniscient. Marta has cautioned her own young daughter about leaving home, though her daughter already expresses a fondness for Marta's home country, which is very moving and meaningful for Marta.

Ben did not explore in detail his relationship with his family except to say that his father died when he was fifteen and that he felt too merged with his mother. Like some other co-researchers, Ben's reflection during the interview leads him to associate leaving his home country partly with a desire for emancipation from his mother. He felt he needed to depart from home in order to grow up and to see how he was as an adult. He felt he could not do that within easy access of this mother, so a substantial physical distance was necessary for them both to feel he was independent enough to begin to emerge. Quite similar to Ben, Martin also had a very close and exclusive relationship with his mother, which he both enjoyed and found suffocating. Subsequently the time spent interacting with his peers and with his mother was unbalanced. Martin's isolation from same-age peers added to his apparent difference, and this difference increased his peer rejection, in turn leading Martin to further isolate himself. This cyclical reinforcement resulted in very difficult schooling experiences. Martin's biological father died when he was young and he did not get along with his stepfather, which contributed to his desire to leave the family home and become independent. Since leaving, Martin's relationship with his mother is much improved and he ascribes that to his being away from home.

From these accounts it is apparent how psychoanalytic interpretations might arise if we look only at the material that psychoanalysis interests itself in – early developmental bonds. However, replacing this section back into the whole constellation of emerging themes, we see a more complicated picture, not readily reduced to any one cluster of theoretical metaphors. Also, the intricate *interactional* effects of child attributes responding to environmental dynamics, and vice versa, are evident in all of these accounts. The importance of family (as well as peer) relationships is evident, but it also raises questions – ‘Why, of all the siblings, did *this* person leave?’ Looking back at previous themes a picture seems to emerge. *Something* about these individuals sets them apart, and perhaps concomitantly establishes their strong, empathetic or conflictual, interactions with caregivers. Consistent attributes seem to include: an abiding sensitivity to interpersonal relations, the need for freedom and space to direct their life choices, an affinity to life’s mystery and difference, the call of the ‘self’ to express its potential. All of this interacting with homogeneous cultures and/or suffocating parenting seems to increase the likelihood of leaving home and of not feeling ‘at home’ in the first place.

Summary Points:

- ✚ **Early relationships: familial, parental, and peer, are frequently implicated in decisions to leave home or at least the timing of the migration. It is unclear to what extent difficulties in these relations are expressions of, rather than formative of, desires to leave.**
- ✚ **Co-researchers acknowledged that early parental relationships often had an impact on their plans to leave but frequently cautioned that their feelings about home and travel cannot be reduced to these dynamics. Difficult family circumstances seemed to coalesce around pre-existing sensitivities in those who left, differentiating them from siblings who stayed.**
- ✚ **Overbearing parents and merged relationships with mothers were cited as hastening stimuli for departing at a specific time, usually as quickly as possible in order to begin to develop oneself in a freer space.**
- ✚ **Relations with the home culture and parental relations can become intermingled, so that an attitude of needing space from one is generalised to needing space from the other. Both can feel intrusive and conforming for people who have strong values of independence and self-direction.**
- ✚ **It seems that problems surfacing in the home environment, or issues of not-belonging, reinforce interests in the outside larger world, establishing a stronger trajectory in favour of world-relations and attraction to otherness.**

4.7 Explicit Issues of Home and Returning Home (19)

Introduction

I explicitly introduced the question of returning home in one of the interview questions; it did not emerge organically as a theme from the co-researcher narratives. This presents an interesting quandary. The theme of 'returning home' was not revealed as an essential aspect of the phenomena of voluntary migration by virtue of its being commonly mentioned in narrations of individual experience. It was delineated as a theme on the tail of a question – its inclusion was the product of personal introspection that elicited 'return' as an essential aspect of the experience of leaving. This intuition arises from my awareness that return has always been an issue for me, always the horizon against which I experience my being away.

As a consequence of this open question it has actually emerged that returning home is an ubiquitous aspect of the experience of voluntary migrants, no less than it is for involuntary migrants or migrant workers. Obsession with the question of return and experience of the magnetism of the origin lurks near the surface for each of the individuals interviewed – return either as a desired future possibility, a work in progress, an unlikely option, or an unequivocal threat. It seems that the introduction of this researcher assumption, based upon my own experience, has actually revealed a constitutive factor in the experience of 'existential migration'. A deviation from traditional *phenomenology as bracketing* has facilitated the appearance of this facet of the phenomenon. Of course the inclusion of the researcher's own experientially-based assumptions (rather than theoretically-based speculations or hypotheses) can be considered phenomenological in a broader sense, i.e. as an aspect of my own experience of leaving home it constitutes a feature of the comprehensive possibilities of the experience of voluntary migration.

This section will also explore the constitutive elements of the meaning of 'home' for the participating co-researchers. Interesting to note that many of these co-researchers report never really feeling 'at home' and yet they have a fairly clear notion of what would constitute such a feeling, should it materialise. Does this notion, irrespective of biographical experience, indicate a suggestion of 'existential inheritance' of an *ideal* of home, a model situation that entrances and is continually implied regardless of whether we've ever actually experienced it? - Perhaps a mirror reflection from the undercarriage of human being itself? If so, is this an idealisation of home that remains potential, never actualised, such that those sensitive to it are doomed to the disappointment of searching for what cannot be ontically substantiated? At the very least, I will argue, this issue of home, and of return, is one way of expressing *something* essential about human being-in-the-world.

Co-researcher Narratives

Nina describes home as a fusion of 'physical place' and 'social space'. It is made meaningful by the arrangement of her personal possessions and as a juncture for congregating her close friends. To feel 'at home' is to feel safe (relaxed and calm), to have free expression, to form a secure base from which one can connect to the rest of the world and explore it. Nina did not have this kind of home where she grew up. Christine imagines home as a place where it is possible to really relax and recuperate from the constant effort of looking after herself. For her, the feeling of wanting to return home for a visit is partially motivated by a need to be looked after, to be nourished by all the little niceties and routines of the settled home. This enables Christine to reconnect to something that feels deeply sustaining. She believes that the importance of this reconnection might lessen if she felt more nurtured out in the foreign world where she lives her life. She realises that her experience of leaving home has been difficult, and lonely, but also liberating from a disappointing home situation that never developed the qualities of home she seeks.

Renata also describes home as a place where one feels relaxed, confident, where one can stand upright with some assurance and be enriched. She feels some sense of being at home in London since she can now navigate the city with some familiarity and she knows how to look after herself here. Familiarity, in this sense, is something about the style of a place, not something as concrete as knowing street names etc. Renata senses that she is beginning to understand more about instances when she doesn't feel at home. Not feeling at home is like feeling totally lost. She recently went to a new city where she knew no one, consequently she felt no connection with the world at all and wondered where she was, what was happening. But once she reminded herself that she is familiar with coping in unfamiliar cities, an embryonic level of familiarity was reintroduced, and she was able to manage³⁷. The scale of a city impacts Renata's ability to feel 'at home' there. Large cities offer anonymity and the liberation of *having to* accept that they cannot be totally grasped and conquered, while smaller cities remind Renata of her own hometown and this brings the associated burdens of more personal meaning and judgements. In London, Renata feels there are many other

³⁷ In the midst of *total* unfamiliarity a degree of familiarity feels welcome – especially when travelling alone and unsupported, which is characteristic of most 'existential migration'.

individual strangers like herself so even when walking alone through the city she is in the company of other similar individuals. Again we have this uncanny mix of the familiar and the unfamiliar, the need for some connection and acquaintance but a concurrent need for space and freedom.

For Rita, the feeling of being at home comes upon her in specific modes of localities rather than it being commensurate with having a personal private space. She feels 'at home' in different communities in the world, she feels accepted in those places, and values her ability to communicate in local dialects and navigate local life. Rita feels at home when she stands out a bit, though if this generates invasive attention or too fixed an identity, it can feel stifling. Rita feels that her houses in London and in Africa are her homes, both being in very diverse cosmopolitan areas. The important thing about home is that it gives a place to come back to, a modest settled base in the world, making it easier to venture out and explore. When Rita is here and her husband is in Africa, it is not clear where home is, indicating that 'being at home' contains some association to this relationship.

Despite establishing her own homes, Rita's childhood possessions remain in her mother's house and when abroad, she has had distressing dreams of her parents leaving this house, signifying the continuing living presence of this place though she would never consider moving back there. Her ongoing life continues distant from the stifling little Britain she grew up in and she could never return to that. However, Rita feels attached to her home landscape and recently, with an eye to retirement, she bought a house in this general region but in a more liberal town adjacent to her hometown. Like other co-researchers, for Rita an important aspect of living in London is the ability to choose friends who share her cosmopolitan experiences and interests.

From the interviews it becomes clear that the idealised home implies a certain interactive mode of sameness between self and surroundings, for example, similar values, attitudes, and sensitivities, but without imposed cohesion and within a space generated by acceptance of diversity. Realising the importance of familiarity to their sense of home can generate considerations of returning to one's country of origin. Aging and its concomitant changing values, conflated with possible desires for increased stability, are facets of this consideration. Contemplating returning home after living as a foreigner implies bringing back some of the elaboration that has developed while abroad and crossing that with the valued mode of the

familiar. Each co-researcher who even contemplates return struggles with how to address the original issues that contributed to the accurate decision to leave. Some suggest the possibility of living in a *cosmopolitan* way in one's own native country, a melange of strange and familiar.

For Eva, after many years of forcing herself to visit home out of duty, these visits have suddenly begun to feel more pleasurable and this seems in part connected to the different priorities and life reorientations associated with maturing. This shift presents new possibilities for improved relationships yet Eva also mentions the uncanny sense of visiting home and being confronted by the reality that important people have died during her years away and the need to cope with the palpability of these 'absent connections'. Without comprehending it fully, Eva is beginning to feel the clichéd desire to end life in her home country. It can feel confusing and conflictual when the impetus to return begins to arise after being away so long. Eva feels that this desire for return has a deep existential or mystical element to it. It holds the promise of deep reunion and total belonging by returning to one's origins, a need for real mothering that cannot be provided for oneself, mothering in the broadest sense, being mothered by one's home country. Eva imagines this growing desire as encompassing a healing quality for the wounds of being human.

Francois feels in transition concerning his feelings about home. When he was young, the family unit was relocated from a known home to a foreign place, resulting in an enduring deleterious effect on the previous cohesiveness of the feeling of home. The combination of physical house plus complete family unit held the feeling of home for Francois. But the change in location, coinciding with his older brother leaving for university, affected the whole family dynamic, making new demands on remaining family members. Recently his parents and siblings have resettled in the same place, rekindling for Francois a feeling that there is a home again even if he is not located there himself. It isn't a return of the original sense of home, but a strange combination of home and not-home. Francois even considers moving back to his home city now, which for a long time seemed like too much work living there and coping with narrow-mindedness and external expectations, but now it seems like it could be easier to live there with family and friends nearby.

Francois realises he could not return to his home city and pick up as the same person he was in the past, he has been changed by all he's experienced and the places he's lived in the

interim. Despite difficult homeless years, and recently feeling he could live in his home city again, Francois has decided to settle in his London flat and begin to commit himself to study and work here. He has decided that it is possible to have a sense of home in a place that is not the home of one's dreams, while not giving up on realising those dreams. He is finally able to feel some sense of being at home in the world through a combination of the family home being re-established in the background, and his own life in the foreground, revolving around his own flat and social support. At certain times, with certain people and in certain places, Francois is able to feel at the centre of his life, and his studies and own life direction have been an important part of finally achieving a modicum of feeling at home in the world.

Camilla has come to accept that the idealised notion of 'being at home in oneself' is difficult to achieve as it necessitates working through deep and longstanding issues and feelings. Living in an unfamiliar context has allowed Camilla to see more clearly who she is as distinct from who she was trying to be under the influence of the surrounding environment. Now she can ascertain what is consistent and what is context-specific, thus unravelling what is essentially her self. Camilla had mistakenly thought that external approval would give her the degree of self-acceptance necessary to be 'at home' with herself. She assumed that the group's acceptance, especially a group of very exacting local peers, would address her own negative feelings about herself and reassure her that she is OK. This infused so much pressure into being accepted that the strategy undermined itself and acceptance became impossible. Camilla, perhaps somewhat optimistically, retains the goal of feeling 'at home' in herself since it would allow her to take that feeling anywhere and therefore to be free. Other co-researchers seemed less optimistic that being-at-home was achievable at all, let alone a 'portable feast'.

Carl is curious about when he refers to his original home as 'home' and when he doesn't. Four years ago he left and severed his feeling for that home, deciding he'd start over again and never return. He needed to get far away in order to re-establish his strong sense of self. However, Carl finds it difficult to make a home in the UK because the historical context of his childhood is not shared with anyone here. It is painful to realise he lacks those deep associative roots yet he believes London can become a home in a temporary sense. Like Camilla, a part of Carl's process of re-creating his sense of home and reinventing himself, is based in discerning what is essential to him and what is carried over from his original culture. He has discovered that ultimate truths about the world become only contextual truths and useless in different environments. He has been in a process of detachment in order to let his

new habitat become his new home, including building a new network of social support. Like most of the co-researchers, Carl finds he relates more readily to other foreigners because they share a profound commonality of experience that connects them. Like other outsiders he's had to put effort into learning how each society functions for those on the inside and those on the margins.

Carl describes the meaning of home as a place where he can be metaphorically naked, vulnerable, a place that allows both the beauty and the pain of life. This is why his parents' home can no longer be home for him, as their religious views do not admit pain as something to engage with. The physical layout of Carl's home is very important in that it must include a space where he can be in solitude a few hours each week. This is experienced as sacred time, even more important than his relationships. This space has replaced his previous religious belief. However, relationships are also important and it is crucial that he lives with people who share values and experiences in common, especially the experience of being different. Leaving home has been a growth experience for Carl and the learning has been mostly positive. He has discovered that it is important to be flexible enough to adapt but also to have some grounding in a home base and he is concerned that if he moves too much he might lose the latter and end up without any roots at all. He is intrigued by the fact that he feels more at home in a multicultural area of London, where there is no overriding identity, than in the context of his original home, where he feels inferior. Carl feels life is so utterly contextual that it could be argued there's no such place as home, it's entirely context. However in practice Carl admits that he cannot construct home arbitrarily, there are substantial necessary qualities to the formation of this experience, including freedom from having to conform and compromise himself.

Although travel has exposed Sarah to people she would never have encountered at home, her first *chosen* friendships retain a special deep significance. This is one instance how Sarah's home culture remains her 'default position'. Acknowledging that much has changed while she's been away, Sarah can still assume a deep commonality with fellow nationals and she feels relief in the company of people from her home culture. For example, the personal space between people is negotiated in a familiar and safe way, so she can concentrate on just being herself. However, this familiarity with home lessens the more comfortable she gets in London. Sarah realises that she is becoming more English and she now makes distinct observations about her home culture: there is a pressure to conform, a condoned form of

intrusiveness, characteristics she used to take for granted are now standing out as startling. Though she still feels more relaxed at home, Sarah says ‘me isn’t me anymore back home’ because she’s lived so long in London. There’s a slippage of one place into the other, and she finds herself in a twilight zone where it’s often not clear which world an association or even a person originates from. When she visits home, misunderstandings might now be due to being away for years or because it’s something misappropriated from her London reality.

Sarah notices that ‘home is always where I’m not’. In her hometown she says home is London and in London she says home is her hometown, at her parents’ place home is the city and in the city she might call her parents’ place home. Sarah says that somehow this ties into the sense of always wanting to be different when she was growing up, but different in a safe and acceptable way. Being able to proclaim, “I’m from somewhere else”, introduces uniqueness for Sarah, and possibly a distance from whatever happens where she is. Sarah can overlook negative aspects of her home culture because she is just visiting, but this would be different if she was considering re-settling there. It is much easier for Sarah to visit home as long as the question of returning to live there is not open to consideration. She admits that she thinks a lot about returning short-term but it is never a consideration to move back permanently, and this clarity relieves the tension of navigating the two places.

Sarah, along with some other co-researchers, explicitly prefers to live in a challenging culture. She describes England as a more difficult and complicated culture compared to her homeland, which is beautiful and too comfortable, though she realises it would not be straightforward if she returned to live there. She knows she will never quite fit in anywhere now, neither in London nor even back home. During an extended visit to her homeland, for the first time ever Sarah got homesick for London, which felt exciting because it meant she could finally have that balance of loving her country but accepting living as a foreigner in London. Finally it was OK to be different without comparing the two places.

Two of the interviewees emphasised the importance of their childhood *house* in their feelings about home. Both these people come from a part of the world that has recently been at war. Renata feels the house represents a more innocent and ideal state, a fantasy of happy childhood, when the family was a whole unit with no inkling that would ever change. Knowing the house is there has always grounded something in her. The house evokes deep feelings and any changes in its structure are resisted, as though it is a museum and not a

living place. It seems that none of her family has achieved separation from that house; it retains an emotional grip over the entire nexus, especially the females as it has passed along matrilineal lines. Renata would contemplate buying the house if possible, to maintain it as it is. If the house was gone, she feels she would lose her home in her home country; the ground would be pulled from under her, regardless of having no intention of ever occupying that ground again.

It is not surprising then that the shifting boundaries and new national identities of civil war were distressing for Renata, generating questions about what is home, where is home, and the stability of home. She points out that the social intensification of the emotionality of home was a catalyst for national conflict. For her family the conflict impacted upon their physical property, destroying it or disputing ownership, and this was very anxiety provoking. The war in Renata's country led to the eventual selling of their summer house which she found very difficult as it was the place of many childhood vacations and buttressed the family home in providing a reassuring physical orientation in her home country. This is reminiscent of the expressed need from other co-researchers for a 'home base'. Changes in physical places can be unsettling in a way that generates personal insecurity. For Renata, that property had signified a continuing bond and now that bond is physically severed.

Marta expressed deep emotion in response to the question of returning home, and she expects that this section of the interview is emotional for everyone. She was reminded of how pleasant her life had been at home, how even now birdsong reminds her of those peaceful past mornings. Yet she feels she'd be lost there now, everything would be strange again as it was when she first arrived in London. Marta anticipates that returning home would be very difficult, that she would feel unwelcome, all doors would be shut to her, she wouldn't be able to navigate the society or even the language. Who would she be? Although the thought of returning occurs to Marta, she always rejects it because it would feel like retiring from life. If she returned she'd feel dead, there's nothing left for her there and this constitutes a strong motivation for staying away, it means staying alive, vibrant. When Marta imagines returning to her home culture it is intricately linked to returning to an isolated life with her mother in their big house. In that house all her needs would be taken care of, she would become incapable and helpless. Even if she imagines her mother dead, Marta sees herself enclosed in that house, like a prison. As with Renata, but in a very different sense, the house looms large in the life of the family. For Marta, the house remains inseparable from memories of the

struggles with her mother and every time she enters the house that atmosphere descends upon her. There is a very strong tie to that house and to her mother, a bond, but not an attraction. She feels drawn to visiting the place but would never stay. Marta resists the process of her world imploding when she visits home, and this causes aggressive confrontations with her mother.

Parental attitudes towards the location of the family home have an impact upon the children's experience of that place as home. For example, Patricia describes her parents as being dislocated and rootless due to relocation from the country to the city and their rejection of the city as homeworld had an impact on the children's ability to call the city home. If the parent/extended family rejects where the child is raised, then the child loses the only source of home given to them - the parent's abandoned home was never the child's. The child is denied belonging to their known environment but also does not belong to the historical parental environment; they are foreign in both places. Perhaps some children react to this 'homelessness' such that the likelihood of leaving home and the family culture is increased. As presented earlier, some co-researchers reveal that their self-identity is intimately connected to knowing where they belong. By extrapolation, not knowing where one is supposed to belong can result in a confused identity. However, the positive side of this is that not knowing who one is, not having a set identity associated to a particular place, allows for increased freedom in choosing who one will be, trying on identities and places and amalgamating them creatively.

Kathy calls herself a 'global nomad', but she also continues to identify as a patriotic American, saying she hasn't changed at all. However, this identification is from a distance, intimate and vigorous but on the outskirts. She admits she would get bored and frustrated living in the insularity of America, but she dreams about owning a house there someday and living there half the time. Kathy's feelings of homesickness arise from a need to be in an environment that matches her own values (matching of the personal and cultural allows a certain valued interaction). Kathy struggles to understand the current anti-American feeling in the world and attributes it to the dominance of American commerce and culture in the rush to globalisation. These are aspects of the culture that she identifies with and she joking describes her successful lifestyle as being typically 'materialistic American'. Although Kathy left America years ago, and describes herself as 'homeless', her home culture retains a special

significance for her and her self-descriptions remain more grounded in her home culture than any of the other co-researchers.

Thoughts of returning home can still generate fear, panic, and anticipated suffocation for some co-researchers. The home culture, or family home, can signify a problematic lack of boundaries and the constraint of a prescribed way of life. However, for other co-researchers, leaving always implied the eventual return and some are already engaged in that process of 'homecoming'. Fiona's overall direction has always been back towards home, this being a conscious intention over the last years though the route has turned out to be rather circuitous and there's also a hesitation that return might still encompass feeling of entrapment and cultural limitations. Fiona compares the process to rock climbing, where one takes deliberate and cautious steps and then tests to see if they will hold. She has attempted and then aborted one move back and felt the danger and ambivalence of that. Returning has become a highly conscious and analysed event due to the deep feelings and felt importance of it. She has never felt she has the right to claim a home in any other place on earth. She could only make that claim in her country of origin; this requires returning in order to exam whether it *could* feel like home, in every way, now. Fiona did not want a nostalgic ex-pat relation to her home but needed to feel her connection to the place, to really test the *concept* of home, more even than the *actuality* of it. In exploring whether home can be both a geographical and a psychological reality, she is emphasising the sense of connection, the interaction between self and place, more than the place itself. This requires retuning developmentally and working through stages that were not addressed earlier, gaining psychological development from 'homecoming' is a way of having both a sense of home and a sense of moving forward, of change. Fiona needs to combine these two sensitivities, to feel she can change what is not satisfactory in the environment in order to settle. She is aware the reality will be complex, that there will be challenging limitations like the ones which motivated her to leave in the first place. Also, her worldly life experiences have made her different now, necessitating sensitivity to conflations of fitting in and not fitting in. She knows she is not going back in time to the original sense of home and she is also cognizant of the fact that she will be returning to a community where many people have never left and there could be resentment and resistance to her return and to her need for engagement.

Peter has also recently returned to his homeland after years of being abroad. Though emotionally difficult, returning home has become an opportunity to reflect upon his time

away and the significance of the rite of passage initiated by leaving home. In returning, Peter was partly looking for professional nurturance and personal solace in order to enable his life to be satisfying and to progress. He no longer feels the need to escape his parent's lack of understanding by leaving his home country, but he does imagine his life will always entail travel or living overseas, perhaps including Asia where he has built an adult life for himself. Peter's time in Asia was transformative and he maintains strong relationships there. Asia has become familiar while remaining substantially foreign, therefore satisfying the need for mystery while also feeling like 'home', perhaps the only place on earth which satisfies Peter in this way. Contemplation upon his return has crystallized some of the meaningfulness of Peter's time in Asia, so that leaving home now can symbolise something other than escape from the family situation. Also, continuously being in unfamiliar and strange situations in Asia proves conclusively to Peter that he can cope in such extremes, instilling in him an appreciation for his own mysterious qualities. Peter feels it is a dark and mystifying process that has culminated in his present life circumstances nonetheless there appears to be a perceptible pattern and although not premeditated or planned, it seems to express his felt convictions.

Kumar is trying to reconstruct a relationship to his native country, which he left with his parents at the age of five. When asked about home, Kumar says he uses the word 'home' in two ways, his physical home is in England but his 'real' home is his ancestral home. He almost wants to call his home country his 'spiritual home' and when I suggest that his soul feels at home there, he takes a deep involuntary sigh in agreement. His identity seemingly formed around his native home, imbuing it with a special quality that his home in England does not have. England is just where he lives. Kumar experiences his longing for his home country as a positive yearning, whether it is fulfilled or not, though he believes he will relocate there eventually. Not surprisingly, Kumar has wondered what his life might have been like if his parents had not taken him to the UK. He remarks on how different it would have been and for some reason emphasises what he would have lost, experiences and opportunities he would have missed out on by not leaving. But he also describes the imagined life he didn't have as less complex, simpler, and slower than the one in the UK. As he thinks of this he reconsiders that maybe he does want that other life now rather than later, but then decides he would like both. His ideal would be to live half of the year in each place. These sentiments echo the desires of many of the other co-researchers and as mentioned earlier it is

difficult not to consider that in Kumar we are witnessing the nascence of a process of 'existential migration'.

A striking commonality in the narratives of co-researchers is the need for stimulation but also the need for specific modes of similarity between the 'internal' and 'external' environment. It is as if 'home' is in fact a person-environment interaction, whether momentary, temporary, or durable. This section on 'home' incorporates many of the previous themes of independence, space, and affinity to the foreign, while introducing more explicitly the ulterior needs for deep connection, familiarity, and a secure base that is nourishing without being oppressive. It also hints at some of the deeper feelings of nostalgia and loss. For a number of the co-researchers there was an implicit or even explicit desire for the home country to remain unchanged, like a museum or shrine from the time of one's childhood (or even parent's childhood). There can be a considerable sense of loss and distress about the changes in the home country. At times of loneliness and crisis there are increased feelings of homesickness and even thoughts of returning, but returning to a place unchanged over the years. Going back to just the way it *was*, going back in time. Most of the co-researchers maintain relationships with family and others back home through frequent visits and these cause a turmoil of mixed feelings about the decision to leave and regrets about the unlived life frozen in some alternative but inaccessible dimension. However, despite all the unexpected difficulties and paradoxes, *all* those who chose to leave feel certain that given a second chance they would *have to* go again. This certainty does not seem to assuage the nostalgia, sorrow, and longing of having left.

In terms of returning home, it may be significant to confess the extent to which living with this thesis has impacted upon my own process of 'existential migration'. Like my co-researchers, my own experiencing has been carried along by the interaction of the interviews, and for me also enhanced by the subsequent analysis and writing. My own feelings about 'return' have evolved during this project to the extent that after sixteen years away I am now planning my own return home to Canada. In fact for me the completion of this PhD comprises the sacrament of homecoming, literally a 'rite of passage'. The call that leads away is now calling for return – but 'return' is misleading. Finally, my homecoming is not constituted as reversal but as continuing forward with the adventure that began for me long ago in a small prairie town. For me this thesis has been instrumental and thus truly phenomenological at least in this sense.

Summary Points

- ✚ Within the cohort the issue of 'home' and the question of returning home are ubiquitous and arouse deep emotion. Co-researchers either wanted to return, were uncertain but constantly asking themselves about return, or certain they would never return, but no one was indifferent to the issue.
- ✚ Feelings about returning home seem to be in a transitional process for many co-researchers – changing depending on circumstances at home or in the foreign place, with perhaps some indication that feelings of wanting to return increase as people age.
- ✚ Definitions of home were quite ideal and contained consistently positive qualities. Even those who had never really experienced this type of home environment could describe what that feeling would consist of for them – a place to be oneself, a place to really relax, a source of nourishment and security.
- ✚ 'Home' was differentially conceived as an interaction, a moment when the individual and the environment 'matched' in specific and idiosyncratic ways, allowing the feeling of being 'at home'.
- ✚ The physical home retains a potent symbolism of security for some co-researchers, whether it's an adult residence or one's childhood abode. This physical space can serve as a 'base' for adventures out into the world, or knowing that this place exists unchanged, even in another part of the world, offers some sense of security.
- ✚ Feeling at home is often tinged with an intertwined feeling of being not-at-home for co-researchers. These individuals often try to arrange to live in two different localities, never achieving 'home' in either but often assigning the term 'home' to the place where one is *not* rather than the place one is actually in.
- ✚ To reiterate: These individuals regularly report feeling 'at home' in groups of other foreigners, or marginal people. This affinity to diversity is underwritten by a specific need for similarity among group members, especially in terms of values (of tolerance) and worldview.
- ✚ Returning home can be a complex geo-psychological task and an opportunity to assess the transformations that have occurred in one's self while away. Returning home to settle seems to be as much a psychological and philosophical process of healing as a geographical process of relocation.
- ✚ The longer one remains away from home the less concrete seems the experience of home. For many this process culminates in the person not really feeling at home anywhere. Though there seems to be a desire for the home country to remain frozen in time and unchanging, the fact of change means that home also becomes a foreign country, while simultaneously deeply familiar (stranger in a familiar land).
- ✚ It is interesting to ascertain that regardless of the emotional pain and losses inherent in leaving home to live in a foreign land, no one would choose differently if they had the choice again. Everyone would leave despite knowing the years of deep difficulties ahead and the inherent irredeemable loss.

4.8 An overview of the processes involved in leaving: adapting, unexpected consequences, and paradoxes (19)

Introduction

This section aggregates around two general interview questions; ‘can you describe the circumstances of your leaving’ and ‘since leaving, how has it been for you?’ It also includes any general comments about the overall process made by co-researchers during the interview. In their generality, the above questions elicited varied but specific details of perceptions of the overall process of leaving, with remarkable similarities across co-researchers. However as with the last section, since these accounts are formulated in response to the researcher’s questions, we cannot take the topic of ‘process overview’ as an emerging theme, though the responses to these questions do constellate into noticeably consistent comments. The following section consists of describing how the co-researcher frames their own story over the years, including some detailed and lengthy descriptions of their ‘personal introspections’ and objective choices, together comprising their narrative of ‘existential migration’. Throughout these accounts *it is crucial to note that the need to leave home and the reasons given for leaving can be related without conflating one to the other*. In most cases there clearly exists *an underlying and unfathomed inevitability* about leaving that might relate to reasons that are identified post hoc but those reasons more likely approximate exemplars rather than explanations of the need itself.

Some co-researchers can readily see now how they were preparing to leave since childhood. Although one may be concerned about the veridical status of such retrospective claims, many co-researchers can clearly discern that they made choices that would facilitate living in other parts of the world even before they could articulate that as their destiny. Learning a foreign language, reading books about foreign places, watching foreign films, can all help to prepare, in imagination, the act of migration and expectations of future foreign experiences. Wanting to leave can influence early study choices requiring substantial energy and commitment over a number of years. A holiday abroad can also contribute to leaving preparations and for some, these brief forays constituted a ‘dry run’ to the actual migration. Leaving the country can seem so important that nothing is left to chance; one must take control of making it happen.

Co-researcher Narratives

Externally Peter appeared to others as confident and capable, but to himself he felt that his home life had impaired development of his self-esteem, including confidence in his ability to

be independent. On the one hand Peter was desperate to leave, feeling alienated and unhappy at home but he was also nervous and anxious about leaving. Fantasies of leaving helped him cope with his home environment and he was concerned that if he couldn't survive out there how could he return and cope at home with that fantasy in ruins? Peter felt the only way he could really leave was to go alone, without anyone's support, as a baptism of fire. Once Peter left and realised he could cope, there was no desire to return to the situation at home. Peter's choice of studying anthropology combined the chance to deeply explore life while living it, to analyse the experience of being alien while being in an alien place. Peter's scholarship also enhanced his tools of observation enabling a return to the origin with a new perspective on the benefits of feeling a foreigner in his home environment. As discussed previously, experiences of living in a foreign place for a prolonged period finally allowed Peter an opportunity to combine being a foreigner *in reality* with the possibility of making a home.

For Rita, as for many of the co-researchers, going to university provided the initial excuse and first experience of leaving home. In her case, it offered the opportunity to escape the mismatch between her values and the ethos of her hometown environment, to abandon arid conventionality and to blossom intellectually. Although Rita had friends who also left for university, a number of them returned after studying, and their original leaving lacked Rita's greater desperation. It was surprising for Rita to discover that leaving doesn't happen all at once; while living away, there was a gradual process of separation from parents and the family home. She was surprised to feel a pang of emotion when she would visit home and then leave again; that same home environment that she was desperate to leave and still despised retained some emotional bond.

Renata's account of leaving home reveals more of the contradictory and complicated paradoxes in this choice. Recounting it feels very intimate to her, a very private story of gradually moving further and further from one's family home, hometown, and then home country. Renata experienced her leaving as traumatic at each stage but most difficult was a period when she had to take a step backwards and briefly return to her hometown for financial reasons after having left. Again, pursuing her education was a useful rationale, or even excuse, for leaving home. For Renata, the process of leaving was in relation to needing increasing independence in the form of increasing physical distance from family and home. Unlike some co-researchers, Renata didn't explicitly always assume she'd leave, but her leaving was implied by the fact that she could never imagine living her life in her hometown.

So, like Ben, though she wasn't always conscious that she'd leave, she never imagined she would stay either.

Renata felt herself gradually outgrow each space she was in: her own room, her flat, her hometown, finally... She reports that this progression of needing to become 'physically bigger' changed every aspect of her life. Like Peter, Renata draws a distinction between all the reasons for leaving and the unmistakeable feeling that she just had to go, despite any rationale or explanation. She was not trying to escape from something, but rather was going *towards* something, a curiosity and a search for what she wanted in life, always towards greater independence and self-support. Although Renata clearly felt the need to go, she had no destination in mind and she found that attractive, to just follow the 'call without content'. At the time this need was more important than her education but there was a constant compromise between managing her studies and her continual moving, she saw both as educational. Renata values the connection between knowledge from life experiences and knowledge from academic scholarship. She knew it would not be right for her to remain in her hometown to attend university; she needed geographical movement to match the intellectual movement. From the correspondence between the realms of abstract intellectual and concrete geographical emanates a deeper appreciation of the knowledge acquired. One's holistic being is more engaged if knowledge is lived in motion than when sitting and reading sedentary in a chair. For example, seeing an exhibition away from home makes it a whole adventure, a whole process that is more than just the exhibition itself and certainly more than seeing it around the corner from one's home.

However, leaving incurs an inevitable price and Renata is clear about this. It feels sad to leave behind the familiar and loved place and reflecting on that loss can feel melancholic. The difficulty is leaving something that one loves, *the place of lack was/is also the loved place* but the fact that one had to go also generates a positive excitement for the unexplored. There are definite payoffs to leaving but it is difficult not to have a home. Renata feels comfortable as a stranger among strangers, but she also misses the taken-for-granted world at home, whereas nothing can function automatically as a stranger. She misses the social network that builds over years in the home place, whether one frequently meets with others or not, its existence provides a feeling of connection and continuity. Though it can feel suffocating to have that network, not having it evokes the longing for it, and Renata is slightly embarrassed to recognise that neither situation seems totally satisfying. As we've

discussed already, for many co-researchers the best resolution to this experience seems to consist of having easy access to being away and returning home - both worlds. For Renata, this combination approaches her ideal and she would be unhappy with only one or the other. Living in the UK means the distance is too great for this combination and Renata feels increasingly disappointed when she returns home at infrequent intervals and finds things changed; she is losing the world she goes back to find. At this point in her life, Renata is confused about which country to call home and she uses the two languages to signify the home she is referring to, by saying the word in her native tongue or in English. As described by Sarah, when Renata is in one place the other place feels like home, and this mixed identity is now also reflected in her native first name and English surname, each reflecting one of the two places, so she is half here and half there even in name.

Renata feels ambivalent about returning home. On the one hand she constantly plots this homecoming but wonders if it is at all realistic or just a fantasy to quieten her homesickness. On the other hand she thinks it may be possible, so she is caught unable to decide whether to encourage the feeling that there's no place like home, or whether she should try to deny it, which is her usual strategy. Her flat in London is not experienced as a home; it consists of unpacked boxes, which reassures her that she could leave at a moment's notice. The price of this unsettledness is that she also lives with persistent anxiety. She can't relax with the constant desire for mobility and since this desire seems embedded within her being, she is exploring modes of living with the anxiety. Being uprooted and not able to take root again generates a feeling of insecurity, where every move seems uncertain. However, Renata anticipates a new phase, where moving back or not, or going back and forth, are no longer the correct terms. Though unclear, the issue of home seems to be reframed into the dilemma of combining both excitement and peace in one life. She sees the dilemma as having been '*relocated*' from the geographical to the psychological, or existential.

The process of leaving (and returning for those who have embarked upon it) has usually been described as gradual, sometimes prefaced by years of preparation and sustaining fantasies. This measured transition has sometimes been an expression of sensitivity to the feelings of others left behind, and sometimes out of caution to ensure the leaving would be successful. However, the feelings motivating even a gradual departure were often described as quite pronounced. Fiona was desperate to experience what the wider world might offer as sharp contrast to her own unsatisfactory local habitat. She was powerfully attracted to the unknown,

to excitement, and could not be happy with the predictable life options she saw available at home. She meticulously planned the steps of her leaving, and has enjoyed her adventures out in the world, describing the process as twofold, one geographical and one psychological. She senses regret and loss that she was unable to achieve her goals less painfully and she continues to feel detached since returning to the UK from her years in foreign cultures. In terms of geography, her travels have altered her perspective on space, aesthetics, and landscape.

Graciella left her home country as soon as she possibly could. She wanted to prove to her boyfriend, her parents, and to herself that she could do it. She resisted family attempts to influence her future, instead opting to follow her own path of leaving for America to pursue her dream without even knowing the language. Graciella's previous experiences of travelling abroad reinforced her desire to be out in that wide world, to be in airports, catching flights to exotic new places. But there is also a poignant and powerful image of loss in Graciella's story. She found a newborn sick kitten on her porch shortly before leaving her country. Graciella nursed this kitten and mothered it till it recovered and thrived. She often still dreams of that baby kitten now, dreaming that it's ill and Graciella is not there to take care of her. Though the animal is now grown and healthy, it always appears as small and helpless in the dreams. Graciella feels the kitten symbolises something she had to sacrifice in order to go away, something she had to leave behind. This is not the expression of simple regret since Graciella clearly values highly the unimaginable variety of experiences she has had since leaving her home country. But the satisfying fulfilment of her yearning to explore and live in the world for the past ten years is beginning to change as she grows older. This is related to a nascent longing to be able to return home now, as self-sufficient, as a woman. Returning in this manner would complete something, possibly something concerning the statement she was making to her parents in her leaving (as described earlier).

In Sarah's country it is customary for young people to travel for a year and then return home. She followed this custom (or utilised it) but with important variations, for instance, she first sought employment experience that might eventually assist her in working abroad, and then she left with a one-way ticket. Unlike her compatriots, she was preparing to live abroad without a time limit for returning. She sought adventure and new experiences that weren't available at home. Sarah's decision to remain away was both positive and painful. She valued the opportunity to explore other cultures but leaving her home country was very difficult.

Moving to London was seen as the best option for earning money and having easy access to further travel. For Sarah it was important that she leave home when she felt very positive about it and if she returned, it should also be a choice, not due to lack of work or some misfortune. She wanted to maintain her loving connection to her home city but eventually Sarah had to declare that in fact she was living abroad, rather than just prolonging a trip. The meaning of this declaration and the powerful attraction of travelling to exotic places remains unclear to Sarah. Many of Sarah's school friends have visited her in London and cannot understand her decision to live here.

As mentioned previously, Marta was ostensibly sent away by her mother to attend a training course in London but this was perceived by Marta as a method of controlling her career and relationship choices, so she took this situation into her own hands and decided to stay. She did whatever was necessary to make her temporary status here permanent. Marta now sees that the years have been a struggle. She feels that natives underestimate the difficulties of being a foreigner, especially how difficult it is being unfamiliar with a place, not knowing what opportunities are available. Only now, after twelve years, does Marta feel she has enough information to navigate her new culture. Marta feels it's difficult to push her life forward with the momentum she would have had at home. She wonders if what slows her down isn't just being a foreigner, but her not wanting to be one, and trying to know everything before beginning anything. Marta tries to remain open to experiences, to making the best of things. She is constantly searching to fill in what is missing, what remains unknown and mysterious about the culture and herself.

For years Eva prepared excitedly for her migration to the UK, studying English and business management to support the move. However, upon arrival unexpected obstacles, including host reactions to her foreignness and intense feelings of not belonging, made the transition seem insurmountable. When the hoped-for new life did not materialise it led to depression and regrettable choices as well as thoughts of returning home. Difficulties in the new life can generate new perspectives on possibilities back home but the homeworld simultaneously changes, leaving one marooned between two worlds, suspended between nations with no sense of belonging in either. For Eva this has been a difficult journey with a lot of inescapable physical and emotional suffering, and also some complete surprises. In spite of everything, there is absolutely no regret about leaving and no self-doubts that life would have been better if she'd stayed put. Eva speaks for many of the co-researchers when she points

out that visiting one's origin, and getting feedback from family and friends, can illustrate the degree one has changed and developed during experiences abroad. *Home is like a reflecting mirror*. Others can react positively or negatively to these changes and the increasing gap that forms between the one who left and the ones who stayed behind as they change at different rates and in interaction with different contexts. Of course this can also increase the alienation and lack of belonging for the person who left. But for some people, visiting home after a period away can provide opportunities to form new, more positive relationships within previously difficult family circumstances.

For Ben, the first step in leaving was also under the rubric of education, choosing a university far away from home. Like others, Ben's leaving process can be described as increments in increasing distance and foreignness. When Ben first came to Europe he felt he would never return to his home country to live and he continues to feel this way. He had a very difficult experience of not being able to travel at all while his UK residency was being decided. This was an experience of having his 'primary joy cut off'. Ben describes his experiences since leaving home as up and down, with the beginning of his travelling being 'euphoric', followed by a growing feeling that he should settle down and take on adult responsibilities.

The focus in Ben's life has shifted to what he feels are age-appropriate expectations - travel for its own sake is no longer as attractive as it once was. In this, Ben echoes changes related to aging described by Sarah, Graciella, Eva, Renata, and others. These changes are expressed variously as trying to 'really settle' in the foreign place or thoughts of resettling at home, either decision laced with assumptions of a more 'mature' way of being. For Ben the converse of the attraction to travel has become the pride of fitting into a foreign culture. He notices that he enjoys being treated like a local in London rather than as a foreigner. Though he remains ambivalent about wanting this familiarity, he reminds himself about the loneliness of solitary travel, which he can forget when he's settled and romanticising about adventure. However, the paradox is that loneliness is an integral aspect of travel for Ben, it's intrinsic to the act, and travelling with a companion would destroy that essential experience. It seems that Ben's choices revolve around solitude/travel and community/settlement, with the added variable of his expectations regarding commitment to an age-appropriate lifestyle.

As mentioned above, Ben feels new tensions between staying and 'flying away' as he ages. He feels he'd be foolish to give up the things he has developed through staying, namely a

relationship and career, in order to acquiesce to his desire for adventure. Ben attributes the decision to stay in one place to maturing and valuing the things older people enjoy in contrast to his youthful pleasures. As mentioned previously, he has specific age-related expectations and to continue travelling at his current age would need explication – to continue living as he has could signify a fear of growing up and accepting adult responsibility. Ben values both solitude and community, and realises that while settling for frequent European holidays keeps him from giving up everything, it doesn't seem satisfying enough. On the other hand imagining giving up everything and travelling like he did in his youth also no longer seems quite right. At the moment neither option satisfies completely. He has hopes of developing a compromise by incorporating travel as part of his career. He anticipates that this appropriation of travel would be age-appropriate and responsible, rather than just irresponsibly 'flying away' again.

Since the age of four, Martin's experiences indicated a future trajectory of departure from the rejecting environment of his home country. The initial step towards independence was to leave the family home. Finishing his studies was also an important step. Finding employment in an international hotel was instrumental in his leaving, not only financially but also by exposing him to foreign ways of being. As evident in many of the co-researcher's narratives, exposure to international culture and foreignness can be inspiring for those who have a predisposition to leave their homeland. Working in an international environment helped Martin develop the confidence to attempt relocation to the UK, to access more of what he had been exposed to. Being able to control his own destiny, rather than have it prescribed, was extremely important to Martin. He was not searching for an easier life but one that allowed more choice and freedom and the possibility of belonging. Most if not all the nineteen voluntary migrants interviewed in this study confessed that it's difficult to ascertain one reason or even a constellation of factors that determined their leaving home. Martin attempts to address this haunting question by listing three contributing factors; he left to escape his isolation, to free himself from the suffocating orbit of mother and family, and to disconfirm the negative messages of those who rejected him when he was growing up. Martin finds it difficult to acknowledge the last reason, perceiving in it an aspect of grandiosity, the arrogance to think he needed more than his home country could offer. But it also has an edge of positive revenge, which he is also uncomfortable with.

Sometimes changing relationships in the home environment can provide the final impetus to leave home. The death of a parent or feeling left behind by developments in the lives of friends can loosen attachments so that predispositions to leaving call more clearly. Camilla presents a set of circumstances unlike many of the respondents. Like Kumar, her leaving trajectory is not representative of the cohort as a whole. She had not seriously considered leaving her home until a year and a half ago, after years of dealing with the personal difficulties of trying to belong in her home environment. Gradually the right conditions coalesced, allowing her to leave with the prospect that moving would be positive and supportive and that staying would become increasingly negative and difficult. Her perspective *since* leaving has become more suggestive of what I'm calling 'existential migration'. For example, Camilla had responded to her feelings of not belonging in the home culture with an increased longing to be accepted there. This trapped her in an entrenched dynamic, making leaving more difficult. She imagined that a fixed and accepted identity would bring feelings of security and confidence, whereas a lack of belonging and corresponding unstable identity generated feelings of invalidity. Unlike other co-researchers, Camilla experienced the unknown as unpredictable and thus frightening, reinforcing attempts to be accepted by the known and familiar world, no matter how incompatible it may be with her felt sensitivities. Camilla was afraid of the outside world, feeling she had no idea how to function out there, so even being trapped was more comfortable because it was at least familiar. Unlike the experiences of other co-researchers, Camilla was *afraid*; though problematic, her family constituted the only context where she felt she made sense, and leaving it presented the threat of dissolving into nothing. The situation that Camilla describes could almost be termed '*existential stagnation*'. Camilla had to be assured that leaving home would not mean wallowing in solitary isolation and this is in stark contrast to others who relished the anticipation of solitary adventure.

Unlike other co-researchers, Camilla was quite willing to compromise herself by adopting views or dressing in ways that were not consistent with her own feelings, but this resulted in a sense of losing herself, culminating in the paradox that the closer she was to being accepted by the culture, the more incompatible she was with herself. She says that she had to sacrifice her 'internal home' in order to belong externally. However, moving to London has alleviated the intensity of these feelings and change now seems possible, there is now hope and new stimulation. Surviving the move to London and coping with change has enabled Camilla to

deal with her previous feelings of shame at not fitting in. She is experiencing a new feeling of pride, and an interest in travelling further, living in other places.

Finally making the decision to move gave Camilla the space to recognise that it's the deciding and 'diving in' that's difficult for her, she actually likes novelty, change, new people and places, and now feels less oppressed and more alive than she has for years. She feels there are new possibilities for work, training, and relationships. Surviving the challenge of leaving encourages her that she can take other risks, and make other moves. Peter has also mentioned that leaping into the unknown and coping with it can be instrumental in developing the self-esteem to take further risks. Camilla now realises that the sedimented criteria for belonging presented by the homogenous home culture were incompatible with the person she knows herself to be. London culture is more heterogeneous and openly diverse, allowing a sense of belonging without having to mould oneself to a hegemonic culture.

Some co-researchers have noted a process by which the new culture becomes conflated with the home culture, *especially* if both cultures present as being similar. If the new country has a culture that seems entirely foreign, it's allowed to be entirely foreign, but if there is enough similarity between cultures, say for example Canada and Britain, one expects to understand things, and this expectation is often disconfirmed, exposing concealed differences under superficial similarity thus eliciting feelings of disorientation, even panic. It can be difficult to abide these unexpected and subtle differences, to accept that one is actually here, as opposed to back home. Sarah presents an evocative account of this situation, describing a process in which her shock causes her to devalue the revealed difference: she flees to what is familiar and blames the new culture for not being like home. Sarah understands the act of comparing as an attempt to anchor oneself in a kind of familiarity when feeling out of one's depth. In the situational morass of 'familiar yet strange', one's disturbance elicits the need to grab onto something known and straightforwardly reassuring. Again, we are reminded of the 'unheimlich', the uncanny presence of the strange in the familiar. When differences between the home and new culture also involve a clash in cherished values, there can arise a pronounced dissonance between self and environment, reminiscent of the sorts of dissonance that inform decisions to leave in the first place, and in some cases, instigate another 'round' of migration. If 'home' can be understood as an interaction that flows upon particular person-

environment ‘matching’, perhaps feeling ‘not-at-home’ is the result of an idiosyncratic ‘mismatching’³⁸.

It would be naïve to suggest that the complicated experience of leaving home, including its multivariate motivational ‘levels’, could be completely understood by anyone. Out of the *holistic weave* of life we might be capable of *lifting out* what appear to be distinct threads but we should remember that these threads never exist separately in lived reality (they are always inter-mingled and mutually affecting). Prima facie this thesis topic constitutes an abstracted piece of the ‘whole’ of living experience and thus might move forward our understandings but never conclude them. For example, at this preliminary stage, when lifted out individually some motivations appear to contradict others, falling into ironic paradoxes. Many of the co-researchers express the importance of independence, freedom, and choice, on the one hand, while emphasising the need for approval, acceptance, and belonging *somewhere*, on the other hand. This paradox is detailed in the narratives describing the home environment as a place of imposition and not-belonging but also as a potential provider of security and a base for developing independence. There can be a tension between wanting to be taken care of and wanting to be self-supporting. Developing relationships with other ‘internationalists’ can be one way of reconciling these needs in the context of interrelationships with others who can understand the predicament. Being understood as a voluntary migrant, evidenced in these interviews through the relationship between the research and co-researcher, is deeply valued. Apparent contradictions may simply be highlighting the complexity of the experience, as well as the dichotomies that need to be balanced. Living out these competing ‘calls to being’ can have unintended consequences, arousing complicated feelings about the limits of human existence.

The possibility of being able to renew the search for self from within the riches of foreign worlds is a combination prized by the individuals interviewed. But these experiences also have complicated and unexpected difficulties. For example, there are often complex reactions to people who have never left their home. While voluntary migrants can feel sadness and sympathy for people who have stayed behind, there can also be a hint of resentment or

³⁸ To continue this speculation it seems possible, by extrapolation, that one sort of body-environment interaction may constitute a (matching) experience of ‘being-at-home’ for one person (even fleetingly) while also constituting a (mismatching) experience of ‘not being-at-home’ for another person, or even alternating for the same individual at different times. These hypothetical accounts at least exemplify the prioritising of process over content in such a scheme.

jealousy, imagining those settled lives to be easier because they have not required such resilience and reserves of self-conviction. Coping in foreign places demands an exaggerated degree of self-reliance, potentially extending to isolation, and in turn possibly contributing to a fragile sense of self. Some co-researchers found it difficult to create a sense of emotional safety and security in a consistently demanding foreign environment. Exposure to other cultures and the concomitant demands on the individual seems to 'open up or extend' *something* that subsequently problematise efforts to settle back again into the quotidian life expected at home. The interviews disclose the deeply emotional component to realising that foreign migration creates such a *difference in being* that returning home will not be automatic, or even achievable. Perhaps for some there can be a homecoming that is nothing short of a re-creation, a new migration, but never a comfortable reinsertion into the familiar. The idealised 'match' between self and home environment (which never occurred for most of these individuals) may now be forever lost, even as fantasy. And this time the 'mismatch', the failure to feel at-home is the unintended consequences of the migrant's *own choice* to leave, rather than a failure in the environment.

From the interviews it is clear that the decision to leave the home country was, of course, not apprehended in its full complexity – no one really anticipates the unexpected in-between limbo of homelessness inhabited by many of the co-researchers. A prime motivation for leaving is to find a place where feeling 'at home' is possible, but the search itself can result in not belonging anywhere, the recognition of which can be devastating. Primary questions of identity surface in the experience of not-belonging anywhere: 'Who do I belong to?' 'Where are my people?' For example, traversing across nations generates appreciation for what each has to offer but being unable to amass everything encountered together in one place elicits constant dissatisfaction. Often the co-researchers report feeling *caught* between the contrasting worlds of two countries; the conflicting feelings are especially difficult when the contrast reveals the privileged aspects of the lifestyle forsaken at home in comparison with the more deprived life in the adopted country. This can generate feelings of inadequacy and shame. It is an important point that so-called existential migrants, unlike many other voluntary migrants, may end up with a lower standard of living as a result of their migration – this reveals that material betterment is not the prime motive in this process. The lives of friends who have stayed evolve according to the prescribed adult patterns, usually including financial and material accoutrements. Over time this exposes the migrant as increasingly different from the home environment and sometimes leads to doubt concerning the choice to

stay away. It can feel unsettling to make choices that do not entail pre-formed future trajectories, while the expectations around you, and the unfavourable comparisons, increase in intensity as time passes. Paradoxically, there often remain feelings of superiority³⁹ towards those who settled for the straightforward pre-packaged life of security in the home culture. As mentioned earlier, these critical feelings can mutate into envy of the comfort of those lives even though it is clear one could never have survived that choice. Though that settled home life would have been experienced as too constraining, entrapping, and a sacrifice of one's 'true potential', that knowledge doesn't necessarily dampen the lament that one was just too different to possess that life and its inducements.

Kathy's use of the term 'global nomad' reduces the ambiguity and complexity of her lived experience to something comprehensible and expressible. As previously mentioned, it's a term used functionally in contemporary corporate relocation trainings. When she began her foreign journeys, Kathy did not realise that the consequence was that she was closing the possibility of ever leading a 'normal' American life again. Now she's unable to fully fit in anywhere, living in a twilight zone between cultures. She perceives that she cannot live just in America any more because she is no longer just American. An annual three-week holiday home is enough for her as she suffers boredom with the American culture and feels a lack of freedom there. Kathy's multiple migrations have inducted her children into the experience of being 'global nomads'. Since she and her husband no longer have strong cultural identities, this in-between space has been passed along to her sons. As a family Kathy sees them as condemned to live in a social-cultural limbo and although she sees this as a phenomenon of the 21st century, she is concerned about how this will affect her children. Kathy is forging an identity that is constantly being elaborated by various cultural interactions, determining that she will exceed the belonging offered by any one place, thus truly becoming a nomad. Realising the consequences of her lifestyle now, Kathy considers that she might have done things differently, but what? She remains convinced that she *had to* leave, in fact she explains that she would have gone alone even without her husband as this was her destiny before meeting him.

No one in her world could comprehend Inez's decision to leave her country and her fiancé, to move to London and learn English. Despite this she was confident enough to persevere with

³⁹ To what extent these could be considered 'compensatory' is open to investigation.

her decision. The experience of choosing her own future was so crucial for Inez that she sold her own precious paintings in order to finance the trip. She gave up her whole world and in the process of saying goodbye ultimately realised how important she was to others, but that also did not reverse her decision. She even packed for her trip a full month before leaving and kept the bag by the door, which she realised later was heartbreaking for her mother. Inez sacrificed everything she had in order to pursue a dream that was, for the first time, of her own making.

The skill of adapting to new surroundings is an inherent capability of all the voluntary migrants interviewed. However, a few have pointed out the double-edged aspect of this skill. According to Graciella, her worst and best quality is her ability to be flexible, to adapt to any culture and fit in. Her experience of moving to New York without knowing the language revealed her ability to mimic, a skill she picked up from going back and forth between her parents, being in turn the person each expected her to be. It is a way of surviving but it also constitutes a threat to her own mission, to remember who she is. There is some indication it may also be partly a way to hide from the painful feelings of not fitting in. In a similar way, and contrary to her values of freedom and choice, Sarah also experiences in herself a 'dangerous' ability to adapt rather than take a stand. She notices how she will work to adapt to what she is living through and sees that clearly only retrospectively, when she has greater perspective. Lacking strong female relationships and the established social network she had at home makes Sarah feel very alone when there is a crisis here, suggesting that adaptation is an understandable strategy when support from others is inadequate.

Once Renata feels herself settling in a place she feels an opposite pull to keep looking for the 'more' of life. This keeps her always in a first phase of settling, getting to know a place, surviving, still feeling unsettled. She finds herself increasingly wanting the more that could also come from staying in a place, different goals, sinking in deeper, maybe having a family. Sometimes she wonders when all this leaving will stop but she has no idea how to satisfy both desires. When she begins to go deeper into a place she always finds stones and eventually has to decide if she should persevere, or if the ground is rock and unsustainable. Similar to Renata, the only time Graciella felt she had everything she needed to stay and settle in one place was in India but her spiritual teacher presented her with a life or death decision. She could stay and die there or keep moving and live. She now sees that her happiness would not have persisted there, for example, her desire for a profession could not

have been fulfilled. Graciella feels that she continues to need the tension of two opposites in order to hold open a space of possibility for herself, as she did with her parents when she was young. She feels she can live as long as she knows that gap is accessible, in the event that she needs a refuge. But it remains a mystery how she can actually realise this possibility in practical and geographical terms.

Initially Marta began the interview by describing her life as ‘charmed’ but by the end of the interview she was in tears realising that in fact it has been a struggle. Now Marta perceives her leaving and staying away as intricately woven into her desire to break from her mother’s control and pursue her own potentials, which she did. Despite these motivations for leaving and staying away, Marta feels doubt about what her real reasons were, as if there is still something else underlying these expressions. It was important for her to admit the previously unacknowledged personal impetus in her leaving. This shift in understanding is a good example of the ‘movement’ experienced by nearly all the co-researchers during the interviews, suggesting that there is therapeutic value in phenomenological explorations of stories of leaving. And as hinted earlier, my own self-understanding has likewise shifted significantly during work on this project, facilitating my own process of returning home.

It is important to note that having other significant motivations for migration does not preclude the ‘existential’ significance of the act, its ability to incorporate and express or address issues inherent in human living. For example, Eva describes both her difficult family situation and economic factors as motivations in leaving home but both these motivations were intimately interwoven with the hope of fulfilling her potential as a person⁴⁰. For Eva, even when she was a young girl, images of material products not only symbolised a more comfortable life, but also a whole imagined world full of promise and potentialities that couldn’t be actualised at home. Eva set out to explore her possibilities as a person by extending herself economically and intellectually in a new and unknown environment and this required a certain amount of courage and desire, in order to cope with the foreign place. Eva speculates that economic desires may constitute compensations for feelings of deficiency, separation from meaningful relationships, an emotional lack that’s difficult to

⁴⁰ It could be argued that every economic motivation implies an inherent existential motivation – the desire to improve one’s status and material conditions. However, I hope it is apparent that if these are the only underlying attributes of the choice to migrate, then this act is essentially different in kind than the migrations I’ve been presenting here, which are largely expressions of a desperate need for self-realisation beyond simple economic betterment.

articulate. Accumulating material possessions can make one feel more tangible while simultaneously comforting the pain of not belonging. Once again, Eva points out that voluntary departures can be instilled with great hope, great longing, and deep pain all at once.

A last important note worth mentioning here regards the experience of homesickness – paradoxically it seems possible to feel homesick even when there has been no clear experience of home and no intention of ever returning home⁴¹. I propose that homesickness is also an ‘interactive experience’, a comment on the present at least as much as a desire for a nostalgic past. Perhaps at bottom homesickness is a forlorn desire for some reconciliation with the givens of existence, the quest for a human form of dwelling that seems implied by life but never realised. These speculations and extrapolations will emerge more fully in Part Two of the thesis.

Summary Points:

- ✦ Leaving home was a ubiquitous assumption for some co-researchers and even in childhood they were making choices consistent with and facilitative of their future destiny.
- ✦ Despite one’s desperation, leaving still requires requisite support in the form of adequate self-confidence regarding abilities to cope in unfamiliar settings. Some co-researchers tested their abilities and planned a phased leaving in order to guarantee that their departure would be successful and they would not be forced to return.
- ✦ Leaving the family home for university was a common first step in incrementally larger migrations. Of course many young people leave home for university, the migrations described here had an intensity that defined them as ongoing and long-standing, with university facilitating leaving rather than the converse. These ‘existential migrations’ have a *felt direction* to them though not always a clear goal.
- ✦ For a few co-researchers, an initial aim was to be accepted in the home environment and they remained engaged in that struggle for some time. Their process of ‘existential migration’ more clearly manifested upon leaving home (departure sometimes initiated by a shift in dynamics in the home situation), at which time they felt free to express new or uncovered sensitivities of difference, independence, etc.
- ✦ This process of ‘existential migration’ can pose as more superficial economic migration, concealing its deeper dimensions. Economic considerations are in no way incommensurate with migration to safeguard existence – they are compatible motivations but the more apparent and recognised economic rationale can easily mask the deeper process that is simultaneously unfolding, and I would argue, often primary.
- ✦ However inevitable leaving was, it consistently incorporated unexpectedly deep feelings of loss and sadness. However, despite these unforeseen emotional difficulties, not one co-researcher regretted their decision in the sense that they would choose differently knowing what they know now.

⁴¹ Also paradoxically, it is possible when visiting home, to *not* want to stay but *not* want to leave. This again reveals a tragic dilemma inherent in the limbo of living in-between.

- ✚ The necessary skills to adapt to foreign cultures comprise a double-edged attribute. Some co-researchers valued being so adaptable, while also recognising that this malleability threatened their own sense of self, even the ability to maintain a modicum of their own cultural inheritance.
- ✚ Co-researchers often report comparing themselves to peers and family who stayed behind. Such comparison elicits complex feelings of superiority and envy. Migrants feel sorry for those who are seen to have taken the easy route, while also being jealous of their accomplishments and security.
- ✚ The gap between those who leave and those who stay continues to widen as time passes. As co-researchers age, some begin to desire the positive attributes of a settled life, at least to gain educational advantages and career progression. But they also seek to maintain their mobility and respect for their personal sensitivities.
- ✚ Many co-researchers report being in a limbo state where no place will ever feel like home again. Those who have returned home perceive it as a long and complicated process and by no means one of recapturing what was left behind – there is a melancholic recognition that *that* life will remain as un-lived potential (though in fact an illusory potential since every co-researcher emphasises leaving as necessity).

4.9 Pilot definition of ‘existential migration’

Introduction

This section is an attempt to gather together in one description an amalgamated version of the diverse narratives paraphrased above. I will present what for me appear to be both essential and individual aspects of this process of choosing to leave home. Below is *one* version, which cannot incorporate all the variations we have witnessed, though my intention is to offer an evocative foundation for understanding those variations, and future ones. From the preceding accounts of voluntary migration, (migration that was chosen by individuals who *could* have stayed, at least from an external point of view) we can begin to sense the *quality* of experience that has until this present attempt remained largely unrecognised, at least in its full implications. Hopefully the lengthy narratives and thematic groupings provided above adequately endow the reader with a ‘felt sense’ of the topic out of which a conceptual discussion and crossings with other disciplines can emerge without diminishing the experiences now at the centre of our concept of ‘existential migration’. I have presented the description below as an illustrative narrative of the most common features present in the co-researcher interviews. I have sent it back to co-researchers for their validation and adjusted it accordingly. Here are three co-researcher reactions to this description of existential migration:

Marta: I have now read your chapter three times and it makes a lot of sense.. The bit about longing for home (not your words, but my take on this) is particularly powerful, partly because I don't want to admit this (longing) to myself...

Inez: This is the first time I attempted to read the description and I had to stop after the end of page three. I felt as if my mind widened (if this makes sense), my throat narrowed and going down my heart and below, it became even more narrowed, and then I was sitting with a feeling of sadness ... I had tears, unbearable tears ... as I have them now again ... I felt that reading your paper put me in touch with my own self – as if I was at home ... the home of my body ... but this makes me very sad ... where am I going to end? Where and how am I going to die? The answer is that I don't know how I will supposedly have a home ... but I feel that home is me ... that my roots are within me ... but this also makes me miss people ... lovely people that I encounter during my journey ... and suddenly they disappear ... but I am thinking right now about my roots ... and my tears stopped ... and I feel something of an emergency to be back to my roots and see my lovely sister ... When I read *Return*, I realised that I have been doing that since last year ... I have been trying to enter into a process of reconciliation where there was originally rejection ... and although I feel that some of that has prompted some changes in my relationship with my family, there are still, and I feel there always will be, an abyss that is impossible to understand ... I can only feel it.

Martin: I was very touched reading the paper. It resonates a lot with my personal experience on a deep level. Also it does with the material of some of the clients I have worked with. I liked a lot of things you mention in the paper, eg, my own sensitivities standing out more in a strange environment; feeling stateless and rootless and being torn between two cultures and mentalities; living consciously rather than automatically in the new environment; being treated as more special every time going back 'home' etc. I had a strong emotional reaction as I was reading of the homogeneity (I'd even call it Philistine mentality) and I was thinking of actually being at risk of being devoured by my original 'homeworld'. And hence migration speaking in those terms seemed like a choice between life and death. One aspect that seemed to be underemphasized in your paper is the profound sense of loss as one leaves their familiar homeland and throws him/herself into the unknown. For me it meant a loss of security (at least on the surface of it), physical home, family, friends and a familiar way of relating to people. As I came here ... I had to learn a new way of relating to people, in a similar way to a baby who is trying to learn a new language. I know you said your account is meant to be general but for me returning has never been an issue because simply it would be like going back where I came from and expecting to be treated by people in the same way as they did then without expecting me to have changed. This would be a death of most of what I have achieved in terms of my confidence and hopefully more healthy relationships here in the UK. In terms of homesickness, (and I may be contradicting myself re: the point of loss I made earlier) probably one of the greatest losses is the fantasy of an ideal home which I never experienced. What I mean by that is that I never felt homesick just because I have very few good things to remember from [my home country]. But what I have been mourning is the choice I never had ...- a fantasy that will always stay a fantasy but never touched my actual experience. Don't know if this is of any help to you but this is my immediate reaction to your paper. It's very poetic and full of emotion. With your permission I will forward it to a few other people with migration experience and see what they think.

I present the description below in the first person, believing that it is more likely to strike the reader's felt response if the language is immediate in tone. If the reader can hold a bodily-

accumulated sense of what I have been describing in Chapter Four, they will have an experiential guide to assess my pilot definition here, and the elaborations that follow in Part Two. So, like the co-researchers themselves, each reader should be in a position to assess the description I present below. In this sense the reader is able to further elaborate (and contradict and clarify) my understanding of the concept, and thereby capable of going past the confines of this paper⁴². If this actually occurs, then for those readers at least, this thesis qualifies as phenomenological process.

Why existential *migration* and not existential *migrants*? In this thesis I actively avoid contributing yet another diagnostic category or individual label to the vast therapeutic and social science nomenclature. Though I may be overly cautious, at this point there seems insufficient evidence to suggest there is a ‘type of person’ we can refer to as an existential migrant, as though it is an inherited personality variable or trait. In point of fact there may well be a specific style of ‘openness’ that underlies some proclivities to leave – for example, there could be individuals who are more likely to engage in ‘existential migration’ due to their openness to certain sensitivities or potentials in being. This openness may be the outcome of an interaction between their being and their environment, creating a predisposition to this particular response to the dilemmas of existence. However, it also seems possible that even these individuals may eventually settle (though what that means may be idiosyncratic), while others who were settled may later ‘open up to’ existential migration as a strategy for life. Also, people who are relocated through career may find that they are left ‘unsettled’ by the experience and enter into some years of wandering before resettling.

It is obviously not primarily an inherited ‘trait’ if it arises and subsides in a variety of people in response to their changing circumstances. It seems much more like an interactive process, one that may last a few months, a year, a decade, or a lifetime. It also seems that the way that this process begins, and when, may be significant – if one never felt ‘at home’ at home, leaving will have a different meaning than if one did feel at home for some time and then that belonging became dislodged. These variations both involve a degree of choice, but what of

⁴² Interesting, perhaps, that I want to give my readers the space and independence to have their own relation to this topic, but I don’t want to lose contact with them either. I want readers to be able to “travel” with this idea, if that’s not being too metaphoric, and to respect the different ways we may come to understand what emerges here.

the person who doesn't choose for themselves, for example the wife accompanying their spouse on relocation and who would never have actively chosen to relocate to a foreign place? These so-called 'trailing partners' may be forced to confront aspects of existence that otherwise would not have arisen for them. What of refugees, and at the other extreme, what happens to individuals who are 'born' into an affinity for existential migration but do not have the basic ability (economic, state hindrances to migration) to leave? These issues and others are touched upon later in Part Two of the paper, but remain substantial questions for further research.

A description of existential migration

Self-potential. In a process of existential migration, the 'call' to realise my self-potential overrides most other considerations, including all buttress against the whims of life that belonging and security offer. This call may have always been present as a vague anxiety pushing towards departure, or it may have been a slowly accumulating chorus that eventually builds to a crescendo and to try to ignore it would have greater consequences than the losses entailed in leaving. The self is felt to be an active living entity beyond my own control, deeply informed by this call that emanates from a faraway mysterious place that is simultaneously primordially me. The call comes from a restless spirituality, the searching that seeps out of not-belonging. Migration is a multifaceted act – it protects this emerging self-in-creation, it expresses my heeding of the 'call', it is an act which simultaneously demonstrates and bolsters my valuing of my self, my life, my being. Despite the sorrow and the fear, leaving says I am worth taking up the responsibility for creating my own life.

The foreign place mirrors the potential of the self. It is unknown and unfixed by routine. There I will be flexible and malleable, excited by the offering of a new constellation of choices and new possibilities for expression. There is a hoped-for fertile interaction between self and new world. It is a relief to escape the old confining expectations that were so well known that they had lodged within my self as a residue of the sediment all around. Leaving is simultaneously escape *to* and escape *from*.

Escape. Existential migration means to escape with my life, an act of existential, if not physical, survival. It is a choice both 'to defy' sameness and 'to exist' as the particular and the unique. I experience the homeworld as oppressively conventional and homogeneous and

they expect me to adapt to *that* in order to fit in. We reject each other - they reject me for my difference and I reject them for their quotidian view of life. How did I end up here of all places? If I conform to the conventional all meaning in life dies for me. I know there is so much more out there so I will sacrifice what I have - I must leave to get the space to discover a life I can call mine. Staying is stagnation but leaving offers the possibility of continuous development, movement in every sense. Being able to make my own choices requires having enough physical space to feel the reflective space to consider my options. I must resist any encroachment upon my personal expanse and if I can't stand firm, I need to move on, to protect my freedom.

Freedom. To not be free is to not be alive. In leaving I am embracing my freedom and independence through movement. This requires that I have enough confidence in myself to think that I can make it out there, and if I do, I in turn increase my confidence. Somehow I got enough confidence to think I *could* survive in a foreign and unfamiliar place, to think I could adapt to a world that's different from me. After all, I've been doing that at home. I leave in stages, with growing confidence at each stage, testing each step to make sure it will hold and I won't collapse back to the origin. First I go to university, as this facilitates my leaving, which is the underlying primary motive for every step I take. I feel I am directed towards increasingly larger migrations, increasing distance and difference, and this *direction* makes the process existential. I have a felt direction more than a felt goal; it is a journey with no set destination, slowly I entertain that the journey *is* the destination.

Belongingness. The foreign world offers me the perspective to see life as a whole, and even to look back at my home experience without the danger of being sucked down into that homogeneity. I now realise that I never really felt 'at home' in my homeworld. My family and friends seemed to fit in but I never had a sense that I belonged there and in retrospect I identify that as a component of my desperation to leave. Feeling different has sensitised me to others' differences, which I seek in order to make my own difference a source of belonging rather than rejection. I find that I naturally tend to congregate with other internationals and outcasts. We are a loose fellowship, a non-binding group. We have pronounced cultural differences, which we enjoy, but we also have a basic shared outlook, maybe because we share the experience of 'chosen exile'. But of course my attraction to difference increases my difference from the conventional society who shun whatever stands out as not-belonging, anything they're not familiar with. I have found that my own sensitivities are better reflected

in foreign places than in my own original home, and this makes me feel even more stateless and rootless.

Homelessness. International travel and living as a foreigner in a foreign land are archetypal situations for realising my specific sensitivities, for nurturing a self like mine. But I now come to realise that being rootless makes me feel unsettled inside, fragile, and it takes a lot of energy just to keep myself together. I find myself in a kind of indeterminate state, in limbo between everything established. I no longer know where I belong and sometimes I wonder which direction to go. Sometimes I still feel excited and sometimes I feel lost. I look at those who stayed behind and lived the life that was laid out for them, and I feel superior because I had the courage to leave, but increasingly I also feel envious. As time passes, the gap widens and I see their security and the fruit of their deep rootedness increase the distance between us. I realise that a part of me thought I could always jump ship and return to that life left behind. Now I have come to realise that it is gone forever. There is no going back, no picking up where I left off.

Return. I think about returning almost every day. Sometimes I am clear that I would never return, sometimes I fantasise about it, yet other times I feel a dull homesickness, a kind of pull back to the only place that could ever have been home but now isn't. I think this signifies a desire for a kind of spiritual and psychological reconnection, a healing of the self in some way, and reconciliation where there was originally rejection. I sometimes imagine the return as healing my deepest feelings, whether I act on it or not. It would be a process of long transition to even contemplate this as a possibility. Maybe just imagining is enough. It would be a complex geo-psychological task to really *feel myself* back at my origins, and to assess what transformations have occurred in the intervening years. But there is also the melancholic recognition of time: home did not freeze the day I went through the departure gate. Home has changed, though deeply familiar it is also different, and I return as a stranger in a strangely familiar land. The return, like the leaving, is about me, it points towards my self-journey more than towards the choice of specific physical environments or aesthetics. But again, I feel anxious that the cycle is doomed to recommence, how could I stay here now and not succumb to the suffocation that led me to leave in the first place? How can I protect my fluid self, elaborated by all my experiences in the world, and withstand the demand to cement into the conventional? How can I balance my desire for home with my need for self-direction?

Ambivalence and balance. I need both space *and* relationship. If I had that originally I might have stayed. Might have. I need to find a balance between the threat of impingement and the arid desert of isolation. I need warmth and connection without the oppressive demand to conform. I long for a kind of belonging that accepts who I truly am rather than the conditional belonging based upon how well I can mould myself in *their* image. I seek a balance between relational connection and the attraction of mobility, movement, change, and the constant stimulation of the foreign. When I feel myself settling and starting to belong I relax, but then it suddenly triggers the opposite impulse for adventure, to explore somewhere exotic. I find it hard to develop deep roots. I am rootless. Personally I live deep within myself, but with the world I remain shallow, without community. My 'existential migration' remains a profoundly individual process even if it's not solitary, even if my partner joins me, even if they are likewise migrating, it remains unequivocally concerned with *my* being-in-the-world. Both settling and not-settling seem to incur threats to developing my potential – loss of self at home, or arrested development because I never stay still. The ideal seems to be to live in two places, to have a country house or live half time in two cultures, or at least to travel extensively. Then I can belong and remain apart, independent, a community with an escape route. But I would always gaze back from one place to the other, and realise that home appears where I am not.

The spirit of leaving. I don't want to lose the personal development I have achieved by sacrificing so much. My leaving was in part a spiritual quest, or at least a journey of meaning, an attempt to connect to the mysteries of life itself. I was called to make manifest an intuitive connection to the transpersonal dimension. I was marginalised at home because of this nascent sensitivity. I need to live consciously, not automatically. I can't go to the same restaurant twice. I need to stay awake, to continually 'kick myself alive' so I don't slip into the mundane and habitual. The way I did that was to seek out unfamiliar cultures where the everyday demanded constant attention, where their mystery would match my own. That was the closest experience I've had to being-at-home, the temporary relief of the world mirroring the mystery of my own self.

Home. I imagine home as the feeling of being able to be myself, being able to relax, being nourished and secure without oppression. I wonder if home is a place or a temporary interaction between place and self. Is home a moment: the feeling that arises when the environment matches me in some unpredictably specific and idiosyncratic way? Home has

always been temporary for me. The physical place can be a potent but unrealisable symbol for all a home should be. That *place*, if I can stand its disappointments and unconvincing promises, can serve as a base for my adventures out into the world. It provides some helpful illusion of permanence for the transience of life. But my feeling at-home is now forever tinged with feeling not-at-home, the two come inextricably wrapped together. It reminds me of my origins, the only 'home' I've had, but also the place where I was painfully aware of not belonging. Homesickness is a given, not a demand to return home, where the feeling paradoxically continues unabated.

Origin. What happened there that *I* didn't fit in? Why did I leave, *really*? I contemplate that question increasingly as I age and as I begin to long for the ground to hold me still. I remember my relations with my parents, my family, and my early peers. I don't know if those relationships were anticipations of my leaving or contributions to making it happen. From my earliest memories I gazed outward to the horizon and made choices that would facilitate my departure. I knew then that I was different, and they also seemed to know. Feeling different at home was not all painful, I grew to like standing out – difference can be a source of specialness as well as rejection and there could be a fine line between these two reactions. Now returning home for visits allows me to feel somewhat exotic, somewhat prodigal, perhaps with an excuse for my difference.

My feelings about home and travel cannot be reduced to family dynamics but when I reflect upon my life trajectory it always involves those early years, when the journey first formed. Overbearing and indifferent relationships hastened my departure but did not cause it. Why was it me who left, why not my siblings, my cousins, my peers, most of whom stayed behind unable to comprehend my desperation to leave. I notice that my feelings for my homeland now seem intermingled with my feelings about my family; they have become interconnected. If one is intrusive or non-accepting I need space from both. Leaving remains emotionally painful, unexpectedly finding myself in a homeless limbo is frightening, but I would not make a different choice now if I had to do it all over again. *I had to go.*

Along the way I have met others like me and this helps. I feel our deep affinity, and it feels safe. Finally I am not alone in feeling alone. Occasionally we can talk about leaving and being away, but rarely. It's like we have to be reminded not to give up on being understood. My family would not understand; anyone who chose to stay would not get it. I sit in silence

with the feeling that can't be said, it touches my deepest emotions, hopeful excitement and tragic feelings of irretrievable loss. Sometimes we mask our leaving, and our subtle shame, under economic rationales for migration, but that is superficial for us, for others that's true, but for us seeking a better standard of living is not the primary desire. It might be a part of it, but it is equally likely that we end up living less affluent lives because we left. The imperative was to follow my potential as an end in itself, not as a means to material betterment. My migration remains more 'other-worldly' than consumerist. There is a melancholic dawning recognition that one can live only one life no matter how many possible lives one can imagine. There is also optimism and satisfaction and some pride from following the mysterious path of the unknown with courage, concurrent with a niggling thought that it might actually have taken more courage to stay.

PART TWO: CONCEPTUAL CROSSINGS

Introduction

Before continuing to the next phase of the thesis, I would like to reiterate the structure of the project thus far. The thesis topic has unfolded largely in chronological order, itself a journey which initially coalesced around nascent personal experiences and intuitions regarding leaving home and subsequent questions regarding the status of 'home'. These emergent thoughts guided a preliminary literature search (Chapter 1) designed to ascertain the practicability of embarking upon an original doctoral project exploring the significance of voluntary migration and the experience of 'home'. That preliminary review of existing research literature revealed that the experience of voluntary migration and the implications for conceptualising the importance of home were occasionally referred to as significant areas for formulation, however formal research into this *lived experience* of voluntary migrants was non-existent in terms of an existential-phenomenological exploration. Therefore a phenomenological research study (Chapter 2) was designed in order to contemplate, from the point of view of migrants themselves, the ensuing personal narratives and implications of such a life choice. The subsequent research attempted to sustain the nature of the origin of the thesis topic by manifesting a reflexive intersubjective approach to phenomenology, embodied in semi-structured and co-constituted interview sessions. The analysis of these co-researcher interviews (Chapter 3) eschewed interpretative paradigms and endeavoured to maintain close connection to the individual meanings implied in each transcript. This analysis revealed predictably diverse biographical trajectories which simultaneously conveyed a number of remarkably consistent themes and concerns across the cohort. These emergent themes (Chapter 4) were not assumed to be summative, but were taken as one of many possible depictions of a dialogic process irreducible to comprehensive representation. The themes were presented as an evocative culmination of their various lived exemplars, which were described in detail in order to invite the reader to form their own felt sense of these artificially separated 'strands' of what I now conceptualise as 'existential migration'. Chapter Four concludes with one hypothetical first-person account of existential migration, reviewed and commented upon by a sample of the co-researchers.

This leads to the second part of the thesis, which presents the opportunity to return to existing discourses on migration and home in order to assess and refine the concept developing within

Part One. Part Two represents a wide-ranging foray into relevant literature from the perspective of various disciplines (see Rapport and Dawson (1998), and Rapport (2003), for critical reviews of migration literature, and Papadopoulos (2002), for critiques of the absence of conceptualisations of the significance of 'home' in migration). Some of this literature points to the value of a study like the one carried out in Part One, while certainly the majority of the research into migratory issues and cross-cultural adaptation is based upon assumptions that diverge significantly from my own, presenting qualitatively different outcomes (for example, Brislin, 1990), thus creating opportunities to contrast the concept of existential migration with more conventional understandings.

This section will therefore attempt to explore the principal material and controversies that have emerged within representative discourses by re-contextualising them in interaction with the thematic constituents from Part One. In each instance, I set out to highlight existing reference material that impinges upon these themes, but recognising the substantial degree of overlap of ideas between and within themes, I will limit detailed discussion to literature that sets the template for existing views so that it can be analysed in relation to the original work discussed in Part One. Thereby the second part of the thesis seeks to incorporate an unbiased presentation of pre-existing discourses while remaining organised around and informed by the emergent themes of Part One. The method consists of 'crossing' each theme with the relevant literature, transforming the presentation of the theme so that it converses with current discourses while retaining its phenomenological veracity. These transformations respect the literature by allowing them to reveal more general aspects of the themes, often their more conceptual and philosophical components, though my intention is to remain inspired by the lived experiences which previously engendered the themes. The essence of each theme from Part One will be summarised at the beginning of its respective section and the section will subsequently conclude with a comment on what it discloses in terms of conceptual elaboration of existential migration. The following structured discussions cannot be entirely discrete, as before, the themes are lifted out of a lived whole; identity and belonging coexist, the question of home and spirituality are intertwined, practical applications impact upon philosophical speculations, conceptual discussion implies practice modifications, while literary and autobiographical accounts do not fall neatly within any single heading.

Part Two will coalesce into four chapters, the first chapter (Chapter 5), 'Self-Identity, Belonging, and Home' will incorporate the major themes of 'self and identity', 'belonging',

and the ‘meaning of home’. These themes will interact with concepts from boundary studies, tourism studies, studies on the concept of home, and the anthropology of migration. The second chapter (Chapter 6), is entitled ‘Extrapolating from Identity, Belonging, and Home to a Philosophy of the Unheimlich, Dwelling, and Homecoming’, and will be a further departure into the philosophical discourse of Martin Heidegger, and Anthony Steinbock’s phenomenology of home. The narratives of co-researchers are present as a constant comment upon these ideas, incorporating the theme of ‘returning home’, ‘not feeling at-home in the world’, and ‘wider life perspectives’. Chapter Seven, ‘Psychoanalysis, Practical Implications, and the Sensitivities of Existential Migration’ is an interaction between the theme of ‘valued characteristics and sensitivities’ and further explorations of individual affinity to difference, valuing of independence, and the significance of the motivations underlying migration. This chapter also refers to the theme of ‘family and home circumstances’ and revisits the intrapsychic/existential debate as present in Freud, the Grinbergs, and other writers. It also explores practical implications of this thesis in areas such as cross-cultural training, work with refugees, and psychotherapy, as well as representations from exilic literature. The theme called ‘overview of the process’ is incorporated variously into the above sections rather than presented explicitly as a separate heading. The thesis will conclude with ‘Summary Comments’ about the concept, and the experience of the project overall.

To reiterate, the overall aim of Part Two of the thesis is to ‘cross’ the embryonic concept of ‘existential migration’ with ‘the library’ in order to further assess the value of the new concept by noticing what, if anything, is thereby further elucidated, corroborated, contradicted, or refined. This comparison should also demonstrate where the concept amends or contradicts existing trends in the literature and where these trends challenge the original concept I’m introducing in this thesis. Due to restrictions of space, this part of the thesis is *not primarily* a critical commentary on other’s theories, but rather a comparison with those instances where the new concept can readily ‘touch’, mutually interact with, existing literature. This may necessitate neglecting non-representative aspects of a body of work or of a research paradigm in order to prioritise moments when the major conceptual trends actually *add something* to our grounded experience. Before continuing, a brief note about this act called ‘crossing’.

Crossings

Eugene Gendlin, (1995) writes that a ‘felt sense’, a physically felt sensation that is meaningful and about our life situations, is not private and subjective, but implicitly contains arguments about the world. Every felt sense is the constellation of many ‘strands’ of *implicit* facets of a situation ‘crossing’ at once. Most of these strands are never distinctly separated out. For example, as a reader, your felt sense presumably contains your responses to what I’ve been writing here, ‘crossed’ with your feelings about my approach, plus much of your background knowledge and expertise, your personal experience of this subject... much more than could be readily laid out explicitly. Gendlin believes that this sort of ‘felt sense’ contains the possibility of saying something new about the world, or at least creatively elaborating something already out there. My hope is that by now you have such a felt sense of the concept of ‘existential migration’ and that consequently you can pay attention to what is lifted out in your own felt understanding as I begin to present other ideas about migration, philosophy, acculturation etc. In this way we can begin to articulate some of the strands that are currently implied but un-separated within this new concept, *without losing our experiential intricacy*.

‘Dipping into’ a felt sense is what Gendlin has termed ‘Focusing’ (1981). Focusing is a gentle and radically phenomenological way to ‘be with’ a felt sense such that this feeling begins to open and reveal new aspects of its personal and interpersonal significations. I have attempted to write this paper while Focusing on the felt sense of the experience I am trying to make explicit. Also during the interview sessions, I listened to co-researchers while paying attention to my felt sense of the dialogue (rather than my explicit ideas or theories). I believe this has enhanced any precision that might be evident in this study, and has enabled me to consistently express my overall interactional and evocative inclinations.

The *natural* ‘crossing’ that constitutes the full felt sense (for example the numerous accounts of Chapter 4 cross with your own experience to form your felt sense of existential migration) is now *intentionally* further crossed with the world of situations and ideas. For example, in the next chapter I will begin to present literature from the broad areas of cultural anthropology, migration and tourist studies, cross-cultural psychology, refugee studies, etc. Each article presented will instance the whole ‘body’ of its discipline: its historical development, its mode of investigation, promising avenues of future development, and areas of contemporary controversy. By importing my experiential concept of existential migration into their existing matrix, a new ‘crossing’ emerges, selecting what stands out in the article

while also highlighting specific features of this new concept. It is an interchange that highlights *and* makes explicit what may have lain unarticulated and unexplored. This 'highlighting' implies further articulation, and so on, bringing alive both contributors to the crossing. This active process also occurred during my preliminary literature review, which took place *after* my new concept was partially intuited⁴³. That initial reading further formulated facets of the nascent concept and the presentation here will again be a new 'crossing' with the now more robust sense of existential migration, producing more detail and hopefully generating creative research questions. Of course, this really is no more than a reminder that no concept, like no human being, exists in concretised isolation unaffected by its situational uses in the world of human interactions. 'Crossing', in both its natural occurrence and as a purposive act, exemplifies the neglected importance of our human embodiment.

Gendlin offers the example of metaphor to further explicate crossing. In metaphor a word's meaning includes its use in that specific situation, in fact in this sense each word is a metaphor. Our felt sense of a word *is* the crossing of its many different possible meanings and its current usage, allowing us to ask in dialogue 'what would you like that word to mean here?' So in the present context, we are elaborating our respective felt senses of the concept of existential migration each time we allow it to cross with other concepts. And of course it is richly significant that these crossings are occurring within the context of a PhD dissertation. Your understanding, responses, and felt sense, would presumably be different if I was writing informally in a travel magazine, which you were reading on your winter holiday to Buenos Aires.

In the situation of a PhD study we are already attuned to look for something original, so the danger of sliding back into old concepts and losing what is newly trying to emerge, may be less apparent. Crossing, in this thesis, derives commonalities and differences by holding the new up to the existing. But in the comparison something must *happen* – it is a creative regress into what remains more than conceptual. It is not the static bashing of one fixed concept against another until both wear down and appear differently. However, in the present context, it is not an equal comparison from the point of view of both concepts. Though both

⁴³ That intuition was in turn the generative felt crossing of largely unformulated personal concerns with the new situation of being in Calcutta with my friend.

concepts are *inter-affected* in this process, I will prioritise viewing the existing concepts through our new one. In my attempt to explore robust historical concepts through the lens of this fragile new concept, I will endeavour to protect the embryonic idea from being shattered and fragmented under the weight of the library. Gendlin's concept of crossing is much more elaborate than I will utilize here. In some ways I have not only simplified but also biased his term for my purposes. In a sense consistent with his philosophical practice, I am crossing the term 'crossing' right here in this situation and in so doing it takes on a specific use meaning that carries us onto the next phase of the project. Gendlin describes the process as follows,

In crossing each opens the other to a carrying forward which makes new possibilities. The more determinants cross, the more novelty is possible ... If we could use only our common store of meanings, anything said or written could tell us only what we already knew. It would be dull ... In crossing, truth cannot be representational, not the accuracy of a copy. Rather, there is a truth of what can cross -- what can make sense. We can understand each other, across different experiences and different cultures, because by crossing we create in each other what neither of us was before (Gendlin, 1995:557-8).

Chapter 5. Self-Identity, Belonging, and Home

Introduction

‘During the first half of the 20th Century, over 100 million people migrated, voluntarily or forcibly, from one country to another’ (Aronowitz, 1984:237). By the beginning of the 21st Century, international migration had increased in parallel with the intensifying flow of goods and capital as determined by escalating international globalisation (Massey, 2003). But migration is not just a recent phenomenon, in the introduction to *Applied Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Brislin (1990) recounts how, for thousands of years, travellers, merchants, missionaries, soldiers and others (eventually including legions of social scientists) have, as a consequence of migration⁴⁴ and travel, observed the similarities and differences between their own and foreign cultures. ‘Culture’ here refers to the patterns of behaviour passed along from generation to generation, carrying implicit assumptions about life, some of which are typically not questioned until difference is encountered. It also refers to less visible aspects of life such as norms, values, ideas, which are imbibed subliminally from birth, to some extent constituting or influencing our given identities. Members of a *society* - a nation, a delimited group within an area, an ethnic category within a larger setting - share culture and thereby feel a sense of belonging together through a degree of shared identity. Identity and belonging are thereby instrumentally inherent in constituting the experience of ‘home’, where one comes from, where one belongs, ‘where they have to take you in’ (TS Elliot). From the narratives in Part One, it is apparent that what I am calling ‘existential migration’ is intimately related to personal identity, experiences of belonging, and therefore the experience of being-at-home and not being-at-home. By ‘existential’ migration I indicate the cogent themes in my analysis which are concerned with issues of *interpersonal existence* such as creating meaning in life, pursuing one’s potentiality, accepting the inexpressible while confronting limit situations, and negotiating the dilemmas of world relations. Below I begin to explore various formulations of the experience and the impact of cross-cultural migration and comment upon these from the new perspective of existential migration.

Self and Identity

⁴⁴ In studies of migration an international migrant is usually defined as ‘a person who has moved from one country to another with the intention of taking up residence there for a relevant period of time’ (Hammar et.al.,1997:16).

The home environment can obstruct the development of one's potential self, so migration can be a way to safeguard one's burgeoning identity. The foreign place offers a more spacious environment in which to form one's identity according to personal sensitivities. Identity is in flux, an interaction of person and place, and while the home environment can suppress one's 'true' identity, having no roots at all can result in a fragile sense of self.

The incontrovertibly vexing history of western philosophy is apparent in the terms 'identity' and 'self', posing primordial quandaries concerning constructs of human subjectivity. 'Identity', as utilised here, refers to how one defines oneself, and arguably to a greater or lesser extent, incorporating how one is perceived by one's habitat insofar as this impinges upon self-development. In terms of 'content', and in accordance with everyday language as evident in the transcripts, 'identity' and 'self' usually refer to the characteristics constituting this self-definition, and the *feeling of being who one is*. My specific interest is in the self-in-migration; what is it that motivates a 'self' to migrate, and what impact does the shift from familiar to foreign environment have upon this project of self-creation?

In order to attempt a coherent presentation of these foundational concepts, I will limit the treatment to contemporary conceptualisations that represent the assumptions situated within relevant texts of migratory discourse, concentrating upon two prominent recent books, Andreea Ritivoi's⁴⁵ *Yesterday's Self* (2002) and Nigel Rapport's⁴⁶ *I Am Dynamite* (2003). Both books respond to the extremes of postmodern self-as-cultural-sieve and essentialist self-as-fixed-subjectivity discourses by offering an interstitial conceptualisation based explicitly upon migratory experience and largely corroborating the interactional view I am developing based upon analysis of the co-researcher interviews. Ritivoi outlines both extremes of the identity debate,

Realists hold that the identity of a person exists outside a symbolic system, and often try to define it in accordance with an immutable trait. From a realist standpoint, the meaning or existence of the self is not *constructed*, but *given*. Constructivists (or antifoundationalists, or relativists, or postmodernists – the nomenclature varies), on the other hand, point out that the identity of a person is embedded in social or cultural contexts, and that it has no hard core, independent of an interpretive process focused on the respective contexts (Ritivoi, 2002:7-8, *italics in original*).

Bendle (2002) points out that there is a contradiction between the postmodern malleable identities that conform to the imperatives of globalisation on the one hand, and on the other

⁴⁵ Ritivoi is a renowned American cultural theorist, professor of English and rhetoric.

⁴⁶ Rapport is a widely acclaimed writer on migration and identity, and professor of anthropology and philosophy at St. Andrews University, Scotland.

hand valuing identity as crucial and fundamental. This postmodern constructionism is seen as optimistic in terms of adaptability and hope in an increasingly borderless world. However, it's inability to account for *any* aspect of identity deconstructs the term itself and makes it meaningless – there is no identity. Acculturation research depicts migration into a foreign culture as often resulting in profound, usually problematic, repercussions for the individual's sense of self (Brislin, 1981, Aronowitz, 1984). The fact that immersion into a new culture requires adaptation and adjustment signifies that *something happens* in this impact, crudely conceptualised in extremes as either assimilation or disorientation. *Something* is assimilated or disoriented, and if this were not true we'd be hard pressed to account for the lived experience of the co-researchers who leave home in order to develop and express *something*, namely 'who they are'. Without some mode of identity *per se*, their migrations would seem arbitrary rather than 'motivated' (and tinged with 'desperation'). The motivations so clearly articulated by the co-researchers require an understanding of identity that accounts for this guiding personal impetus (not strictly postmodern) while also considering that the motivation is to realise one's *potential* by altering the environment (thus not entirely realist). Below I will discuss the contributions of Rapport and Ritivoi, both of whom develop conceptualisations of identity consistent with these co-researchers' narratives. I will also offer a brief enhancement based upon Gendlin's version of cultural crossing as well as evidence from the co-researcher themes.

In terms of migration, displacement from one context to another offers a comparative *difference* and therefore a *distance* from which to contemplate both identity and environment. Through this reflection the person may become fragmented and troubled as habitual quotidian life is exposed as inessential – these are the 'psychological problems' emphasised in the research (Aronowitz, 1984; Baker, 1999; Berry et.al., 1987; Brislin, 1990; Huntington, 1981; Leong and Ward, 2000; Selmer and Shiu, 1999 etc.). Rapport suggests that identifying displacement with labels such as 'alienation', 'culture shock', 'maladaptation' and 'homelessness' degrades its positive possibilities. These labels seem biased towards perceptions of displacement as resulting in conditions of rootlessness, with the individual being blown incessantly across foreign lands, alienated from their respective societies. But such a view nullifies the human actor and obscures the centrality of *motive* under the shibboleth of social determinism.

Culture, gender, ethnicity may amount to particular contexts in which individuals live out their humanity, but they do not speak to the essence of identity... experience is an open-

ended matter deriving from interpretation; human life is in active relationship with circumstance (Rapport, 2003:73).

Rapport stresses that self-contemplation invites the migrant to appreciate the impact of dislocation in creating a life-course, that comparing initial with subsequent identity,

... can also be a positive move, and displacement a conscious and creative act by which individuals shift and remove and oust themselves... as a route to growth... Becoming a refugee or exile from a social milieu or relationship or world-view, becoming someone else, individuals assure themselves of a distance by which to look askance and consciously create anew... In displacement lies a route to personal empowerment (Rapport, 2003:51).

Thereby, travel seems to support the inherent individuality of experience while suggesting the possibility of multiple identities interacting with diverse contexts. Rapport proclaims that 'A diversity of selves is part of the complexity of changing environments which individuals image as contexts for their actions' (Ibid:31). As evident in the above quote, Rapport perceives that the organisation and content of identities remains within the individual's agential control, evidenced in the 'creative *act*' of migration and its resulting 'empowerment'. In other words, irrespective of culture, self-awareness and action remain the axis and expression of the individual worldview and this awareness of one's own sense of self influences further behaviour and choices.

Rapport suggests that the way in which an individual conceptualises him or herself is reflected in their world relations and 'amounts to those individuals' most fundamental theories about the world' (Ibid:33). He introduces the term 'life-project' to describe the sort of self-theorising that manifests in self-propulsion, encompassing specific aims and purposes, and providing *direction* more than specific unified *goal*. This reveals the capacity for the individual to posit his or her 'own authorship' over their life trajectory – not in an isolated solipsistic mode, but also not determined by external culture. In this way, an individual can conceive of other ways of being and thereby question their own identities and the values inherent in their own circumstances. The emphasis on self as agent, actively constructing a life narrative, fits well with the descriptions of co-researchers.

Rapport suggests that individuals acquire identities gradually from birth through their activities in the world, and this energetic unfolding is individually-directed and manifests in a 'unique history of embodiment', of 'worldly engagement', surpassing itself as it goes. This 'individual organism-plus-environment' is discrete but not alone – it is surrounded by a

fecund world interacting in indeterminate ways. Individuals embody 'subjective phenomenologies' and 'are responsible for transforming the given nature of the worlds into which they are born into their own imagined and interpreted versions of identity, self and other...' (Ibid:89). Rapport offers the suggestion that an individual's life project may be conceived as that person's 'environmental architecture' (Ibid: 225), maintaining conditions within which the self goes on further, affecting relationship choices, modes of engagement, affecting ways of attending and thereby forming identity and environment. Rapport's celebration of the positive aspects of migration are corroborated by the co-researchers, however, the concomitant sense of loss seems underemphasised in his account.

Andreea Ritivoi (2002) similarly concentrates on the migrant experience, emphasising the individual in order to garner insights into the generalities of immigration. However, whereas Rapport stresses the positive potential for self-creation in displacement, Ritivoi concentrates on experiences such as 'homesickness' and 'nostalgia', revealing that immigrants cannot just be 'born anew' in the new land (Ibid:3), nor are they totally self-constituted, as the radical separation from the known makes the experience of 'home' perhaps forever problematic. Ritivoi seeks to combine the idea of realist immutable personal identity with contextual flux. Cultural adjustment and adaptation, argues Ritivoi, needs to be considered as an operation of *both* these modalities of identity.

Like Rapport, Ritivoi acknowledges the temporal aspect of identity, that it forms over time from birth, and that adaptation need not undermine, as commonly emphasised, our sense of personal identity. However, we also have 'identifiable' identities in communities where we 'belong', so *who we are* continues to unfurl in these domains of shared sameness and individual difference. She argues that identity forms according to a logic of its own, incorporating what is perceived as enhancement and dismissing what is inadequate for each individual (Ibid:45). The self emerges from a 'kernel of identity' that forms the beginning of the person's life story (Ibid: 57). She proposes that the self is not an independent object but a mostly unarticulated sense of what is of importance. This 'sense' is contemplated in the meditative withdrawal characterised by solitude (Ibid: 91) wherein we *hesitate* as we consider ourselves, and our life decisions, for example to stay or go, or return. In this hesitation 'we affirm our awareness that whoever we are is not an existing entity to be spotted and released into being, but a possible search...' (Ibid:169). Ritivoi's account also corresponds with the

co-researcher narratives in that they report temporal identities elaborated in response to migratory interactions in accordance with unfolding potential rather than haphazardly.

Reminiscent of Ritivoi's assertion that identity has its own logic, Gendlin's notion of body-environmental interaction also reveals a 'responsive order' to our way of being-in-the-world (set out in Gendlin, 1997, 1997a). Such 'order' is more than logic but includes logic, plus all other forms of bodily interaction (breathing, feeding, imagining, etc.) in an unseparated felt sense. It is as if 'self' is an intentional 'acting back' to the world, combined with the 'acting upon' from world to self. According to Gendlin, each new situation 'crosses' with all previous situations as they are carried and implied through individual embodiment, creating more intricate 'elaborations' of the person's understanding. In these elaborations the meanings perceived by such a person always exceed any one culture with its various forms of life. However, if this person has left their original culture, their body-self is therefore even more complex through greater situational elaboration than a person who has lived only in one culture. Therefore a person who has lived in two cultures is now 'marginal' to each and cannot 'help but understand each culture better and more perceptively than people who have lived only in one place, because the situations of both cultures have crossed in the person's experiential mesh' (Gendlin, 1996:3). This deduction is explored in point 5 below.

Possible Conceptual Elaborations

By taking explicit account of migratory experiences, the above nuanced concepts of identity and self proffered by Rapport, Ritivoi, and Gendlin offer many points of crossing with the co-researcher narratives. Much of their individual experience is described by these author's concepts. However, further elaboration of their concepts may be possible. Below I have sketched some of the facets of the concept of existential migration that are lifted out by this discussion and which may carry it further. These points at the end of each section will be gathered into a brief description of the conceptual attributes of existential migration and presented in the summary comments at the end of the paper.

1. In the narratives it is clear that a 'contemplation of self' often occurs in the home environment *before* introduction of the difference and distance of a cross-cultural experience, which is noted by Rapport as constituting this contemplative agency. Something has already occurred at home that allows the person to have a reflective distance from their environment and this reflection encompasses a desire to leave.

Therefore *an identity that stands apart from home environment predates leaving* and seems constellated around this affinity for difference. It also seems to constitute a necessary condition for individual agency as emphasised by Rapport.

2. The contemplation of self seems to connect the individual with a 'call' to realise their potential, usually constituted as a desire to seek environments that afford the space for self-actualisation. It is not clear where this 'call' originates from⁴⁷ but it does not seem to emanate from the culture (more at odds with it), rather it fits with Ritivoi's description of self as unarticulated sense of search - direction rather than content. This 'directionality' as opposed to clear 'goal' was explicitly confirmed in some co-researcher narratives (for example, Renata). In this way *self is conceived as felt potential* rather than set content or cultural determinism.
3. Conventional research into migration emphasises the problematic nature of cross-cultural experiences whereas Rapport seeks to correct this by describing the potential benefits for the individual in terms of developing a self-reflective life-project. Ritivoi balances both the potential and the losses in these moves, which closely approximates the binary quality of the co-researcher narratives.
4. In relation to the above point, Rapport's proposition of a 'life-course' as a positive creation from migration requires slight modification. While a self-creative act, the co-researchers also emphasised the 'desperation' to leave, the 'need' to go. It was not solely positive choice, though not 'determined' it appears to be in some way an impulse born of *self-survival as much as self-development*. Following such a life course implies some sense of 'homelessness' for most, even rootlessness and a consequent fragile sense of self as a result.
5. This homelessness may be related to Gendlin's concept of individual elaboration. Perhaps, in contrast to Gendlin, the individual by virtue of the complexity that results from cross-cultural elaborations, is also *less* able to understand either culture and certainly less likely to identify with either. Experiencing 'more meaning' through more elaborate and varied experiences complicates a person beyond existing cultural forms and can't automatically be equated with better understanding or belonging. Gendlin is likely right when he says that 'understanding does not depend on a common content' (1996:3), as though two people compare their respective 'content' to see if it's similar enough for a basis of understanding. But the meeting that occurs between a marginal 'existential migrant' and a native 'homebody' may miss the deeply-rooted/uncomplicated understanding that the native person has and that the 'existential migrant' may in retrospect long for. If Gendlin were entirely correct, the 'existential migrant' would understand the native person better than the native does himself instead of occasionally not being able to understand or appreciate their way of living or their choices at all, as evidenced repeatedly by the co-researchers.

Belonging

Belonging is not always achieved and certainly cannot be assumed to exist 'at home'. Ideally belonging would consist of warm connectedness, incorporating acceptance of the unique person one truly is, a welcoming of diversity. When belonging is conditional upon conforming to an oppressive homogeneous environment, this implies an unacceptable sacrifice for individuals who are different or unconventional. Therefore, leaving home can afford the space one needs for self-development, but the need to belong continues and

⁴⁷ Further exploration of this 'call' recurs in the section on Heidegger's thought.

sometimes belonging without accompanying claustrophobia is achieved by living in two places. It is also possible to feel a sense of belonging within a diverse group of fellow internationalists who share implicit similarities. At a certain point, some measure of settled belonging seems to facilitate further self-development.

Belonging⁴⁸, as presented in the co-researcher narratives, could be conceived as the experiential bridge between 'self' and 'home' (both also conceived experientially), and as such is implied in both. In order to minimise repetition, this section will therefore necessarily be brief, constructing a linkage between the previous section and the subsequent section, guided by the everyday understandings emerging from the interviews, and complimented by the implications of representative discourse. 'To belong' is to possess an identity that is welcomed, acceptable, even necessary, in a specific group; it implies positive experiences that assist in securing one's own sense of self. The impression from the narratives, confirmed by my own intuitions, is that for many people a sense of belonging seems to offer a bulwark against the contingencies of life. To belong seems to suggest an ability to locate oneself within a reassuring family, locality, religious, or national context. Belonging, then, is to find, and perhaps to some extent thereby attempt to 'fasten', one's own identity within a larger identity, but which one(s)? This question reveals that in the co-researcher narratives *national* identity is typically the template for explorations of belonging. The logic that follows from this assumption is that

...all individuals *should belong* to a nation and have a *national identity* and state citizenship and that the bordered state sovereignties are the fulfilment of a historical destiny. This view has become pivotal in defining not only our world-views but also human identities' (Paasi, 1999:69, *italics added*).

If *national* belonging is of prime importance⁴⁹ what are the ramifications for those of us who are disconnected from national identities, shunning them or at least holding such identities lightly? More perplexing, what kind of schism is revealed by those individuals who have found greater affinity to a foreign culture and in effect would have been 'misidentified' with their original home culture? This seems to suggest some interaction between self-identity and the surrounding culture wherein an adequate 'matching' must occur for an experience of belonging to be felt, otherwise there is a mismatch and the individual continues to seek a

⁴⁸ More profound discussions of belonging occur in the section on spirituality and phenomenology of home. The present discussion remains at a connecting level of everyday discourse, spanning the two related concepts in this chapter.

⁴⁹ This impression could be attributable to an artefact of the mode of framing interview questions, and the assumptions of the overall study itself, except that this prioritising of nationality seems ubiquitous in discourses on belonging in the modern world as evidenced in the upcoming references to Michael Ignatieff.

grouping where the expressed values and characteristics allow this sense of larger identification. Belonging, like identity, therefore attains the status of dynamic process rather than finalised accomplishment. In the narratives, identification with other diverse internationalists presented adequate experiences of belonging for many co-researchers. Again highlighting that belonging seems predicated upon some sense of similarity, though that may be constituted through implicit similarity of values and outlook rather than explicit manifestations of cultural sameness. To what extent this is peculiar to voluntary migrants is an interesting question, but in any case it suggests a partial deconstruction of simplistic equations of individual-state belonging.

In fact recent reconceptualisations of national borders increasingly posits them as *narratives* connected with states, and ‘typically linked with ontological narratives – stories that actors use to make sense of their lives as members of social collectives and to define who ‘we’ are’ (Paasi, 1999:75). This suggests that just as borders are in flux, so it seems that the relations that constitute the ‘belonging’ aspect of our identities are also fluid: ‘who I am’ is in constant relation to *where* I am and *who I am with* – for example I belong to the Canadian ‘we’ in the foreign ‘them’ context of London but I reduce my national identification and become more marginal when I’m in Canada. The concept of existential migration prioritises the individual point of reference as a stance toward the collective, and also as an attempt to resolve existential dilemmas (who am I, where do I belong) through active choices.

Liisa Malkki (1995) points out that being uprooted from a national community does not automatically lead to the loss of one’s traditional cultural identity and therefore the loss of belonging. For example, we have likely all encountered expatriate communities that not only maintain their national identity, but even exaggerate it in the new land. Rather than whole, fixed and sedentary, belonging is more like an organism defined *partly* but not conclusively by territory (house, locale, nation). However, Malkki (1995) convincingly points out that there is an obvious bias in the study of society and migration, towards the sedentary. Our ideas of culture and belonging are biased towards the fixed and stable rather than change, migration, and travel (Ibid:508). *Implied in this bias is the assumption that the home country of origin is the normal and ideal habitat for its citizens, ‘the place where one fits in, lives in peace and has an unproblematic culture and identity’* (Ibid: 509, *italics added*). According to this scheme, returning home, for example, is unproblematic because it’s where a person

belongs and feels most safe and secure. This reification of home as a place of comfortable belonging is challenged by the current thesis and will be further addressed in the next section.

In the last chapter of *The Needs of Strangers* (1984), Michael Ignatieff argues that after the last century of war and destructive nationalism, the world may be ready to shift the attachments of belonging from national to international objects. In his view, 'Modernity is changing the locus of belonging; our language of attachments limps suspiciously behind...' (Ibid:139). Ignatieff points to globalisation as evidence that old patterns of belonging are no longer even rational, but in order to shift to a kind of global belonging, he thinks 'Our task is to find a language for our need for belonging which is not just a way of expressing nostalgia, fear and estrangement from modernity' (Ibid). Reminiscent of postmodern constructivism, Ignatieff argues that our conceptualising is more problematic than recent developments in modern political and economic structures and despite these contentious claims, he offers interesting comments about modern belonging, highlighting more biases in our common sense views,

We think of belonging as permanence, yet all our homes are transient. Who still lives in the neighbourhood where they grew up? Home is the place we have to leave in order to grow up, to become ourselves. We think of belonging as rootedness in a small familiar place, yet home for most of us is the convulsive arteries of a great city. Our belonging is no longer to something fixed, known and familiar, but to an electric and heartless creature eternally in motion... Perhaps above all we think of belonging as the end of yearning itself, as a state of rest and reconciliation with ourselves beyond need itself. Yet modernity and insatiability are inseparable... We need to see how we live now and we can only see with words and images which leave us no escape into nostalgia for some other time and place... Without a language adequate to this moment we risk losing ourselves in resignation towards the portion of life which has been allotted to us' (Ibid:141-2).

Ignatieff wrote this before the fall of the Iron Curtain, the World Trade Centre disaster, the American 'war on terror' and before the pace of globalisation and westernisation increased to its current fever pitch. Ignatieff himself is a voluntary migrant, having left his native Canada for London, recently moving on to the United States to teach at Harvard. It is perhaps impertinent to wonder how his own experiences concerning belonging and impermanence influence the view he espouses above. Contrary to his depiction of the world, 98% of people still do not migrate at all, preferring to settle in permanent or long-inhabited homes and small localities, even within big cities (Hammar & Tamas, 1997:1). They make settled permanent lives, presumably even in the 21st century, and the clash with globalisation, for most people, will likely occur as the introduction of change into their own familiar worlds rather than

through international travel experiences or corporate relocations. I would counter that most people still equate belonging with permanence, reconciliation and place (rightly or wrongly). Perhaps Ignatieff, along with the co-researchers (and others like myself who would identify with the process of existential migration), represent a minority way of being whose formulations, including this thesis, offer them a site of belonging, but one that cannot be assumed to describe a new generalisable form of life. Possibly the modes of belonging Ignatieff reacts against institute more than a simplistic archaic historical constitution; perhaps they express fundamental motifs, or perhaps more accurately, are purposive in their design to camouflage the nature of existence itself. If such speculation holds any veracity, devoid of such camouflage we may be entering a more anxious and less liveable age, one of global not-belonging. Perhaps existence inheres particular givens that cannot arbitrarily be bent to the will of modern capitalism. These conjectures are addressed more fully in the next chapter.

Possible Conceptual Elaborations

This brief discussion of 'belonging' in the context of migration offers suggestive elaborations for the concept of existential migration. These provide especially salient contrasts with usual assumptions and forms of belonging. Below are outlined some of the points lifted out by this discussion and which will be included in the summary conceptual attributes of existential migration at the end of the paper.

1. The co-researcher accounts suggest their belonging is *not an automatic state* equated with one's origin but more appropriately conceived as a fluid temporal process, like identity, unfolding in time so that one can belong and not-belong at various times in the same place (see Carl's interview) and lose and regain a sense of belonging.
2. Belonging also seems spatial for the co-researchers in that they postulate belonging in more than one place or within different groupings at the same time. In part this seems to be an avoidance of claustrophobic belonging, which enforces a conformity that obliterates the crucial adherence to realising personal potential.
3. The status of 'belonging' is perplexing in that co-researchers remain cognizant of its felt importance while eschewing its conventional group forms in favour of individual, even solitary, quests for self-development.
4. In terms of the discussion on 'belonging', the concept of existential migration again exemplifies a subtly nuanced integration of fluid but ordered process with *something* essential. Belonging, regardless of postmodern optimism for international realignments, may not be completely arbitrary; otherwise 'existential migrants' would not need to search for it.
5. Most co-researchers' identities seemed forged with their migration *journey* more than their arrival in situ. Belonging may also be a by-product of this quest itself rather than

joining a settled community. *One's destiny may consist of this felt direction rather than any particular destination.*

6. Existential migration presents a stark counterpoint to the modern emphasis on national belonging. While ties to one's origin and its concomitant problematic belonging may persevere, further research is needed to assess whether co-researchers' affinities to new foreign cultures constitute a rival or qualitatively different form of belonging. National boundaries may function as containment against ontological insecurity, offering a global-level therapeutic frame⁵⁰. Just as the border of home seems suffocating for co-researchers, it is possible that the familiar nation-state is likewise too restrictive, an unacceptable imposition upon individual human potential. In some way, migration and border studies will have to take account of sensitivities inherent in existential migrations.
7. Existential migration offers an other-directed ethics rather than belonging premised upon sameness. In the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' our co-researchers quite consistently aligned themselves with strangers, outcasts, and other marginals like themselves, paradoxically displaying a contemporaneous affinity to difference and similarity.
8. The concept of identity counterpoised beside the concept of belonging lifts out the tension between individuality and relatedness, with the concept of existential migration favouring the first person account as a reference point for exploring relationships.

Variant Conceptions of Home

The issue of home remains evocative for those who choose to leave home. Even those who weren't sure they'd ever felt 'at-home' could define home as consisting of positive qualities such as a place to be oneself, a place to really relax, a source of nourishment and security. The solidity of the physical family home, or the illusion of an unchanging homeland, can provide a secure anchor for some individuals as they seek adventure out in the world. 'Home' was differentially conceived as an interaction, a moment when the individual and the environment 'matched' in specific and idiosyncratic ways, temporarily allowing the feeling of being 'at home'. The rare experience of actually feeling at home often implies enough distance from others to avoid the claustrophobia of a hermetically sealed habitat. The longer one remains away from home the less concrete it becomes and for many this process culminates in the person not really feeling at home anywhere since the homeland continues to evolve while the person is abroad (stranger in a familiar land). For some people, like each of the voluntary migrant co-researchers, leaving home was the right choice despite the inherent emotional pain and losses.

Since the concept of 'home' encapsulates aspects of 'identity' and 'belonging', these concepts will manifest again briefly in their explicit impingement upon an exploration of the meaning of home. Initially I will present conventional formulations of the meaning of home as *house*, and then as *place* more generally. From a review of the various discourses on home

⁵⁰ See Madison (2001) for an existential critique of the therapeutic notion of 'frames'.

it quickly becomes apparent that home is normatively equated with a settled location. These conceptions are represented in the writings of various phenomenologists (eg. Baldursson, 2002), a Jungian analyst (Marcus, 1995) and an oral historian (Read, 1996), *all of whom assume the context of a settled life*. This presentation is followed by discussion of the resurgent interest in the significance of home within the context of migration (forced and voluntary), represented by a clinical psychologist (Papadopoulos, 2002) and anthropologists (Rapport and Dawson, 1998). Finally, the interpretation of the co-researcher interviews posits nuanced meanings of home and possible elaborations of the concept I'm developing here.

Reifying Home as House

In a representative phenomenological exploration of at-homeness, Stefan Baldursson (2002), acknowledges that phenomenologists consider the body as the zero-point where lived space is organised, however he posits that the home could equally be considered the focal point of our life world. Though Baldursson concedes that the meaning of home may be situationally dependent, referring respectively to country, city, or house, he reifies home as primarily referring to *house* or a place of *residence*. In so doing, he unreflectively equates home with house, based mostly upon his own association of childhood house with a feeling of at-homeness. 'In memory, then, our house is a place of *protection* and *security* where we are safe, where we withdraw, and where we find comfort' (Baldursson, 2002:2). He sees home as the *place* where we are 'at peace', 'most ourselves', 'in harmony', 'on familiar ground', 'relaxed and comfortable' (Ibid:3). In his view the experience of departure from home serves to emphasize the centrality and personal meaning of the home space.

From the co-researcher accounts, 'home' is revealed as particularly significant, *possibly* conjuring an orienting role for the individual life, but certainly not unequivocally possessing the features commonly ascribed to it above. Co-researches have not typically experienced the cosy archetypal abode and the 'authentic communication' typical of the 'homely relations' that constitute a 'true home' (Baldursson, 2002:7). In contrast, these individuals report not feeling at-home in their original house, feeling suffocated rather than cosy, leaving the family habitiat in search of at-homeness, etc. Such exceptions reveal that 'at-homeness' must assume greater abstraction from the settled and conventional in order to take into account the individuals who desperately leave home, or who feel most at-home in a foreign setting. Baldursson unfortunately seems to presuppose what a home *is* before initiating his research.

Baldursson's supposition of home as childhood origin is representative of a ubiquitous bias within the therapeutic literature (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989), refugee and migratory studies (Papadopoulos, 2002), cross-cultural psychology (Schutz, 1964. 1970), as well as phenomenology (Bollnow, 1960); the predominant exceptions to this trend are represented later as enhancements of the common understanding arising in the co-researcher narratives.

House as a Reflection of Self

In her intriguing text *House as a Mirror of Self – Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home* (1995) Clare Cooper Marcus investigates the significance of house to its inhabitant by asking each resident to draw their feelings about their home. In Marcus's view, the relationship between self and dwelling has a 'preverbal' and 'mystical' aspect to it, best expressed in literature and art rather than the work of psychologists, anthropologists, architects etc. Marcus coins the term 'domocentrism' to describe the 'desperate clinging' to what is inside the home (Ibid: 80). In this case, she believes the relationship to the house has become a replacement for relations with other people and the contents of the house have acquired the status of compelling psychological defence. Marcus provides interesting accounts of remodelling, hoarding, and other house-centred activities that she sees as attempts to work through past and present psychological difficulties.

Marcus has also conceived the term 'domophobia', supposedly referring to those who find it 'extremely difficult to stay in any one place long enough to feel "at home"' (Ibid: 90). Without empirical proof, Marcus boldly asserts that 'For such individuals, having a permanent abode is fraught with too many unresolved emotional issues from childhood' (Ibid: 90). The 'domophobe' is supposedly stuck in an emotional state in which security is associated with the vast expanse of the amniotic fluid or a phylogenetic memory of living in the ocean, rather than the solid object of the mother. Yet, according to Marcus, in order to nurture the soul we may *have to* leave home, live in different places at different times according to our current emotional development. She believes 'When we start to feel not totally at home in our dwelling or, conversely, when we seek a broader home in another place, it is likely that the soul is demanding recognition' (Marcus, 1995:252).

It is unclear how Marcus would ascertain who among our co-researchers are 'domophobes' and who are seeking 'soul recognition'. The co-researcher narratives express the binaries of

‘have to escape’ with ‘exciting journey of self-discovery’, presumably typical of both Marcus’s motivations for leaving. Her explicit assumptions about childhood and the role of the mother prevent Marcus from a deeper phenomenological analysis – this theory-first mode of inquiry will be revisited in the section on psychoanalysis. Though the personal accounts offered in the text at times coalesce with certain aspects of those offered by the co-researchers, Marcus reifies traditional settled life as the given and as somehow less tragic than the transitory, vast expanse of homelessness. Though Marcus offers sensitive and insightful glimpses into the complex relationships we can have with our physical houses, she also relaxes into simplistic causal assumptions of childhood experiences being determinative of adult choices.

Loss of home from the settled counterpoint

In *Returning to Nothing, The Meaning of Lost Places*, (1996) the Australian historian Peter Read presents oral histories of his fellow countrymen who have been forced out of their homes, for example by natural disaster, economic necessity, or redevelopment. Read explores many incommensurable and fundamental questions applicable to an understanding of settled life and by implication offers comparisons with aspects of voluntary migration. By crossing my stories of existential migration with his stories of forced evacuation, certain facets of both processes stand out more clearly. Read’s text is a beautiful and haunting love song to lost places. In a sense it’s a testament to what co-researchers in this study have not generally had - permanent emotional rootedness to a convincing ‘home’ place. Read’s basic premise is that humans feel some necessity to turn space into place, to erect mental and social boundaries that demarcate certain sites as unique, as ‘home’.

Read begins his exploration by posing the question, ‘How do humans form such powerful and mysterious attachments to country’ (Ibid:2)? By ‘country’ Read prioritises geography and landscape over social nexus and national culture, denoting how cultures presuppose rootedness and take it for granted. People respond individually to their locality, sustained by their shared identity, generating a feeling of belonging. Read’s specific interests, though fascinating and certainly worthy, tend to skew the positioning of his text; in order to demonstrate the neglected importance of human attachments to locations, he concretises place as object. He argues quite convincingly that the sense of ‘place’ has been given scant attention by western social scientists and historians and concurs with geographer Edward

Soja's (1989) premise that social scientists should rediscover the essential matrix of place as the context for human activities. Though Read consistently maintains the equivalency of home to place, he also recognises and lists some of the important interactions that may constitute part of the multiplicity that generates that feeling of 'home',

As well as the space it occupies, people conceptualise their home as the functions it performs. To some, home is a comfortably bounded enclosed space, defining an 'other' who is outside. Others, more socially attuned to their neighbourhood and friends, see 'home' not as a place but an area, formed out of a particular set of social relations which happen to intersect at the particular location known as 'home'. 'Home' can be a focus of memory, a building, a way of mentally enclosing people of great importance, a reference point for widening circles of significant people and places and a means of protecting valued objects... Home is the ultimate focus of all lost places (Ibid:102).

After presenting numerous narratives depicting the agony of losing a loved home, Read offers the more perplexing account of 'Con', who 'always felt restless, and at the age of forty had not stayed in any one place longer than four years' (Ibid:44). For Con, though he spent most of his life in Australia, his sense of belonging has become 'one of the central uncertainties of his life' (Ibid). As Con sees it,

The traditional heritage of a place depends on people believing the same relative notion of what the truth was. I was conscious that I was not sharing it with others, and that other truths were possible (Read,1996:44).

Read assumes that Con's experiences are explained by his parents being European immigrants who stressed Australian acculturation but within strong continuing bonds with their motherland. While it makes perfect sense to think that this may have impacted Con's sensibilities, we still need to ask why only Con developed accordingly while his siblings exhibited no such characteristics. Also, there is no consistent cause-effect outcome for all children of reluctant or homesick immigrants. Though he feels some envy for those who are deeply rooted, Con also feels liberated from the trap of being tied to place. He feels that his weaker rootedness has allowed him to become more self-reliant. He appreciates values of personal freedom and openness, yet also feels sorrow about his lack of connection. If we read Con's own descriptions, it is tempting to ascribe to him a process of existential migration. When Read asks 'Whence arose this profound and ambiguous rootlessness?' (Ibid: 46), it suggests at least a slight prioritisation of the settled over the transitory, as if one is *the given* and the other an aberration that requires explanation.

In contrast to Read's population, more than a few of my interviewees claim not to have a close attachment to any one place, often exhibiting sentiments similar to DH Lawrence in his comments on suburban living⁵¹,

... all these little dog kennels – awful pigglings suburban place ... Is this all men can do with a new country? Look at those tin cans!... There was something indescribably weary and dreary about it (Lawrence, 1955).

Read assumes that such antipathy is explained by the distinction between observer and local inhabitant, 'Suburbia is so familiar to the resident, so unfamiliar to the outsider, so individual to the gardener, so uniform to the critic' (Read, 1996:179). Without diminishing Read's reintroduction of the importance of place, the co-researchers' experiences offer an important addendum; there are also 'outsiders' within the community, living with their gaze averted from the locality that their neighbours love so dearly, instead focused upon imagined foreign lands far away. Not everyone living in a place, even suburbia, is blindly attached to the place, umbilicalised and in love with the land. Since it is clear that a particular unrecognised minority do not form unambiguous attachments to country, it raises questions regarding the axiological and ontological status of 'home'.

A salient distinction between the co-researchers and Read's interviewees is that his interviewees mostly described group experiences of movement while my cohort is mostly engaged in solitary journeys. The losses Read documents, though deeply personal and distinct from individual to individual, occur within a social nexus that allows them to be publicly recognised and spoken about. Whole neighbourhoods or even entire towns were dismantled and relocated, or suddenly lost to violent storms. This impresses upon the experience a degree of public validation that has been missing in the case of existential migration. For some co-researchers, the research interview constituted an initial recognition of their experience as such and their first opportunity to construct a coherent dialogue around their leaving, even though these issues had always remained a constant source of fascination. I think this explains some degree of the emotionality of the interview sessions. The next section explores the group refugee experience, shifting the focus away from the settled as norm.

⁵¹ Rita's comments on her hometown are a prime example.

Centrality of Home in Forced Migration

In his recent text *Therapeutic Care for Refugees - No Place Like Home* (2002), the Jungian clinical psychologist Renos Papadopoulos stresses that people who have been forced to flee their homes are not treated as if home itself was a significant issue for them. This point, and the fact that Papadopoulos equates home with place, is reminiscent of Read's treatise explored above. However, Papadopoulos emphasises individual psychology⁵², defining home as a territory that *evokes the feeling* of being at home; therefore it is both geographical and psychological. He suggests that there is a foundational substratum of human experience into which more tangible characteristics are developed and the 'very fact that one has experience of a home (regardless of how good or bad, long or brief, it may be) forms part of this substratum that contributes to the establishment of a foundation to being human' (Ibid:17). This fundamental stratum, according to Papadopoulos, only comes into view when it is disturbed, for example in the refugee experience. Papadopoulos's central reasoning concludes that the loss of home constitutes a primary disturbance which he calls nostalgic disorientation, reminiscent of 'ontological insecurity', 'existential anxiety', 'angst' and 'dread'. The resulting deep absence creates a 'syndrome' of homelessness. Papadopoulos clearly presupposes that attachment to a secure home constitutes psychological health while homelessness, or not-being-at-home in the world, is a risk factor associated with pathology.

Papadopoulos believes that when a home is 'lost', its containing functions break open and disintegration can result, on individual, family, and social levels. Homecoming nostalgia, in this view, is a desire both for a physical home and for the lost containment; in fact, family and home are treated as inseparable entities. It is unclear how Papadopoulos would account for the experience of 'existential migration', namely the evident ambivalence regarding home does not fit easily with his reification of home as 'holding', implying a reliable stationary place. Papadopoulos characterises home as

... a primary condition where one's presence and entitlement are taken for granted. Unquestionably, one does not have to earn the right to be at home. One should not be required to achieve anything to gain the right to be at home. Home is where one is (Ibid:38).

⁵² As explored in the section on psychoanalysis, this version of 'psychological' is embedded within psychodynamic intrapsychic assumptions.

In their loss of home, refugees are bound to share a deep 'nostalgic yearning for restoring that very specific type of loss' (Ibid: 15). *Nostalgia* derives from the Greek *nostos*, which means returning home, and *algos*, which signifies an ache or pain. According to Papadopoulos, this is a unique type of loss, encapsulating a multidimensional signification of the physical, imaginary, psychological, origin and goal, return and reintegration. This powerful mixture of dimensions creates confusion and bewilderment,

It is as if the absence of home creates a gap in refugees which makes them feel uncontained and they then look around to fill the gap ... This is so because, *de facto*, most homes provide some kind of continuity that enables co-existence between many opposites: love and discord, distance and proximity, joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, flexibility and obstinacy, envy and magnanimity, rivalry and collaboration, loyalty and betrayal, enmity and friendship, similarities and differences, to name but a few... Regardless of how 'dysfunctional' families may be, homes can provide that deep and fundamental sense of space where all these opposites and contradictions can be contained and held together. Inevitably, this develops a sense of security, regardless of whatever other traumatic experiences family members may also have as a result of their family interactions (Ibid:16-7).

Papadopoulos may offer an adequate description of the devastating expulsion from home suffered by *those who were settled*. However, his analysis does not include the co-researcher experiences describing an original lack of belonging at home combined with a search for home elsewhere. This 'disturbed' orientation to home may culminate in experiences of 'homelessness' but there is no indication that this constitutes pathology. In fact homelessness, like home, may also be a given substratum of human being. In the above account home is conflated with a containing space of bricks and mortar, perhaps contiguous with the analytic 'frame'. But not everyone seeks containment in this form and the co-researcher narratives suggest an abhorrence of such 'holding'. Proclaiming that we have a 'right to be at home' avoids the question, 'as what'? Co-researcher experiences of home have typically been less conflated with place, and certainly more ambiguous, partly due to their experience that their whole self was not welcomed at home – they had a *conditional* right to be at home, earned through conformity. Despite reassurances to the contrary, our co-researchers represent home as *not the place one is meant to be*, or at least *not the place one is convinced by*, one co-researcher described home as where she was 'put to grow up'. Evidently for some, entitlement is not enough.

In his paper on Bosnian refugees, Richard Black (2002) proposes that simplistic notions of 'home' have contributed to the problems associated with post-war reconstruction. In this view the contemporary world is once again associated with 'a metaphysical loss of home',

conveying a lost past, which leaves both migrant and refugee longing for a distant inaccessible home, its impossibility increasing the strength of identification. Migrants often 'overlay an imagined homecoming on the clear physical impossibility of reaching a fixed and distant geographical place' while policy-makers look at political and economic tensions as the obstacle to return home and do not see the notion of home itself as problematic. Based upon the co-researcher narratives, the question arises as to what kind of 'home' is longed for and re-created and how is such a home actually experienced if it comes to fruition? What becomes of the refugees who embody the sensitivities of existential migration - are they welcomed, can they feel at-home in the midst of the social creations of their fellow refugees?

There is a body of theoretical literature on home, but little of the phenomenological variety attempted in this thesis. Most of the literature, no matter how nuanced and sophisticated, seems to take as a starting point home-as-place. In a departure from this, Sociologist Dorothy Massey in her text ironically titled 'A Place Called Home' (1992) suggests that the *social relations* of 'home' are most important, resulting in localities with fuzzy edges to them, obscuring where one homeworld ends and where another begins. Massey believed there would always be tension between the meaning created by consciousness and the role of the physical structures in shaping that consciousness. This softening of the assumptions regarding the constituting factors of home leads us into the next section, further 'deconstructing' the edifice of home.

Home and Migrants of Identity

In this section we arrive at experiences of migration that closely approximate the co-researcher narratives. In accord with my evolving concept of existential migration, anthropologists Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson (1998) argue in their text *Migrants of Identity* that we urgently need a framework to rescue the person of the migrant from being inconsequential to understanding migration (or home) and to think the individual back into the centrality of historical processes. They suggest that we could start by regarding movement not as a deficient interval between the solidities of departure and arrival but as an authentic mode of being in the world. Rapport and Dawson (1998) suggest that it is in the search for identity that an individual defines him or herself and as the search is ongoing, the definition is never complete. More so, they suggest that '...in place of traditional

anthropological classifications of identity, we discuss and analyse the search for identity in terms of conceptualizations of ‘home’ (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 4).

These authors present a post-modern idealisation of transit points and ‘non-places’ as signifying how movement has become fundamental to modern identity. They present examples such as waiting rooms, refuge camps, transit stations, malls, and hotels, arguing that now no place is complete in itself and no place is completely foreign. ‘And in this situation, people are always and yet never ‘at home’: always and never ‘at ease with the rhetoric of those with whom they share their lives’ (Auge 1995, c.f. Ibid: 108). For a world of travellers, labour migrants, exiles and commuters, home may be found in a routine set of *practices*, in styles of dress and address, in memories and myths, in stories carried around in one’s head (see Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 7). The authors seem to be expounding from the descriptive into an almost *political* project geared toward liquefying the conception of home. Rapport and Dawson suggest that ‘home’ is a useful concept in providing an adequate understanding of an individual’s ‘world view’, a unique *constellation* of memory, longing, the ideational, the affective, the physical, the spatial and the temporal, the local and the global, the positively and the negatively evaluated (Ibid: 8).

Rapport and Dawson suggest that forms of migration are a resource in the quest to come to know oneself as much as this is possible. It is for this reason too that home ‘moves’ us most powerfully as absence or negation (cf. Hobsbawm 1991:63; Rapport 1994a). In these formulations ‘belonging’ takes on an almost antithetical character. To belong is to be estranged to the degree that alienation brings self-knowledge and awareness, elevating belonging to an ‘authentic’ relation rather than a tranquilised natural state. Some co-researcher descriptions seem to corroborate this view in their acceptance of a necessary degree of not-belonging within experiences of ‘home’, enough displacement to offer distance and space. These are interesting concepts, with striking resonances to Heidegger’s thought on homecoming, as we will see later. However, a new conception of ‘belonging’ and of ‘home’ are required

‘Home’, we suggest as a working definition, ‘is where one best knows oneself’ – where ‘best’ means ‘most’, even if not always ‘happiest’ ... One is at home when one inhabits a cognitive environment in which one can undertake the routines of daily life and through which one finds one’s identity best mediated – and homeless when such a cognitive environment is eschewed (Rapport and Dawson, 1998:9-10).

This contrasts with most assumptive views, which seem to equate being at home with acceptance and intimate belonging, even an eschewing of difference, and a lack of self-awareness or certainly self-consciousness. The formulation above seems to offer a more fluid version of home that is carried in the individual's schemas and lived in aware interactive routines. I must point out that this version of home, innovative as it is, seems to deviate slightly from the phenomenological accounts I've offered. Though it comes close to the interactive version of home evolving from the concept of existential migration, it also suggests that home could exist anywhere, yet co-researchers have found, quite painfully, that home does not arbitrarily occur, is often temporary, and sometimes occurs when one is least able to navigate daily routines rather than where one is cognitively 'best mediated'. We have seen that some of the co-researchers feel most 'at home' where self and world is mysterious and unfamiliar. Later, Rapport and Dawson suggest that home can refer to the environment in which one's self-identity is best grounded, 'or worst, or most, or most freely, or most presently, as one deems fit' (Ibid: 21). Again this raises the spectre of home as somewhat arbitrary – is it where one feels worst *and* best, most free *or* most grounded? However, this definition of home retains a strong resemblance to the interactive definition developing here and is a direct challenge to conventional anthropological understanding in which home is equated with a fixed place, stationary and centred.

Rapport and others are beginning to re-conceive of 'home' in order to take account of increasing globalisation and increasing movement. They talk of a mobile home, home as partly constituted through shared social interactions rather than bonded to place. They suggest both that one can be at home in movement and that movement can be one's home. When we compare this concept to the lived experiences of the co-researchers, it raises the question of whether home is reduced to just another way of being 'homeless'? In the interviews there was no mistaking the homelessness of movement with the rootedness of home, regardless of the idiosyncratic multi-valent dynamics involved on both sides.

As evident in the discussion above on identity, Rapport wants to go further than most of his colleagues by calling for a 'humanist-existentialist anthropology which recognises the radical freedom or apartness of the individual...' (c.f. Sokefeld, 1999: 439). Rapport believes that individuals may be inconsistent, even self-contradictory, yet still be 'themselves' as agents. He sees an 'irreducible dialectic between environments and their individual construal' (Ibid). Rapport conceives of human social life as comprised of a diversity of individual worlds

‘abutting against one another’. These formulations give credence to the possibility that the emergent concept ‘existential migration’ will fit somewhere within current trends in anthropological discourse.

Some radical intellectuals grappling with studies of migration now find themselves facing hallmark issues of postmodernism, culminating in moves to link displacement with emplacement, and considering both as ever-unfinished situations. These scholars (see Malkki, 1995) see the study of everyday facets of diaspora or displacement as casting light on the supposedly normal condition of being in place and attached to an identifiable people. One conclusion is that the ‘national order of things secretes displacement, as well as prescribed correctives for displacement’ (Ibid: 516). These modes of conceptualising link mobile experience to the experience of the settled community in an intimate way, suggesting also that existential migration may offer a comment upon human existence generally, not just those who leave, a view which receives some credence from Heidegger’s contemplations on the topic.

Possible Conceptual Elaborations

It is difficult not to think of home as place but what if this is simply a misleading manifestation of concrete settled thinking? Of course home is *related to* place, and to many things, like relationship, mood, smell, acceptance, freedom, and other individual sensitivities. What if ‘home’ is the name we use when specific interactions emanate in specific environments (places of origin as well as entirely unfamiliar places)? What if home, like other interactions, is in flux, constant elaboration within the experiential process of ‘homing’? For each person the quality of that interaction may vary, but it seems there is also something shared to these phenomena, something we recognise and potentially understand when another talks of ‘home’, ‘homesickness’... Although the co-researchers mostly display a conflicted or ambiguous relationship to ‘home’, these feelings are no less manifestations of ‘powerful and mysterious attachments’ than the strong sentiments expressed by people who have lead settled lives but by misfortune suddenly loose their beloved place. The strength of the emotions aroused by the co-researcher interviews demonstrate that issues of ‘home’, ‘returning home’, ‘place’ and ‘displacement’, are deeply evocative and in no way the subject of passing indifference just because one *chose* to leave.

Based upon the study so far, we can challenge the trends in this thinking even further. Human events take place as 'situations' and a situation is the interaction of body and context, not context alone; life is not just poured into various empty spaces that then give it shape. We have seen the co-researchers interact and respond to their *given* places in particular ways, but clearly not as the conventionally understood 'deeply rooted bonded sites' for pursuing a life. The interaction between these individuals and their environments depict that for some individuals the *foreign place* feels more like home. Sometimes the unfamiliar context can provide the longed-for interaction 'homing' and it is this *felt* interaction which serves as the *sine qua non* of what is referred to as home, no matter how temporary⁵³.

Arising from this, I would suggest that my interaction with the physical and the social world originates from a being already impacted by that physical and social world. Likewise, that physical and social world is already perceived from that already-affected on-going being. There is an interaction that calls forth the way body and environment *are*, and the way both *are* also impacts upon the possible interactions that can then occur. It is a mutual responsiveness before it is separated into person and environment. Our associations to place are not packed away in some psychic basement waiting to be unpacked when we garner the courage to visit our childhood home. Rather, those very experiences, and their reverberations, are implied in every place we visit, whether the interaction between self and place makes them felt or not. This is an example of the 'unseparated multiplicity' of these experiences, instantly *making* salient certain aspects of our past, present, future, homeworld, foreign-world, relationships and place. A strange market in Cairo may provide exactly the 'match' that allows some of those interactions to unexpectedly flow again, and we utter in the midst of this foreign bustle, 'It's so strange, I feel I know this place, this is great, it feels like comfort and adventure, I feel comfortable here, I feel I could live here...' An experience of 'home' arises and flows and eventually recedes. Is that any less 'home' than the little house where we originally played games and learned about the world? For some of us Cairo might feel more like home *while* the childhood home retains a unique axiological status.

Remembering Gendlin's remarks on cultural crossing, and if we consider home as interaction, perhaps cross-cultural elaborations can complicate an individual to the point that

⁵³ Eugene Gendlin's *A Process Model* is based upon prioritising interaction, suggesting that both space and time are generated by, rather than determinate of, interaction.

it becomes less likely that person will find a body-environment ‘match’ that will allow the feeling of being at home. Perhaps there are not many social or physical environments complex enough to ‘match’ an increasingly elaborated cross-cultural person? If this is at all indicative, then we may begin to consider the implication that *the sort of complexity experienced by cross-cultural people generates a kind of unheimlich sense*, a not quite fitting-in anywhere. Below are a few other points from the discussion on home:

1. The experience of at-homeness seems intimately associated with identity and belonging. Who one feels oneself to be will imply where one has felt belonging and therefore, where one feels at home. ‘Home’ cannot be abstracted from the experiencing individual involved. Implications include that national borders constitute ‘false boundaries on the free wanderings of the ‘homeless’ cosmopolitan mind’ (Rapport, 2003:119).
2. Existential migration offers opportunities to deconstruct reified views of home predicated upon assumptions of settled life and concomitant ways of being. These deconstructions maintain a definition of home by acknowledging that those who leave home retain special significance for their origins *and* continue to seek semblances of ‘home’.
3. Home can refer to one’s origin and to the feeling of being-at-home, and contrary to most research, one cannot be reduced to the other. The experience of home has both (perhaps unrealised) existential/spiritual aspects as well as practical associations.
4. The fact that co-researchers’ leavings were solitary migrations rather than mass migration or forced exodus, seems to impact identity, belonging, and the sense of home. Solitude, the lack of recognition from the settled majority, and a lack of communal dialogue, have an impact upon the interpersonal relations that partly comprise ‘home’ and that may inform the significance of place as the site for specific homey interactions.

Chapter 6. Extrapolating from Identity, Belonging, and Home, to a Philosophy of the Unheimlich, Dwelling, and Homecoming

Introduction

The preceding chapter repeatedly indicated junctures for consideration of ‘deeper’ ontological aspects of migration and those will be explored more in this chapter through an existential and phenomenological analysis. Glen Gray (1951) presents an interesting perspective in which he suggests that the *mood* of existentialism could be described as ‘a feeling of the homelessness of man’ (Ibid: 114) and this mood is intricately woven into existential metaphysics. The world we are thrown into cannot meet the claims of the human spirit. ‘Our natural and social environment oppresses us with its foreignness, its unsuitability as a home for all that is specifically human about us as individuals’ (Ibid). According to Gray, if we are sensitive to the human condition, we will not find a refuge in nature or society, we will remain outcast. The existentialist’s deep-rooted homelessness sets him or her apart from the idealist goal of finding one’s home in the world, or the naturalist’s emphasis on material nature. However, the existentialists do not share the ‘cynical hopelessness’ of the pessimists, but instead seek to balance absence with comradeship among the few likeminded individuals they come across. Even this abridged opening description of existentialism resonates with the deeper unexplored implications of the previous chapter while recollecting sentiments present in the co-researcher interviews.

Following Heidegger, Gray presents an evocative description of the existentialist’s state of being as arguably indistinguishable from the more profound implications of the individual exemplifying a process of existential migration,

When you feel [unheimlich]... you are seized with a nameless fear. You are out of your element, but more than that you have an intuition of abysses hidden from normal moods. These rare experiences of the uncanny... are revelatory of the innermost nature of reality. At such times we feel a deep sense of unease; we are threatened and oppressed by everything in general and nothing in particular. We are filled with dread or anguish, a psychological state which has for the existentialists metaphysical origins... what has oppressed us is the primary intuition that we are not sustained by infinite power and plenitude of being... On the contrary, we, human creatures, perceive dimly in the experience of the uncanny, that the world rests on nothing. It has no basis or ground (Ibid:116).

From this quote it is clear that the 'mood' of the existentialist has more than a little convergence with the affective experiences of many of the co-researchers. Our co-researchers, nearly without exception, seem to have perceived *something* of the radical ungroundedness of human existence and perhaps subsequently have not been capable of re-convincing themselves of the solidity of conventional forms of life. From an early age, some have apparently ascertained that they are independent, cut adrift without an omnipotent parent or anchor against the fortuity of life. However, such sensitivities (and existential migration) are uncommon. 'We are chiefly creatures of comfort, not seekers of truth' (Ibid:117) yet during the interviews a few co-researchers explicitly stated that being comfortable was inadmissible and most narratives implied that one's life is sustained by putting oneself in increasingly foreign and challenging situations in order to remain alive, *contra* complacency. We see in existential migration a dread of the everyday intertwined with a motivated search. As Jaspers puts it, 'The bottomless character of the world must become revealed to us, if we are to win through to the truth of the world' (Jaspers, 1932, *Philosophie*: 469, c.f. Gray, 1951:117).

The existential view tends to emphasise the denudation of existence, exposing all distractions and evasions in order to reveal our defencelessness. This is the opposite of our primary desire for security, safety, protection, or 'home'. The interviews present the plight of some co-researchers as consisting of the paradox of desiring 'home' in the sense of warm belonging, while embodying a broken-hearted insight that such comfort is unconvincing and perhaps illusory. Instead, seeking the uncomfortable boundary situations of life, with all their associated distress, at least offers the consolation of direct contact with the granite surface of life. Such a way of being is not embarked upon once and for all; it requires constant choice. Of course the ultimate limit situation is death, and as we all die alone, perhaps some recognition of this generates the greater individualism of the 'existential migrant', the solitary character of the world-wanderer⁵⁴.

Sonia Kruks (1990) in her *Situation and Human Existence* points out that there is an overwhelming though misguided temptation for us to 'treat our own lives and those of our fellows as problems rather than as mysteries' (Kruks, 1990:38). We cannot choose the

⁵⁴ This comment is speculative but prompts one of the many possible empirical research questions implicit in this thesis.

circumstances we are born into, social class, language, location, etc. but as a *for-itself*, a conscious being, we must *choose our way of being* all those givens. I may be born into a working class family, but to *be* a worker requires my choice. This distinction sheds some possible light on the disjuncture between the co-researchers and their home environments. Somehow it is as if they *could not choose* the most obvious way of being offered by their traditions, conventions, and environmental expectations ('I *had to go*').

Merleau-Ponty's 'situated subject' highlights the fact that situations present limitations, but that they are never totally fixed, though we may perceive them as such. Each situation forms and re-forms, partly structured by 'sediments' from prior situations, so no situated action is totally free yet also never totally determined, though it can appear to be so. This raises an interesting question regarding the difference between these co-researchers, who are intent upon expressing their freedom, and others who are unaware that choice even exists for them⁵⁵. It is possible that the distance from belonging, the space implicit in being marginal, is constructive in creating awareness of possibilities and choice. This awareness of the freedom in man has been described as a 'hollow in Being', 'a place of unrest' (Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense*, 1964: 65-6, c.f. Kruks, 1990: 121). Heidegger's perspective emphasises that

As thrown, Dasein is delivered over to a particular society and culture at a particular stage in its development, in which certain existentiell possibilities are open to it and certain others not... Dasein is also thrown into its own life at a particular stage in its development, which further constrains the range of available choices. One's particular upbringing, previous decisions and present circumstances may make becoming a social worker impossible or becoming a priest almost unavoidable. In other words, the facts of social, cultural and personal history that make up an individual's present situation constitute an inheritance which she must grasp if she is to project a future for herself; a part of that inheritance is a matrix of possible ways of living, the menu of existentiell possibilities from which she must choose (Mulhall, 1996:169-70).

The quandary seems to be that to respond 'authentically', a person must accept and grasp the given in order to choose to move beyond a simple and straightforward recapitulation of inherited tradition. The co-researchers may exemplify a response that appears 'authentic' for the most part (though I don't see how this can be assessed objectively from a spectator's view) in that it is a living *beyond*, exceeding the given culture largely through elaborations with unfamiliar traditions, yet it could also be seen as a jumping-over rather than a taking-up of one's inheritance. Obviously there are deeper philosophical components to the descriptions

⁵⁵ Yet at the same time, the co-researchers also seem limit-bound and un-free in their inability to stay!

presented in this thesis and the emerging concept of existential migration. Given the ostensible correspondence between an existential stance and the emergent themes, and acknowledging its continuity within the overall orientation of my thesis, the philosophical grounding of this chapter seems appropriately founded upon existential-phenomenological understandings.

In the first section below I will offer a lengthy exposition of Anthony Steinbock's (1995) phenomenology of home crossed with the evolving concept of existential migration. Following this I introduce interpretations of contemporary modalities of migration and travel in the modern world as an entry into discussion of Martin Heidegger's conceptualisation of the *unheimlich*. The concluding sections of the chapter expand from the experiential to the philosophical in a discussion of the issue of homecoming, conceptualising the possible return home from an existential, spiritual, and mythic perspective. Though Chapter 6 hereby comprises the furthest foray into philosophical discourse and speculation, my intention is to endeavour to remain guided by Part One of the thesis and the co-researchers' individual experiential accounts.

Philosophical Reflections on Homeworld and Alienworld

Turning to Anthony Steinbock's phenomenology of home proffers a philosophical view of the previously explored issues of identity, belonging, and home. In *Home and Beyond*, Anthony Steinbock (1995) asks basic questions about what it means *to belong*, either to a family, a social group, or to an organisation such that we can use the plural pronoun 'we' or possessive pronoun 'our'. Answers to such questions necessarily incorporate the problems of identity, difference, and who is to be considered an outsider or stranger. Steinbock's own contribution is to develop an approach that is situated within the modes of co-generating 'homeworlds' and 'alienworlds' (Ibid:4). Supporting conceptual elaborations from the previous chapter, Steinbock asserts that the homeworld has an axiological priority but not a foundational one – roughly suggesting that the homeworld is not the 'first world', the primary or most basic, but rather the one with a unique value.

In describing the creation of the engendered homeworld, Steinbock points out that our bodies bear the characteristics of our earthly home – our bodily processes and the earth belong

together; can be deduced from each other⁵⁶. Steinbock reviews the various ways that this world-constituting subject has been described,

For Merleau-Ponty this world constituting subject is primarily the “lived-body”, for Scheler, “person”, for Heidegger, “Dasein”. For Husserl it is “transcendental subjectivity” and eventually what he calls “transcendental intersubjectivity” (Ibid:84).

In this sense, the earth is ‘privileged as the ground of our being’; earth is home in a sense in which no other ‘place’ could be. The earth grounds everything, including the lifeworld, which is our historical, cultural, delimited territory, normatively distinct as *homeworld* but necessitating co-constitution with *alienworld* (Steinbock, 1995:121). According to Steinbock, the process of constituting our homeworld occurs by rendering as familiar that which is unknown, emphasising the similar features of a thing, making it as expected. This is the process of reduction of the *unheimlich*, reducing world to earth in its hominess and comfortableness. Steinbock says that when we “change places”, move or migrate, ‘we do not simply leave the terrain behind’ (Ibid: 166). By terrain he means our familiar milieu and he emphasises his point with the slogan ‘*the terrain attaches to the lived-body*’ (Ibid:165). Homeworlds may make us happy or miserable, but regardless, they are privileged as *the* world from which we accrue our bodily comportment, our way of sensing, to the extent that Steinbock considers speaking of the lived-body as the “home-body” (Ibid:233). Steinbock clarifies his view by stating ‘... simply being in a particular location for some time and *having been born there* does not necessarily make a territory a homeworld’ (Ibid:233, *italics added*). A new house, for example, may not be home for a long time or it may never acquire the ‘generative density of a sedimented tradition’ and never ‘draw me home ...’ (Ibid). To reiterate, Steinbock proclaims that a homeworld is usually tied to a geographical location, like our birthplace, but the homeworld cannot be equated simply to our place of birth for this would restrict home simply to origin. A later childhood residence may be more home than the first one. Even a nomad, according to Husserl, has a homeworld, and a homeworld can exist in the future as in ‘the promised land’. Of course the co-researchers have made explicit that *having* a homeworld and *feeling* at-home need to remain distinguished.

This construction of home as familiar simultaneously demarcates another world, where our conceptual systems do not work, an ‘abnormal’ world where our own normality and values are alien. Steinbock perceives that the familiar lifeworld is constituted by what is taken for

⁵⁶ This body-environment co-implicating is delineated in detail by Eugene Gendlin in *A Process Model* (1997).

granted as typical by a person, revealing the ability to ‘typify the alien in a style of what is already familiar to me’ (Ibid:174). Steinbock continues by saying that the ability to typify ‘is the essential means of human normality to ensure against the existential shock of having to see the world the way it is. Those who have lost the ability to typify the world... are abnormal, pathological, “morbid”’ (Ibid:175). However, does all typifying necessarily consist of a reduction to sameness and the appropriation of the unfamiliar? Is a phenomenological attitude similar to the one attempted in this thesis a form of typifying? These questions require further elucidation and contemplation.

According to Steinbock, the perspective of home as normal lifeworld generates the experience of the alienworld *as not normal, nor home for me*. He is inferring that the alienworld and homeworld are accessible to us in different ways – the alien is ‘other’ and the home is known, so our relations to each will incorporate these qualitative distinctions. However, through the co-researcher interviews the possibility is ascertained that one can also feel ‘alien’ at home, and finding one’s home an alien place is not the same as finding an alien place alien (as our interviewees corroborate), likewise feeling at home in an alienworld is not the same as finding an experience of home in one’s homeworld. The ability to feel at-home in the alien does not eradicate the unique significance of the homeworld, but the perspective of home and alien need not be normal and abnormal in the quotidian manner he has outlined.

The interview narratives challenge this equating of homeworld with the sense of a shared belonging, revealing this as a non-phenomenological reification. This is not to deny that the homeworld is qualitatively significant in *some* way, leaving an imprint upon our discriminations between lifeworlds. Our comparisons between worlds are not arbitrary. Alienness requires comparison to a homeworld as distinct from any other lifeworld, but the felt quality of that comparison, the motivation for differentiating, may vary greatly from the conventional modes being presented by Steinbock. Anyone can adopt various responses to one’s homeworld, for example, critical or apologetic, but both of these can still be based in belonging – presumably a person can feel profound belonging to a home culture that they also criticise. But it is a different matter to adopt various responses, critique, resistance, subservience, or flight, towards a homeworld where one has had little sense of belonging. For a person to be able to contemplate ‘escape’ he or she must have developed some degree of a ‘critical attitude’, a perspective that allows assessing pre-given culturally constructed convictions. This allows the *possibility* of ‘freeing oneself from a potentially naïve

appropriation and complacent repeating of a tradition' (Ibid:206). I suggest that we need to re-open these concepts to account for the experiences of existential migration. We need to begin to ask again, what does it actually mean to not-belong to the coherent given world we are thrown into? For example, if leaving signifies releasement from the tight hold of the homeworld, does it simultaneously constitute the homeworld letting go of us; not-belonging may be a two-way process even if its recognition is more obvious in the one leaving. It insinuates that the traditional homeworld would rather maintain its cultural appropriations than modify them enough to accept the full diversity of its own membership.

Steinbock introduces Husserl's term 'homecomrade' to refer to those others who feel familiar to me, who I feel most at-home with, with whom I share important rituals and customs. He or she is a 'co-bearer of our world' (c.f. Ibid:224). Though typically it is assumed that homecomrades share one's original home place and that particular mode of sameness, the term presents an interesting possibility. Although those embarked upon an existential migration embody a shared tradition and culture from their homeworld, it can be asked, who *really* is the 'homecomrade' of such a person? Based upon the co-researcher narratives, I would propose that a homecomrade is more likely to be another engaged in existential migration rather than an individual who shares the home rituals and customs. In fact for some of our co-researchers, exemplified in Patricia's transcript, meeting someone from 'home' is an experience that accentuates alienness rather than familiarity or comradeship. Individuals engaged in existential migration seem to 'recognise' each other enough to congregate; some co-researchers even referring to a 'tribe', a wandering lost tribe. If it is reasonable to suggest that existential migration generates temporary groups of 'homecomrades' we are on the brink of proposing the existence of 'an alternative human history', one based upon solitary migrations rather than the edifices of settled collective history, and one that has not been acknowledged or recorded as such. This interpretation of homecomrade can be read into Steinbock's view, bolstering it as a possibility while obviously not his main emphasis,

We may recognize another homecomrade on this basis of this or that familiarity. Familiarity can show itself through a particular style of dress, typical smells of food, typically familiar accents. We may recognize a homecomrade... by the way they cross the street when the light is red... by the values they hold etc (Ibid:224).

Possible Conceptual Elaborations

The above analysis crosses with the thesis research to foster the following clarifications, contrasts and elaborations.

1. The prime issue emanating from this comparison is the apparent bias towards the sedentary in Steinbock's analysis, despite token acknowledgement of migratory experiences. Both homeworld and homecomrade are for the most part geographically based concepts. Though the homeworld has axiological rather than chronological priority, Steinbock offers no scope for the homeworld to be constituted in otherness rather than sameness – one cannot be most at-home in the foreign or the *unheimlich*.
2. How does Steinbock account for co-researcher homeworlds that were both known and not taken-for-granted? He assumes that the homeworld reduction of unknown to familiar results in hominess and reduction of the *unheimlich*, yet the co-researchers certainly *knew* their worlds without being obscured by them – they retained an awareness, an agency or responsiveness that fostered alterity.
3. Steinbock's account de-emphasises agency and assumes a majority 'normal' view in a way that seems inconsistent with the concept of existential migration.
4. The lived-body is a home-body in that we acquire our bodily comportment in a homeworld culture, to some extent, regardless of our rejection of that culture. Even a native North American critical of his own culture and living in London typically has a North American comportment. However, this critical not-belonging to the homeworld is also presumably part of this comportment – we don't just accrue a heritage but simultaneously our associated values towards that inheritance. For example Rita was recognised as a 'fish out of water' in her homeworld. Presumably such a body inheres aspects of the original terrain already complicated by a pronounced response of 'not-belonging' which is then carried to new alienworlds, where it is further elaborated through interaction with the foreign environment.
5. In some processes of existential migration perhaps a future 'promised land' could approximate the homeworld more than one's origin or any geographical locus. However, in compliance with Steinbock, the co-researchers often indicated that childhood and family homes and homeland also retain a qualitatively special significance regardless of how inhospitable they may be for the particular individual.
6. Individuals embarked upon existential migration may comprise a permeable and intangible alternative human history yet to be chronicled in any substantive way.

World Alienation and the *Unheimlich*

It is worth noting that Steinbock's analysis of the significance of home and alien causes him to lament the contemporary efforts to create a world *sans frontiers* as an attempt to make home and alien interchangeable. He believes that such attempts mistakenly assume that home and alien are mutually symmetrically accessible, that we can achieve a kind of amorphous internationalism. Likewise, Peter Read (1996) perceives that not acknowledging the import of home-place in the modern world has resulted in 'creeping international sameness', creating a 'tabula rasa' which aspires to a condition of 'absolute placelessness' (Read, 1996:196). The

following sections address contemporary modes of being within creeping internationalism and their ramifications. They constitute divergence from the assumptions inherent within Steinbock's and Read's analyses, in part revealing the radically heterogeneous values encompassed within sedentary versus migratory accounts, especially in relation to such concepts as 'authenticity' and 'the unheimlich'.

Modern tourism studies extend far beyond conventional tourism *per se*, utilising the topic to investigate the 'modern consciousness' or contemporary worldview in general. In a research paper echoing themes similar to those I expound in this thesis, Wang (1999) wants to re-think authenticity in tourism in terms of existential thinking. He shifts the focus from toured objects in order to concentrate upon the *personal or intersubjective feelings* aroused by liminal processes of tourism. As a response to the ascendancy of pretence over sincerity in modern life, some tourists are resisting passive consumerism to become creatively engaged in travel.

People are nostalgic ... they want to re-live [more authentic ways of being] in the form of tourism at least temporally, empathically, and symbolically... Tourism is thus regarded as a simpler, freer, more spontaneous, more authentic, or less serious, less utilitarian, and romantic, lifestyle which enables people to keep a distance from, or transcend, daily lives (Wang, 1999:358).

These values, including dissatisfaction with mundane everyday life, harmonise with the descriptions of many co-researchers, and I would guess that 'existential tourism' could be considered a sporadic feature of, or occasionally the initiation of, a process of 'existential migration'. In both processes, adventure becomes a counterbalance and compensation for boredom, lack of authentic novelty, and loss of meaning. However, these forms of tourism are typically community-based group expeditions, thus distinguishing them from the characteristically more solitary process of existential migration. Also, brief touristic interludes may not be the same as more long-standing and integral ways of being as described by the co-researchers. For example, does an annual 'authentic tourist experience' challenge or facilitate ongoing adaptation to unsatisfying forms of life for the rest of the year? It is unclear whether Wang has mistakenly taken a snapshot of the on-going process I am conceptualising, or if he is describing another process altogether. This question may evoke fruitful research study into understanding emerging modes of response to living in the 21st century globalised capitalist world.

Recent developments of Japanese touristic experiences reinvigorate the image of the disenchanted and alienated young western traveller who seeks meaning in culturally diverse alternatives, as originally described by Erick Cohen (1979). Rea (2000) perceives this recurrence as a form of what he terms 'therapeutic tourism', exemplified in the college student studying abroad, the graduate taking time off to travel, and the ecotourist's escape from city life. These journeys entail an intense personal commitment, a lived process that is different in quality to the typical package holiday or corporate relocation. Co-researcher biographies often reveal utilisation of such modes of seeking as the commencement of their leaving home, sampling a taste of the possible life 'out there'⁵⁷.

Rea conceives the recent shift in Japanese tourism as a comment upon lost potentialities in the Japanese homeland. This innovation manifests as almost pilgrim-like journeys to foreign sites, which function as traditional Japanese *furusatos*, and are even marketed as such. The *furusato* used to be found domestically, in remote countryside locations, offering a 'traditional, pre-modern home' of rustic simplicity and spiritual centeredness. Rea proposes that the fact *furusatos* are now sought outside Japan is the consequence of a state of homelessness in Japanese society linked to social shocks in the early 1990s, combined with an associated new willingness 'to seek existential meaning outside of Japan' (Rea, 2000: 643). He concludes that 'the important point is that these spiritual homes are not of Japanese origin' (2000:657). Crossing this with my conceptualisation of home as interaction, it might be envisaged that for some Japanese citizens Japan no longer implies the interaction that allows them to say 'I feel at home, I belong' whereas these foreign places with which they 'wholeheartedly identify' actually allow a temporary interaction of 'home' though they are ostensibly foreign through and through. Somehow, for *some* Japanese individuals, these places generate a 'matching', that is deeply felt. This development does not appear surprising in that it evokes reminiscence of the experiences of many co-researchers who felt more at home in totally foreign places. Rea's conclusions, based upon interviews with Japanese tourists at various foreign *furusato* sites, echo aspects of the emerging understanding of existential migration, perhaps constituting individual occurrences of its inception,

What has been proposed is that to a new generation Japan is not the home it was to their parents and that it often fails as a source of either modern or traditional comfort. For a

⁵⁷ Singh (2002) points out that tourism can lead to permanent migration and tourists on this trajectory are generally classified as 'wanderlusts, drifters, existentials [sic]' (Ibid:262) and have much in common with many anthropologists who end up settling down in a society that was originally the object of study. Singh believes that this phenomenon requires study. Hopefully the current research contributes something towards this topic.

growing number, succour has been found in the tradition of the West, and young Japanese are fulfilling dreams by actually going to them, where they feel light and free and at home... Happier abroad, they express their distaste for the rigid social mores of home... many Japanese ... [in their search for authenticity, are] going out into the great big world, *less and less in tour groups*, and are immersing themselves in the fields and woods and hospitality of places thought still pristine... (Rea, 2000: 658, *italics added*).

This last italicised comment addresses what seemed a potential divergence between the two concepts, i.e. that 'existential migration' does not constitute an identifiable socially condoned experience, nor is it typified by group arrivals on pre-arranged tour buses. Another dissimilarity appears to be that the furusato experience is one of pure nostalgia for *a national past* and pristine nature rather than substantially based upon attraction to the *future* difference of foreign culture and the diversity of large cosmopolitan centres⁵⁸. The furusato seems to consist in a retreat from the homelessness of modernity merged with a profound quest for something more Japanese, or more *heimlich*, than Japan can currently offer.

In contrast to the quest to reconcile lost interconnection as described above, the travel writer Pico Iyer profiles journeys through our increasingly diffuse and borderless world. In *The Global Soul – Jet-lag, shopping malls, and the search for home* (2000), Iyer suggests a new kind of being may be emerging: a multi-cultural fusion, a cross-border confusion, a hodgepodge itinerant with a porous sense of self, and he depicts this world homelessness in the concept of 'global soul'. According to Iyer, one country or one fixed community is no longer enough, so the global soul, if he or she has *any* sense of home, has only the 'home' that emanates from 'the ties and talismans he carries around with him' (Iyer, 2000:19). Iyer argues that previously our notions of home, past, and community were givens, often oppressively so, however now it is possible to *select* even the most fundamental details of one's life. Despite this strange a la carte self, Iyer also periodically recognises the enduring calling of something called 'home'. An Indian cabbie living in Toronto expresses it this way; 'Where you spent your childhood, sir, you can never forget that place. I am here, sir, and I like it here. But' – and I could hear the ache – 'I love my India' (Iyer,2000:22).

Iyer grew up in three different cultures. He differentiates himself from an exile (who looks back at a home he once had), an expatriate (posted abroad to make a living), a nomad

⁵⁸ Though co-researchers regularly expressed a preference for culturally diverse cosmopolitan centres, this could in part be an artefact of conducting the research in London and therefore requires further research.

(wanders according to traditional or seasonal patterns), a refugee (violently forced to migrate): he is a 'global soul', a person who falls between these categories and yet does not fit into any settled community. Iyer writes of the positive facets of his position in the world, everywhere is new and strange, keeping alive a sense of wonder and detachment. He feels enabled to 'live a little bit above parochialisms', able to see places with a 'flexible eye'; he says 'the very notion of home is foreign to me, as the state of foreignness is the closest thing I know to home' (Ibid:24). The last chapter of Iyer's text is entitled 'The Alien Home' and opens with the conclusion that the only home a global soul can find in today's world is 'in the midst of the alien and the indecipherable'. Of himself, Iyer proclaims he is,

... a wanderer from birth, like more and more around me, I choose to live a long way from the place where I was born, the country in which I work, and the land to which my face and blood assign me – on a distant island where I can't read any of the signs and will never be accepted as even a partial native (Ibid: 269).

Iyer admits that Japan, where he lives, will never be his home, except in a superficial way, and that in return, Japan would not want him to presume to claim otherwise. There is a mutually agreed convivial distance that seems to suit him. A global soul, a citizen of nowhere, could, of course, be perceived as a threat to settled civic harmony.

Iyer's 'global soul' appears to acquiesce to the homelessness experienced by some in the modern world and as such lacks the heartfelt conciliatory quest of the existential tourist. In his text, Iyer articulates values also associated with processes of existential migration; attributes which differ considerably from the settled population. However, he accentuates positive and desired attributes of these experiences while neglecting loss as impetus for continued quests for 'home' as evidenced in existential tourism. He proclaims that the notion of home is foreign to him yet goes on to say that his state of foreignness *is* his approximation of home. Lacking an actual *place* he can call home can be differentiated from lacking the ability to experience 'at-homeness' or not; conversely, foreignness may be Iyer's 'home' yet not provide an *experience* of home. Like Iyer, the co-researcher narratives also celebrate the positive reverberations consequent upon leaving home, but unlike Iyer, they don't neglect the heartfelt yearning and continued sense of loss equally entailed in homelessness. Iyer hypothesises that *the questions* raised by modernity may be our home now: we might find we can live in the 'uncertainties' we carry around with us. Again, rather than evaporate, the issue of locating home seems to haunt Iyer – perhaps one really can dwell in a question? But what would be the felt experience of such dwelling? The philosophy of Martin Heidegger seems to

offer possibilities for clarifying and carrying forward a phenomenological and philosophical discourse on these issues.

Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*⁵⁹ (MR,1962; JS,1996) represents an ontological exposition within which are indicated salient aspects of a phenomenology of the uncanny/unheimlich⁶⁰. For Heidegger, the experience of the unheimlich discloses that we drift along in life without a foundational ground, forever cadavering towards inevitable annihilation. The certitude with which we assume the everydayness of life is such that it camouflages the uncanniness of Dasein⁶¹, allowing Dasein to flee from the not-at-home back to the at-home of tranquillising quotidian detail. However, angst regarding our lack of grounding and moribund nature continues to rumble along, suddenly revealing itself in otherwise harmless situations. Even in being tranquillized, Dasein is in a 'fallen' mode of the unheimlich. In other words, *being-at-home is a retreat from, and therefore just another form of, our not being-at-home in the world, which is the more primordial condition* (see JS: 176-8). Angst fetches Dasein back from the self-assured tranquillized being-at-home, back to its individuation and its not-belonging in the absorption of the 'world'. Thus Dasein's being-in-the world is set in the mode of the unheimlich. Angst is something like an 'alien' voice that 'calls' to Dasein to recover itself from its lostness in the everyday. This voice is a call *from* Dasein *to* itself, from its anonymous existence to its specific manifestation. It constitutes a demand out of the depths of the uncanny to the everyday individual to heed the potentiality of its being. This call approximates a universal conscience that is an 'it' yet a 'no one' yet also a 'something' (see JS: 254-7). This is a call that has no content, no guiding message other than exposing the illusion of a cosy secure world.

Angst returns the individual to 'authenticity' through the 'unheimlich feeling' of realising our homelessness in the world of our demise. A fleeing *towards* the predictable taken-for-granted modes of life constitutes our 'fallenness'; we 'fall' *away from* facing our human condition. It is the call of conscience, in the experience of the unheimlich and attunement to angst, that

⁵⁹ I will refer to the original translation of *Being and Time*, by Macquarrie and Robinson (1962), as (MR...) and to the recent re-translation of *Being and Time* by Joan Stambaugh (1996), as (JS...).

⁶⁰ I will use these terms interchangeably as they appear translated by different authors.

⁶¹ I will need to assume a certain degree of familiarity with Heidegger's thought in order to keep to the task at hand. To recapitulate, 'Dasein' refers to Heidegger's concept of humans as being-in-the-world, unavoidably *of* the world. Literally, Dasein refers to the 'there' of being, humans as a non-dualistic being-there in our worldly situations.

discloses the brute fact *that we are*, in the midst of the *nothing* of the world (see JS:277). To respond to this individualised call instantiates a standing apart from the mass of 'normal living'; those immersed in the distractions offered to them by the world. This *unheimlich* pursues each Dasein who has forgotten what it truly *is*, and demands that a choice be made. Valuing choice, or wanting to expand into one's fuller potential, is an invitation to the *unheimlich*. In Heidegger's words, 'The fact of the *anxiety of conscience*, gives us phenomenal confirmation that in understanding the call Dasein is brought face to face with its own uncanniness' (MR: 296). It is a strange inversion of lost and found in which we find ourselves most fully at the moment when the world sinks into insignificance and we appear most lost in the eyes of the conventional. The found Dasein is not easily re-convinced by the world because it is fascinated by its uncanniness, 'This fascination, however, not only *takes* Dasein back from its '*worldly*' possibilities, but at the same time gives it the possibility of an *authentic* potentiality-for-Being' (Heidegger, MR: 344).

Heidegger's analysis addresses and carries forward facets of the experiences of existential or therapeutic tourism, the global soul, and existential migration. It also summons reconceptualisations of identity and motivation, belonging, and the meaning of home. This reading of Heidegger may initially present as setting the stage for a celebration of the co-researchers as 'existential heroes'. True, these individuals (and undoubtedly many others who never migrate) exhibit sensitivities and construct narratives around themes comparable to Heidegger's 'authenticity'. For example, co-researchers consistently disparage the conventionally unaware lives they encountered at home, opting instead to 'kick themselves alive' through continual confrontation with foreignness, culminating in not-belonging anywhere. Many of our co-researchers report feeling anxious, ambivalent, living in a kind of restlessness and homelessness that may illustrate at least momentary attunement with the *unheimlich* comportment of authentic being. The values of choice, independence, space, and freedom, evident in the co-researcher themes, certainly are reminiscent of Dasein's authentic possibilities and clearly do not convey collusion with tranquillizing 'normality'. However, the co-researchers simultaneously emanate reluctance in accepting this unconcealment.

The current study epitomises a very preliminary stage of a new conceptual development and as such raises more questions than answers. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, from the current vantage point, it seems that existential migration constitutes *both* an affinity for awareness of our groundlessness thus constituting an openness to these aspects of being *and* a fleeing from

confrontation with these givens that are revealed when the habitual breaks down. Experiencing the primordial *unheimlichkeit* of Dasein is presumably not only ‘fascinating’ but simultaneously disconcerting, so it is not surprising that we inevitably ‘fall’ back into the mundane and anaesthetizing world. The fact that our co-researchers seem to continue to look for ‘home’ in some form, indicates that they at least at times, seek the tranquillized ‘at-homeness’ that they are nonetheless unconvinced by. Being-at-home may be the most effective and enduring mode of concealing existential unsettledness, however, once transparent, the camouflage of home may never regain its previous ability to obscure and relax. It is *as if* at some point something⁶² in the individual opens onto potential insights, instigating for some a process of existential migration. Presumably not all such ‘openings’ lead to this process but I would suggest that this process, in turn, does usually include this openness to sensing the *unheimlich*. The concomitant angst of this way of being may inform the motivation to flee, escape, pushing individuals continuously onto new adventures, one step ahead of realisations that are even more difficult to bear and incorporate into a lived biography. But this is speculation that at some point might be formulated into empirical claims or emerge from further phenomenological study. So, if our primordial nature is to be anxiously not-at-home, and recognition of this in turn instigates desires to return to the at-home, engendering circularity in yet another call of conscience, in what sense can we actually *be* on earth at all?

Possible Conceptual Elaborations

The above section represents an inceptive sortie into explicit philosophy and as such begins to generate speculative crossings based upon the insightful experiences of the co-researchers, for example,

1. Unlike ‘existential tourism’, the term ‘global soul’, and most other formulations in this thesis, as a concept ‘existential migration’ incorporates the binary oppositions of the anxious *unheimlich* and the positive potentials of ‘homelessness’, both the experience of displacement and the insatiable thirst for home, without prioritising or pathologising either. This seems a unique feature in the research literature where most commentators align themselves with either the ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ aspects of these experiences to the derogation of the other.
2. The individual call of conscience and consequent separation from ‘the mass’ perhaps sheds light on the individualistic nature of existential migration – that it has a strong tendency to manifest as solitary leaving.

⁶² Reminiscent of Ritivoi’s (2002) ‘narrative kernel’ from Chapter 5.

3. The motivational character of existential migration may be clarified by Heidegger's 'universal call' that issues from no one in particular, with no distinct guiding message – similar in nature to the co-researcher's report of needing to go, and having clear directionality out into the world yet usually no clear goal.
4. It becomes necessary to begin to contemplate a distinction in modes of 'at-homeness' with one form motivated by a desire for tranquillising concealment of the *unheimlich*, and another form founded upon a continuing awareness of the *unheimlich*. One speculates that the first mode constitute at-homeness based upon familiarity while the second is an at-homeness within difference or alterity. The next section on 'homecoming' will explore the second mode.
5. The concept of existential migration is future-oriented, not just tied to the past as in nostalgia.
6. Emphasising existential migration as a process, unlike 'global soul', which is a category, seems more consistent with Heidegger's account. He presents 'fallenness' and 'authenticity' as potentials, processes one can dip in and out of rather than typological classifications of kinds of persons.

A Phenomenology of Dwelling and Homecoming

In *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, Heidegger (1964: 347-63) positions dwelling as a sphere of preservation of the essence of mortal human beings. We must learn to dwell.

What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *proper* plight of dwelling as *the* plight? Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that *calls* mortals into their dwelling (Heidegger, 1964: 363).

In his text *What is Called Thinking* (1968) Heidegger concerns himself with our possibility to learn to dwell in our proper place, in reference to avoiding the danger of 'commonness'. Our living on earth is problematic but humans can bring their plight 'to light', though we must make clear that this 'bringing to light' is always infused with understandings, history and culture (though not reducible to that, as if that is *all* there is). In order to hear this calling we must pass from the familiar at-home, 'natural' and apparently obvious, to the strange or *unheimlich*. 'We must learn to dwell in this uncanny place where we apparently are not at home in what is said and thought' (Heidegger, c.f. Mugerauer, 1988:157). The first great obstacle is our tendency to ignore what deserves to be questioned because it seems so obvious within our 'natural attitude' to living. Here then is a paradox: somehow the strangeness of the not-at-home can offer us an 'authentic dwelling place', a 'home' qualitatively different from an inauthentic taken-for-granted hominess.

Heidegger refers to Holderlin's hymn 'The Ister River' (c.f. Ibid:188-9) as suggestive that mortals can only feel at home in a place that admits them through providing water, food, rivers, fields. Heidegger's 'four-fold gathering' hints at our originary home and way of dwelling on earth, and in the following he instigates a partial rejoinder to the question 'how can we live in the unfamiliar and also be at home?'

This is Dasein's fundamental uncanniness: the state in which it finds itself is never all that it is or could be, and so never something with which it can fully identify or to which it can be reduced – so that Dasein can never regard itself as domesticated, fully at-home with whatever state or form of life and world it finds itself inhabiting... [The call] is definable by nothing more concrete than the fact of its calling: it is the voice of Dasein as 'not-at-home', as the bare there-Being (Dasein) in the nothingness which remains when it is wrenched from its familiar absorption in the world, and that world stands forth as the arena for Dasein's projective understanding (Mulhall, 1996: 127).

Though we must be cautious not to surreptitiously and unthinkingly institute a hierarchy of Dasein's modes of responsiveness, the presentation of Heidegger's thought does invoke the plight of existential migration, in which some individuals have made difficult solitary choices to try to pursue their being-potentials, often leaving uncomprehending family and friends behind. This incomprehension seems to present a stark contrast between those who do not enter the strange, hear or follow the call of conscience, and those few who, exacerbated by an environmental not-belonging which itself may have been predicated upon pre-existing difference, were *lead* into a position where the anxiety of the unheimlich-at-home presents itself consequent with an 'authentic' response to leave since there exists no comparable they-response to stay. There is much that is strange, but nothing that surpasses man in strangeness (Heidegger, 1961:123). Herein we have the configuration of a homelessness that calls us to 'authentic dwelling' in which we preserve the essence of what is human. Without this homelessness we do not dwell. Existential migration is an invitation to dwelling, an invitation requiring acceptance or refusal.

Homecoming and the Return Home

Even those individuals who choose to leave home continue to live in some relation to the question of return. Differentially, some want to return, or are vexed by the question of whether it is possible, or certain they would never return, but no one was indifferent to the issue. Feelings about returning home seem to be in a perpetual process for many – changing depending on circumstances at home or in the foreign place, with perhaps some indication that feelings of wanting to return increase as people age. Returning home to settle can be a complex geo-psychological task and an opportunity to assess the transformations that have occurred in one's self while away constituting a psychological and philosophical process of

healing as much as a geographical process of relocation. The difficulties of return increase the longer one remains away, partly because over time the individual and the homeland respectively continue to evolve, moving further apart.

It is often assumed that the return home or the contemplated return is instigated by feelings of 'homesickness'. It is noteworthy that 'homesickness' rarely featured as terminology from the interviews and did not emerge as a distinct theme. However, in commencement of the discussion of returning home it seems appropriate to briefly cross the nuanced meanings from the interviews with a brief history and some current phenomenological conceptions of homesickness in order to elaborate and further contextualise the divergent experience of existential migration. In an article on the history of nostalgia, Stephanie Pain (2003) describes the 'terrible longing for home' experienced by Swiss soldiers serving as mercenaries. It refers to medical observations made in the late 17th century that some of the soldiers wanted to go home so badly that if they couldn't they died. The diagnosis was termed 'nostalgia' or homesickness and it had a list of associated symptoms and prescribed treatment. The potentially fatal disease was also observed amongst foreign students and in one account the student suffering from 'homesickness' or nostalgia, began to improve immediately upon the suggestion that he return home. Johannes Hofer, the young medical student who coined the term 'nostalgia' concluded that it especially afflicted 'those *forced* to leave home and who found it hard to adjust to strange people and customs' (Pain, 2003:48). First signs of the disease were detected when the victim wandered about sad, *scorned foreign manners*, had disturbed sleep and thought only of their homeland. Though there were a variety of disgusting 'treatments', the main remedy was to give the patient all hope that they could return home when physically well enough. The diagnosis spread and became established as medical fact, confirmed by a post mortem revealing changes in the brain, heart, lungs, and intestines. The syndrome passed from fashion but was temporarily revived during the American civil war, when Union soldiers fighting far from home displayed the same symptoms, with 58 soldiers eventually dying from 'nostalgia'. Eventually psychiatrists introduced new syndromes; depression, nervous breakdown, anorexia, and malingering, and nostalgia was consigned to history. Obviously this curious historical aside presents another counterpoint for consideration of the unique qualities exhibited by the co-researchers in their orientation to being away from home. This account, mistakenly I would suggest, assigns homesickness and nostalgia to forced migrants who cannot adjust to the new place and who *desire return*, rather than a potential response by any migrant and not necessarily requiring action (see Ritivoi, 2002 for a more inclusive description of nostalgia).

In her exploration of the topic, Anne Winning (2002) writes that homesickness indicates the missing of a place where we feel a sense of 'ownness' or intimate familiarity. In doing so, Winning once again equates the familiar with safety, a sense of belonging and intimate connection. While this may often be the case, according to the co-researchers, an experience of the familiar is not the only sense that can be longed for, even desperately. Is 'far-sickness' any more than feeling 'homesick' for the strange, the unknown, and the foreign? Although Winning tries to make a distinction between 'strangeness' and homesickness ('one may like the strange aspects of a new country') there remains a reified prioritising of origin and sameness in her account reminiscent of Steinbock's analysis. From our co-researchers we learn that we can long for home without any intention of ever returning home, in essence homesick for something lost but not necessarily for something cosy and retrievable. Perhaps homesickness, like 'home', can be seen as an interaction. It comes upon anyone, potentially, at the most surprising moments and then recedes again; like a wave it rises and falls. Homesickness may come without necessarily assuming the sensibilities that Winning describes.

To admit of leaving for an indefinite time is tantamount to saying that this history [of one's home] is of no significance to your life. To speak of a future away from home is to deny home and its future (Winning, 2002:8).

In existential migration a person may leave home yet never shake its haunting presence, long for home yet undoubtedly see no future for himself there. Paradoxically, we have maintained a 'special connection' to a homeworld even though we may rarely have *felt at-home* there. It may be this quandary that ascribes such poignancy to the dilemmas of leaving or staying, returning or wandering on.

Stephen Shaw (2002), in his phenomenological self-exploration of returning home, points out the significance of leaving and returning *to family*,

Many people, either by choice or necessity, find themselves living apart from some or all the members of their family. Often the distance that separates is considerable - a continent or an ocean. Familiar constraints of time, money, opportunity, and other obstacles less easily discerned create a gap not only of distance but also of time. Loss of living within a family is frequently one of those things that is not thought about to any great extent until that loss actually is experienced. The distance and the sense of loss can then assume a great proportion and exert a pressing demand that we make the effort to return and visit our families. The experience of returning to our families is always significant and, depending on the factors involved, on occasions profound. In searching for the ground of that experience, I have asked myself the questions: What is it to experience returning to the community of one's family?

What is it like, after an absence of many years, to journey back to the family of one's birth and the home one left? (2002:2)

Shaw wants to explore the 'ground' of this question by interpreting return as re-turn, in the sense of re-viewing and re-making. However, as is the emerging pattern, Shaw also equates home with positive notions of certainty, the known, security, protection, familiarity, predictability, and a primordial sense of belonging. Though he neglects exploration of the prerequisite leaving, he does describe the return as imbued with the feeling of having been excluded from all the intervening living that can never be regained. 'I am ... part of and not part of, part of but not belonging' (Shaw, 2002:4). Though the one who left remains part of the family, he or she is now an outsider, the gap they left having been filled in long ago so that they are no longer part of those deep-seated family interactions. There is a sense that one should belong but that one no longer does; the returnee's role is artificial in the re-constituted pathways of family life. *The one who left, can, at best, be special*. By being away we have elaborated our beings with numerous new interactions. Likewise, the ones who stayed have continued to elaborate their living, so that when we return, body-to-body again, there is a new situation between us, an interaction of the intervening years of differential elaborations, forming something still familiar while simultaneously strangely new and unpredictable. Shaw inscribes the dynamic of staying, leaving, returning, into the definition of home,

The symbolic character of the notion "home" is emotionally evocative and hard to describe ... home means one thing to the man who has never left it, another thing to the man who lives far from it, and still another to him who returns ... [it] is an expression of the highest degree of familiarity and intimacy (Schutz, 1971:107-108, c.f. Shaw, 2002:7).

On the question of migration and homecoming, its nascent significance may reside in the fact that 'man goes out on the sea and on land, masters the earth and the animals, teaches himself language and thought, cures illnesses, and yet comes to nothing, for he cannot escape death' (Warminski, 1990:196). Man sets out towards that which is different and always returns to the 'same', yet, not 'same' as in identical because he who returns has in the interim been elaborated by time, voyage, adventure, longing... In Andrzej Warminski's (1990) reading of Heidegger, it is clear that man is more *unheimlich* than anything else *unheimlich* because man's essence is in 'coming to be at home' which means man's essence is in *coming*, not '*being* at home'. If 'man has to *come to be* at home, then he *is* not at home; if man *is* not at home, then he has to *come to be* at home' (Ibid: 199). Of course this 'coming to be at home' implies that man perhaps remains always not at home. Intrinsic to this perspective is the

intuition that the human relation to Being is grounded in the homelessness intimately illustrated by one's experience of the *unheimlich*.

In terms of existential migration, the suggestion is that we are not-at-home *not* because we have been exiled *from* home, but rather because we have been *exiled by home from ourselves*. The tranquillized home distances us from the self that calls, via anxiety, to be known as the elusive and ungraspable. However, this call is silenced in the mass, who remain safe and secure, comfortable and lost, *at home*. The coming-to-be-at-home in the foreign may imply a *coming to be found*, which is at least a finding oneself in authentic relation with the *unheimlich* – coming home to no longer being lost, though perhaps never *being at home* (in either the authentic or fallen sense)⁶³.

Heidegger continued to be preoccupied with the question of home during his life. In the introduction to his book on Heidegger's later thought, George Pattison (2000) presents Heidegger as epitomising the entire human situation as one of ontological homelessness, 'meaning that on this earth we have no abiding home, since we are not embedded in the world as a part of nature. Instead we are, as it were, thrown into the world, into a life we did not choose but which, now we are here, we must choose or, in one of myriad ways, evade' (Pattison, 2000:9). For example, giving a lecture in his hometown in 1961 (c.f. Pattison, 2000:60), Heidegger refers to the television aerials atop most roofs as signifying a future where most of us will no longer be 'at home' even in our own homes. The television allows me to be somewhere else, on safari, at the racetrack, in the midst of another family's turmoil.

Spellbound and pulled onward by all this, humanity is, as it were, in a process of emigration. It is emigrating from what is homely [*Heimisch*] to what is unhomely [*Unheimisch*]. There is a danger that what was once called home [*Heimat*] will dissolve and disappear. The power of the unhomely seems to have so overpowered humanity that it can no longer pit itself against it. How can we defend ourselves against the pressure of the unhomely? Only by this: that we continually enable the bestowing and healing and preserving strength of what is homely to flow, to create proper channels in which they can flow and so exert their influence (Heidegger, 1978, *Gesamtausgabe*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, c.f. Ibid: Pattison, 2000: 60).

⁶³ If 'being' is in a state of 'becoming', then the antithesis of Being is completion. It is in sedimentation, conclusiveness, and completeness that Being is covered over. Thus the movement of existential migration could, in its *authentic* manifestation, be seen as an attempt to remain aware of Being, by keeping closely related to becoming, to anxiety, and to death. It would be an intriguing study to explore the 'existential migrant's' relation to mortality.

Heidegger is concerned that the whole of humanity is forgetting itself amidst the technological revolution and sailing into a forsaken state of total homelessness. This is not the authentic *unheimlich* but rather an alienated lostness. The suggestion is that we can venture out 'humanly' into the foreign even along with new technologies only if we maintain our connection to the source, otherwise such venturing is an evasion of what it is to be human. Heidegger refers to wanderers who have been far from home, in remote places, as being the ones capable of bringing home the message concerning the origins that have otherwise been forgotten (see Heidegger, 1978:vol.4:23-4, c.f. Ibid:179). This source can only be pointed at poetically. *According to Heidegger, what is most authentic for humanity is always what is out of the ordinary.* Such sentiments clearly echo the attitudes and experiences of many of the co-researchers. Homecoming, then, is not the return home to a geographical (and cultural) place, but more a *felt* (adding Gendlin to Heidegger) departure from the aforesaid global homelessness represented by superficial hominess back into the mystery of the world. I would suggest that based upon the interviews and these conceptual elaborations, the process of existential migration exemplifies both the 'globally lost' and the 'authentic' forms of not being-at-home, illustrated for example in the ambiguity towards 'home'; at times inhabiting a space forged by the tension of longing for homey completion and simultaneous abhorrence of its 'natural attitude'.

In a series of lecture courses in Freiburg in 1941-2, Heidegger used Holderlin's poetry to elaborate his ideas that estrangement, 'confrontation with otherness and the alien', allows a kind of self-discovery of one's endowments. The self goes abroad not to 'get lost in strangeness' but to 'ready itself there for its own tasks' (c.f. Dallmayr, 1993:153-55). According to Heidegger, 'self' and 'homeland' are not ready-made and possessed, but acquired through a difficult search, involving various modes of alienation. Patient and sustained reflection are required. This reminds us that the self is not the 'completed, totalised, and whole' object of realism initially at home 'at home' since this would be a 'dead dynamic' and would not lead to the discovery of endowments. Self-discovery is required and this points to a 'homecoming', 'the spirit of home yearns itself for otherness from where alone a return home is possible' (Heidegger, *Holderlin's Hymne*, 124-28, c.f. Ibid:155). This is not adventure for adventure's sake, it is not a self-indulgent addiction to excitement, rather it is a subdued and reticent 'reflective glimpse of self-being' (see Ibid:156). It is important to understand that 'adventure' in the sense criticised here, is a kind of macho, hard-nosed conquering attitude toward otherness and a way of taking refuge from the world waiting for

discovery⁶⁴. Heidegger and Holderlin are extolling a transformative 'hero's journey' as a process of learning, in which the journey abroad is simultaneously a return to the self as the site of responsiveness and transformation. Homecoming and self-discovery are synonyms for a kind of 'going to the source' to attempt the difficult task of realising one's self-distinctiveness⁶⁵.

Homecoming does not point towards a home that is a fixed abode, but rather it indicates an 'in-between place of transit – a zone located between self and other, between proximity and distance, and also between mortals and immortals' (Dallmayr, 1993:159). *Man is unique in his sense of alienation and alone in his need for homecoming*. Rather than an adventurer, an errancy from place to place, driven by curiosity, man is *driven* to diligently traverse the earth's terrain looking to come home. The adventurer in contrast, is a spurious figure not interested in learning, intent on denying home, attempting to indiscriminately substitute the foreign for home, 'thereby losing the sense of either place' (Ibid;163). Therefore, estrangement and homelessness are ambiguous, meaning either the denial of home and the forgetting of being or the homecoming journey guided by a remembrance of being and belongingness.

As described earlier, Heidegger emphasises 'dwelling place' rather than abstract space in a Cartesian sense to declare that place is not location, but lived experience, understood as a poetic proximity to the essence of things (Elden, 1999: 262). Dwelling is not, as we've seen, referring to possessing a house or accommodation. Dwelling grounds one's essence; it is related to place as a specific and an experiential setting down of the human on earth. Heidegger wants to avoid our usual technological ideas of space and time and replaces them with 'place' and 'journeying', through which 'humans come to be at home' (Heidegger, c.f. Elden, 1999:268). Commenting on Holderlin's poem 'Homecoming', Heidegger suggests that 'homecoming is the return into the proximity of the origin... then must not the return

⁶⁴ Such 'adventure' is scarcely deserving of the term in its appropriation of the unknown into the unreflective space of the homeworld even when abroad.

⁶⁵ As an antidote to homogenization and the subjectivity of Western philosophy, contemporary writings have begun to stress 'otherness', non-identity and the need for exile. For example, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1986) emphasises what he terms 'nomadic thought', '... a nomadic type of thinking and experiencing which, forever 'abroad', completely cancels native attachments or any rootedness in a home or settled abode' (Dallmayr, 1993:149). This thought is radically opposed to the settled or uniform or even the return to 'the same' espoused by Heidegger.

home consist chiefly, and perhaps for a long time, in getting to know this mystery, or even first of all in learning how to get to know it' (Heidegger, 1943 c.f. Elden, 1999:268-9). Accordingly, the spiritual and mystical merge into the depth of the migratory process as the connecting adventure out and the subdued return 'home'.

Homecoming as a Spiritual Belonging

Leaving home can initiate a spiritual quest that cannot be undertaken within the confines of the home environs. Travel is a valued mode of 'conscious living', keeping a person aware of surroundings and preventing a slip into habitual and less mindful ways of being. Exploring the world can be guided by an 'inner calling' that seems to be a manifestation of an intuitive connection to a transpersonal dimension. Seeking out contact with unfamiliar and mysterious cultures offers the experience of a 'matching' with the mystery one finds within one's own being. This matching between person and world can generate a temporary feeling of belonging in the universe. The return home, after years abroad, can express a spiritual dimension of reconnection and psychological healing of self, or family, or even addressing trans-historical dilemmas and a willingness to confront the givens of existence.

In a series of phenomenological interviews, Adams (1999) explores moments of communion in which the self-world boundary seems to dissolve, serving as departure points into deeper spiritual development and even 'altered traits of character'. He concludes that 'the interpermeating communion of self and world is *always already here*, always immanent and ongoing, always potentially available' (Ibid:47). The implication being that this experience is intrinsic to all human beings though we have all sorts of ways of evoking defensive barriers against not experiencing it. Referring to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Adams concludes that the 'deepest insights of phenomenology correspond intimately with those from the world's spiritual traditions' (Adams,1999:55). Adams goes on to show convincing comparisons between the imminent phenomenologists and spiritual thinkers such as Thich Nhat Hanh, D.T. Suzuki, Meister Eckhart, Krishnamurti, and various Buddhist thinkers.

In a unique and moving text, *Eternal Echoes - Exploring our Hunger to Belong*, (1998) the Irish writer John O'Donohue presents 'belonging' as the human attempt to bridge the gap between isolation and intimacy. It is, he thinks, far more important than status, achievement and possessions, and without a true sense of belonging, life is empty and pointless. At the heart of individuality there is a profound necessity, a hunger to belong,

To be human is to belong. Belonging is a circle that embraces everything; if we reject it, we damage our nature. The word 'belonging' holds together two fundamental aspects of life: being and longing, the Longing of our being and the Being of our longing. Belonging is deep;

only in a superficial sense does it refer to our external attachment to people, places and things ... Our life's journey is the task of refining our belonging so that it may become more true, loving, good and free. We do not have to force belonging. The longing within us always draws us towards belonging, and again towards new forms of belonging, when we have outgrown the old ones (O'Donohue, 1998:3).

Clearly, O'Donohue is not advocating a mode of belonging which is simply a fleeing from reality, 'When you suppress your wild longing and *opt for the predictable and safe forms of belonging*, you sin against the rest of nature that longs to live deeply through you' (Ibid: 6, *italics added*). There is a 'voice of longing' which awakens the knowledge that something unnameable is missing, forcing some people to 'begin a haunted journey on a never-ending path in quest of the something that is missing...' (Ibid: 14-5). This may equate with Heidegger's anxious 'call', and as such may attest to the motivation to depart into existential migration. O'Donohue, reminiscent of Heidegger and compatible with some of the co-researcher narratives, suggests that we are 'relentless pilgrims' on earth and that our unease is natural and inconsolable. The belonging of the pilgrim and the permanent native differs, and the visitor's presence is easily identified and marginalised. According to O'Donohue, this wanderer prioritises longing over belonging. No place can convincingly lay claim to him or her. 'A new horizon always calls' (Ibid:65). O'Donohue, consistent with aforementioned themes, cannot answer why such a person is committed to foreign adventure, values freedom, and travels with an urgency that has no goal. To him or her, staying in one place is more a threat than any change could be. In his evocative descriptions, O'Donohue closely approximates recapitulation of my own questions and elaborations of existential migration though in considerably more poetic and romantic language.

The soul and the spirit are wanderers; their place of origin and destination remain unknown; they are dedicated to the discovery of what is unknown and strange (Ibid: 68).

O'Donohue believes that society is designed to quell the voice of lonesomeness and banishment within each of us, thereby forever exiling an essential part of the human being. Domestication is thus a reduction of our humanity and the most 'authentic' response may be to try to come to terms with the wilderness of the world that is both fecund and lonely. This is a type of homecoming, to the intimate mysteries of life that remain untamed and undomesticated. 'The homeless mind is haunted by a sense of absence that it can neither understand nor transfigure' (Ibid: 324). O'Donohue proclaims that the growth of belonging consists in transition rather than clinging on to sedentariness.

O'Donohue suggests, like Iyer, that perhaps the journey (or the question) itself is 'where' we belong. We belong to a life process rather than a place, but this is not the secure and cosy belonging of the familiar neighbourhood. In O'Donohue's words, 'The most intimate community is the community of understanding. Where you are understood, you are at home' (Ibid: 370). The co-researcher narratives echo this statement within the themes on belonging wherein home relations had commonly misconstrued the individual through desires for conformity while the 'tribe' of fellow internationalists were often indicated as providing respectful understanding. O'Donohue's perspective coalesces within the existential orbit of this chapter, however in contradistinction to Heidegger's primordial homelessness, he proposes an idealised, almost mythopoetic time when we were all once at home, rooted in our origin, but since cast out like sinners from Eden.

The Mythic History of Coming Home

As widely acknowledged (Kristeva, 1986; Ritivoi, 2002; Hoffman, 1999; Papadopoulos, 2002; Campbell, 2004), world mythology incorporates the ubiquitous centrality of the motif of migration and homecoming. The myth of Genesis could be read as the story of humankind's first exile and suggests that since then we have all on some level felt that we are in exile. Of course Genesis is one of many world narratives and the fact that these stories illustrate such similarly tragic dilemmas suggests *something* fundamental about the human condition is expressed in these accounts and likewise in the accounts of the co-researchers. There are various myths of exile in the Greek, Christian, Celtic and Judaic traditions, exemplified discursively in Howard Swartz's (2004) *Tree of Souls*. Another example, (Papadopoulos, 2002) analyses Homer's *Odyssey*, as illustrative of the distinction between simplistic return and the deeper process of homecoming as necessitating a gradual re-connecting and reintegration with home, including enhanced self awareness. At this point in the thesis I only offer to remind the reader of the universality of such dilemmas by outlining brief instances below and to raise the intriguing disjuncture between the contemporary lack of acknowledgment of existential migration and the myriad samples of corroborative narratives especially but not exclusively in ancient literature.

A Greek tale narrates the tragedy of Idomeneus, Minos's grandson, who was a co-leader with Agamemnon for the Greeks at Troy. Idomeneus promised to sacrifice the first person he saw when he returned home safely from the wars, but the first person turned out to be his son.

Now, upon his return from foreign shores, Idomeneus finds himself doomed to inescapable exile no matter what he does: either he kills his son and keeps his vow, which would horrify his people so much that they would demand his banishment, or he would spare his son and break his promise to the gods, which would equally lead to his exile. Idomeneus is thereby caught in the tension of having to leave in order to survive yet longing for the impossible return. Likewise in Celtic mythology, the unfortunate Naoise incurred the wrath of King Conchobar Mac Nessa by eloping with his daughter, the beautiful Deirdre. The couple were subsequently forced to flee to Scotland where they lived in exile under threat of death if they ever returned home. Tragically, but perhaps significantly if we read the story psychologically, their eventual return resulted in their deaths as well as strife for the whole community, ending in a divided nation where there was previously a harmonious unity. Kevin McLaughlin (1993) argues that such themes linking disaster with exile are not only present in myth but that western literature as a whole is based upon themes of the 'founding of a household [as] ... the plot of plots' (Ibid:875) and the novel itself as the genre of 'homelessness' or 'displacement'. The author cites various works to detect the significance of domesticity and home, arguing that the etymology of home is rooted in the Indo-European *dem-* signifying the delineation of inside and outside (Ibid: 876). Current examples of exilic literature will be described in the next chapter. Below is a popular twentieth century example with similar motifs.

An interpretation of the climax of JRR Tolkien's trilogy, *The Return of the King. The Lord of the Rings Part III*. (1967), reveals a distinct seam of migration, the hero's journey, and exile. The story ends with the return of the main characters to their homeland in the Shire but the primary hero of the story, Frodo, has suffered an injury in the course of his mission to save the world from darkness. Tolkien describes the return to the Shire in sentiments which at once take on a metaphoric tone, evoking comparison with the stories of existential migration described by co-researchers. For example, Frodo, in conversation with the wise wizard Gandalf, refers to the wound in his shoulder as they ride towards home, in response Gandalf says,

'Alas! There are some wounds that cannot be wholly cured'.

'I fear it may be so with mine', said Frodo. 'There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?'

Gandalf did not answer (Ibid:323).

As they near the Shire, one of Frodo's companions remarks on their entry back into familiar lands and how their adventures and former comrades from other lands are already fading from memory as if it was all a dream, to which Frodo responds, 'Not to me', said Frodo. 'To me [returning home] feels more like falling asleep again' (Ibid:333). There has always been something different about Frodo, for example his intense interest in the adventures of the wide world recounted by his eccentric uncle. Now, having experienced other lands and his loss of innocence, Frodo cannot adapt to the genteel life of the Shire. Not that Frodo had lost his love of the place, no, that was as intact for him as it was for his companions. But unlike his companions, Frodo could not stay. Sam, his closest friend settles down and marries, the Shire is the only place he really wants to be, though he still feels a loyalty to follow his 'master' Frodo, and thus feels 'torn in two'. Frodo acknowledges this, 'Poor Sam! It will feel like that, I am afraid', said Frodo. 'But you will be healed. You were meant to be solid and whole and you will be' (Ibid:372). Sam does not understand Frodo's need to leave, 'I thought that you were going to enjoy the Shire, too, for years and years, after all you have done' (Ibid: 375-6). Frodo replies,

'I thought so too, once. But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them...' (Ibid:376).

Frodo rides off with Gandalf and Sam returns to his wife, children, and home, where the fire is lit and the evening meal prepared. The combination of powerful themes in Tolkien's opus lends it to almost inexhaustible various readings. I offer only that this section serves, among many other things, as an example of the loss and ambivalent desires of what I am calling existential migration, including the possible experiences of leaving, return, and leaving behind. Frodo is not leaving for riches or to escape oppression. He is leaving because his 'wound', a consequence of who he is, interacts with his world in such a way that he can no longer be at home 'at home'. Though space does not permit further exploration of the tantalising occurrences of themes of existential migration in world myth and western literature, in the next chapter I will explore some of the evocative ideas of migrant writers and their accounts of leaving home and being foreigners, hopefully adding to the experiential aliveness of the concept I'm attempting to present.

Possible Conceptual Elaborations

In the development and modification of the thesis, this last section is prominent as the most provisional and evocative thus far. It also presents complex discernments regarding the nature of existential migration and the deepest motivations of individuals engaged in this process, as exemplified by the co-researchers. Following are some issues lifted out by the discussion above:

1. The concept of existential migration provides an opportunity for semantic discernments in terms like home, homelessness, and belonging, offering crucial distinctions with philosophic import.
2. To date the concept has lifted out discriminations in modes of homelessness, as either authentic or signifying lostness. 'Authentic homelessness' offers the potential for human dwelling in awareness of the unheimlich dimension in life. The latter definition signifies a conventional 'hominess'. *Existential migration as a process admits both possibilities as two diverse responses to not being-at-home in the world.* It is possible that certain co-researchers were not at-home authentically and others, at the time of the interview, were conventionally 'lost' in the dilemmas and ontic tensions of their not at-homeness. However, such process discernments can only be self-ascribed at any one time, not attributed diagnostically by another.
3. The concept does not prescribe an axiological hierarchy or pathology of modes of responsiveness – the fallen and authentic are descriptive terms though the latter has greater emphasis as counterbalance within the context of its modern neglect.
4. Migration, specifically voluntary existential migration (not all voluntary migration is existential, for example moving for career promotion), seems to sustain enhanced possibilities for self-awareness; authenticity and 'homecoming' arising from confrontation with alienness and the non-ordinary, though these possibilities are not automatic and require choice.
5. Existential migration emerges with psychological, philosophical and spiritual dimensions, however if not chosen, this process can 'degrade' into distracting adventure, which may also be potentially transformative in distinct ways (perhaps generating curiosity and increased awareness of political and economic issues for example).
6. The 'call' to leave home may manifest in similar ways to the 'call of conscience' in that co-researchers have described 'having to go' but without destination or clear goal. If so, then the term *existential migration* seems validated and may constitute, for some individuals, a temporary occasion for 'remembrance of being'.
7. The significance of individual orientations towards death in motivations to embark upon a process of existential migration is indicated but requires further exploration and research.
8. *The concept of existential migration clarifies the possibility that 'home' in its conventional sense constitutes true exile* from values such as authenticity, awareness, pursuing self-potential, freedom, and the ineffability of existence. One's orienting values determine which process is considered exile and which is 'home'. This reawakening of orienting axiology may be reflected in similar themes from world mythic and spiritual literature.
9. Existential migration suggests *process versions* for the concepts of space and time (lived space, directionality, embodied journeying) rather than objective spectator categories of three-dimensional emptiness and chronology. These are in keeping with recent conceptual developments in philosophy (see Gendlin, 1997).

Chapter 7. The Sensitivities of Existential Migration, Practical Implications, Psychoanalysis, and Literature

Introduction

This constitutes the final chapter before my concluding summary and is characterised by its eclectic nature. This contribution serves four primary functions, incorporating minor adjuncts to previously explored subject matter in order to remain comprehensive regarding co-researcher themes from Part One, comparing an overview of the process of existential migration with contemporary research in acculturation, revisiting psychoanalytic conceptualisations in comparison with the more embracing conceptual development of existential migration, and concluding by offering three brief references to exilic literature to illustrate the omission of narratives similar to those of the co-researchers. As such, the chapter is distinguished by its breadth, encompassing the conceptual, practical, and evocative.

Sensitivities Evident in Existential Migration

It seems that anything is worth sacrificing in order to maintain the freedom to chose one's self. Life is meaningless unless it is self-directed and a degree of personal space is necessary for the reflective space within which self-direction manifests. Migration can occur in order to escape encroachment and to protect freedom and independence. The loss of freedom is deeply distressing, approximating the death of the 'self'. To follow the call to independence, freedom and choice, one must trust one's own voice, and have a degree of self-confidence. The challenge of unfamiliar situations offers the possibility of continuous development while the comfort of the familiar is felt as stagnation. Some individuals display a marked affinity to otherness, the unfamiliar, differences in many forms and this typically sets them apart from others in their environment. These people shun the conventional in favour of diversity and seek foreign cultures that better reflect their values. Personal difference is valued when it confers a status of being special but it is avoided if possible when it results in rejection. It remains a mystery why these specific individuals exhibit these values regarding difference often in the midst of a milieu that values similarity. There may be indications of sedentary equivalencies of values evident in existential migration, for example 'inner journeying', academic studies, and social activism.

The description above establishes a review of many of the topics previously tendered, for example the affinity to individualism and associated values of independence, spatial needs, choice, and freedom, as explored in sections on identity, belonging, and home. Here they are

reconsidered as salient sensitivities definitive of a process of existential migration. For example, in consideration of freedom, there is a common reference to distinctions between 'freedom from' and 'freedom to', also called 'reflective' and 'reactive autonomy' (Sato and McCann, 1998). Reflective autonomy refers to having a sense of freedom and choice about one's actions, and reactive autonomy refers to a tendency to function defensively and withdraw from social interactions in order to avoid the influence of others. On the basis of the co-researcher interviews, there is evidence of both types of autonomy – with indications that in order to have a sense of *free choice* to self-determination there must pre-exist some sense of *freedom from* the intrusive encroachment by others, and homogeneous culture generally. This suggests an intimate process connecting the two 'forms' of freedom. The act of leaving may exemplify reactive autonomy while simultaneously constituting the necessary conditions of a potential for reflective autonomy. Many of the co-researchers explicitly described the interrelationship between physical and reflective space, the first inviting the second, absence of the first precluding a satisfying form of the second. Remaining in the home environment presumably presents fewer options for inaugurating a semblance of autonomy, options such as a protective withdrawal into isolated self-reflection, which suggests a poor approximation of the autonomy offered in departure. Again, this is one of numerous avenues for future research into details that cannot be comprehensively explored in the current project. However, of the above listed sensitivities, perhaps it is the ubiquitous and pronounced 'attraction to difference' that constitutes a definitive aspect of existential migration and its divergence from conventional settled forms of life. It is obvious from the co-researcher interviews that attraction to difference (eg. other cultures) coexists within some need for sameness (eg. congregating with other foreigners), reminding us that this does not constitute a mutually exclusive dichotomy, 'to value sameness or stability is not tantamount to rejecting difference or resisting adjustment' (Ritivoi, 2002:10).

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva (1991) offers a poetic text on foreignness, alternating between philosophy, cultural criticism, and depth analysis, by proclaiming 'the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity...' (1991:1). Yet the one who actually chooses to leave, according to Kristeva, is 'poorly loved', is 'inaccessible', a stranger to his mother, riveted to a certain and inaccessible elsewhere, he is indifferent to any pleas to stay and must seek an invisible 'beyond'. This foreigner has a perspective that makes everything, including himself, relative and indifferent, while the 'settled' are rutted in unacknowledged sediment, mediocre by comparison. The foreigner is aloof at least because

unlike the settled, he has actively *chosen* – to leave is seen as active while staying is considered passive. In leaving home, the foreigner transmutes discomfort into resistance. I will present a few instances where Kristeva's evocation crosses with the experiences of existential migration.

According to Kristeva, the foreigner does not emphasise the origin as much as others do, he has fled the origin though it continues to fester, pain, and enrich. The origin continues to haunt but it is the *elsewhere* or the '*nowhere* versus the roots' where he has invested his hopes. The universal need to belong is partially transferred from the origin to the cosmopolitan, the past to the future. Contrary to the Grinbergs' (1989) orthodox psychoanalysis, Kristeva believes that leaving shatters repression, revealing a daring freedom. The foreigner challenges the identity of the group and of himself, mixing 'humility with arrogance, suffering with domination, a feeling of having been wounded and being all-powerful' (Ibid:42). She depicts Freud's conception of the uncanny as a 'foreignness' that 'creeps into the tranquillity of reason itself... Henceforth, we know that we are foreigners to ourselves, and it is with the help of that sole support that we can attempt to live with others (Ibid:170). She continues her analysis by suggesting that the Freudian unconscious takes in the strange in a way that it loses its pathological aspect, integrating an 'otherness' that becomes integral to the same, revealing us as divided with a foreign core. This re-working of traditional psychoanalysis brings us much closer to an existential dimension in which the uncanny or *unheimlich* is a part of our existence rather than a sign of pathology.

After a lengthy discussion of the limits of Freudian and analytic thought in reference to the uncanny (and the suggestion that literature or Heideggerian philosophy might pick up where psychoanalysis subsides), Kristeva comes to the conclusion that 'To worry or to smile, such is the choice when we are assailed by the strange; our decision depends on how familiar we are with our own ghosts' (Ibid:191). She also points out that it is surprising that foreigners are not explicitly mentioned in descriptions of the uncanny or *unheimlich*. She considers it quite plausible that xenophobia includes some attempt to negate the *unheimlich*. The foreigner reminds us of what we reject as strange within ourselves. In this formulation rejection of the foreigner (or presumably the outcast at home) can be thought of as the struggle to remain at home within ourselves, to reject our own unfathomability. The uncanny strangeness of the foreigner comprises what in fact is the same between us; we are both foreign, to self and other – foreignness is the bedrock of the world, in which there is a momentary recognition

that none of us belong. If the foreign is the basis of the shared as well as our distance from each other, then we have discerned two definitions of 'foreign' – the ontological⁶⁶ in which the foreign is our founding commonality and the ontic, in which the foreign is created in the act of rejection of a constituting mystery within one's own 'self'. This invites questions regarding the motivations harboured within the environment's designation of many of the co-researchers as 'different' (foreign). Did these individuals surreptitiously threaten an unheimlich intrusion into established hominess? One can only speculate about how this might have informed the experience of our co-researchers in its impact upon self-other interrelationships in the homeworld. It also suggests further elaborations of the comparable binary homeworld/alienworld previously presented by Steinbock.

Kristeva's account, beautiful and pessimistic, certainly describes some aspects of the experience of existential migration, yet leaves out others. She seems oblivious to the more positive and optimistic aspects of the foreigner. She recommends an antithetical perspective to the equally unbalanced depiction of voluntary migration as all rosy postmodern potential, supplanting this scene with one of opaque hopelessness. She ultimately dwells, perhaps for theoretical reasons, on the dark absences, exemplifying speculative academics that scurry perhaps too quickly from the lived into the purely intellectual.

Possible Conceptual Elaborations

1. Realisation that the co-researcher personal sensitivities are already implicit within the major themes and processes depicted offers credence to the conceptualisation of existential migration as a 'way of being' with ontic-ontological significance in its conflation of explicit individual sensitivities with deeper ontological meanings.
2. These individual sensitivities require more detailed explication and discernment in future phenomenological research.
3. Co-researchers' sensitivities for both 'freedom-to' and 'freedom-from' suggests a unified bi-directionality in orientation, encompassing both desire for future potentiality and escape from past/present captivity wherein the primary orientation seems to be on the future '-to' implying a preliminary realisation of 'freedom-from'.
4. The stranger (at home or abroad) is fascinated by an 'invisible beyond' (reminiscent of Heidegger), riveted by our hidden identity in the unheimlich. But what established this process wherein such individuals are diverted from the homey origin? This primordial

⁶⁶ Designation of ontic and ontological originates in Heidegger's work; ontic indicating the specific nature of particular manifestations of being, for example the way-of-being enacted by particular humans, whereas ontological refers to largely unthematized foundations of Being, common structures of Dasein implicit in ontic manifestations (see Heidegger, 1962; Mulhall, 1996:4).

- question remains unanswered, though its haunting quality might generate further research studies and conceptual exposition.
5. Kristeva's account implicates the homeworld as instrumental in the migrant's departure, as pushing out threatened contamination and refusing recognition of the *unheimlich* within and at-home. Future research might approach the question of this dynamic in existential migration.
 6. There have emerged two definitions of 'foreign' in parallel with the two-fold definitions of home, homelessness, and belonging. Foreign can refer to underlying existential commonality as well as manifested difference.

Practical Research Implications

Looking back, some people seem to have always been in a process of existential migration, desperate to leave but patiently acquiring skills and adequate self-confidence to cope in unfamiliar settings. Many people left home in incrementally larger migrations, often with university locations facilitating leaving, with a felt direction though often no clear goal. This process of 'existential migration' can pose as more superficial economic migration, concealing its deeper dimensions. Economic considerations are compatible with existential motivations but the more apparent and recognised economic rationale can easily mask the deeper process that is simultaneously unfolding, and is often primary. Though not regretted, even an inevitable leaving harbours unexpectedly deep feelings of loss and sadness. Some co-researchers valued their ability to adapt to foreign cultures while also recognising that this malleability threatened their own sense of self, even the ability to maintain a modicum of their own cultural inheritance. Co-researchers often report comparing themselves to peers and family who stayed behind. Such comparison elicits complex feelings of superiority and envy. As co-researchers age, some begin to desire the positive attributes of a settled life while also seeking to maintain their mobility and personal sensitivities. Many people end up feeling in a limbo state where no place will ever feel like home again and some feel it is possible to accept this.

Though individuals in a process of existential migration apparently diverge essentially from other voluntary migrants, they also experience some similar issues, for example the unexpected difficulties experienced from adjusting to the unfamiliar context of a foreign land. Numerous research studies have now been completed on the adjustment difficulties inherent in cross-cultural corporate relocations, concluding that business managers relocate for primarily financial reasons yet a quarter of them undergo an unexpected *personal disturbance of some sort* (Selmer and Shiu, 1999: 453). These individuals did not, for the most part, leave in order to develop nascent potentialities of being or to explore assumptive aspects of existence. However, these relocations are unsettling enough that a number of expatriate managers return to their home country prematurely and exhibit poor retention rates after returning from abroad (Gregersen and Black, 1996; c.f. Jun et al, 1997:520). Another study (Selmer and Shiu, 1999) concludes that assigning expatriate managers to a similar culture can

be an even more difficult experience than sending them to a very different culture. These dynamics were eloquently addressed in co-researcher narratives, Sarah's among others. She proposed that in a very different culture the awareness of dissimilarity is in the forefront whereas if the culture at least superficially seems very similar, then dissonances are more difficult to notice or understand. She also articulated the double-edged skill of adaptation and the inherent potential for fragmentation in a self that previously may have appeared whole. These issues demonstrate implicit potentials for engendering an experience of the *unheimlich*, finding the foreignness within, as indicated in the previous chapter. Such feelings undermine any assumption that one can automatically remain *personally* unaffected by international resettlement.

In addition, Stroh and Gregersen (1998) conclude from their research that, contrary to expatriate's expectations, 'returning "home" can be as challenging as being a newcomer in a foreign country...' (Ibid:111; see Isogai, et. al., 1999, for identity issues in returnees). However, in exploring the return, these authors don't take account of the potential opening to existential restlessness that may develop for the repatriate who has experienced foreignness. Though these authors contemplate the impact of superficial changes in behaviour and comportment from living abroad, they do not consider that these changes themselves may indicate a more fundamental shift in one's assumptions about life and orientation towards being. Their paper is designed, like most on this issue, with practical corporate interests in mind, how to retain employees, rather than exploring deeper experiential and philosophical aspects of individual narratives.

Brislin (1981:122) cites research revealing that individuals who are most successful at adjusting to a new culture are often much less successful at readjusting to the original culture. This finding precipitates Brislin's speculation that 'adjustment' requires a person who is 'open' to alterity and ambiguity, and seeks stimulation, which is an apt though partial description of many of the co-researchers. Brislin continues by offering further conjecture about difficulties in the process of returning home,

The same person may re-adjust poorly upon returning home since the new ideas conflict with tradition. The returnee finds no internationally minded people, discovers that old friends are bored upon hearing accounts of the sojourn, and experiences no stimulation in the country which is already so well known. This relation between adaptation to the new and nonadaptation to the old is undoubtedly related to individual differences in *tolerant personality traits*. *Tolerant people* can benefit from both the old and the new and do not

necessarily experience debilitating feelings of impotence upon returning to their home culture (Ibid: 122, *italics added*).

In this quote Brislin reduces the complex exploration of processes of identity, belonging, home, foreignness, and the unheimlich attempted in this thesis to a hypothetical psychological *trait* called 'tolerance'. Is this reduction to psychology an instance of Heidegger's accusation that we have forgotten '...the *proper* plight of dwelling as *the* plight...' (Heidegger, 1964: 363)? It strikes me as idyllic to suggest that there are 'tolerant people' who can even tolerate a lack of tolerance upon their return home. The returnee, according to Brislin, is coming home to traditional homogeneity wherein he or she is unable to share their personal diversity and love of difference. Are there, in reality, set *traits* enabling persons to adapt equally to the foreign and the traditionally familiar? The concept of existential migration, as presented, prioritises person-world interactions over self-contained subjects with fixed psychic traits unaffected by diverse situations. Below is a brief exploration of what may constitute differences between the process conceptualisation of existential migration and the trait-and-stage depiction evident in most acculturation research.

Stage Theories or Process?

The vast majority of research studies on acculturation and psychological difficulties in adaptation (see Baker, 1999; or Aronowitz, 1984, for a review of studies) remain couched within notions of generalised stage theories, presupposing a fixed identity colliding with a solid environment. The concept of 'culture shock' (Brislin, 1981: 155) underscores most stage-based hypotheses and presumes that coping with such difference causes a seismic fracture in identity, subverting it with self-doubt and insecurity, both of which are seen as problems to be solved. The transition of adapting across cultures has been hypothesised as fitting a W-curve: initial culture shock, adaptation, and then re-entry shock, characterised by negative experiences including pronounced stress, sleep deprivation, and confusion (Brislin, 1981). Not surprisingly, 're-entry shock' has also been characterised as having stages (Hogan, 1983; c.f. Miyamoto and Kuhlman, 2001), including denial regarding the difficulty of reintegration, disillusionment, renewed commitment to realistic goals, self-confidence and resourcefulness, and the trimming of foreign-acquired behaviours and traits (see Page, 1990).

Peter Read (1996), introduced earlier in the discussions of home, recounts that groups of immigrants arriving in Australia attracted the attention of ‘an army of sociologists’ who developed various theoretical models for how immigrants ‘assimilate’.

Such mechanistic models, which detected stages like ‘naturalisation’, ‘absorption’, ‘assimilation’, and ‘acculturation’ were replaced by more sophisticated theories which allowed for individual difference, changing attitudes throughout the whole of life ... Immigration theorists now allow that the process of belonging in a new land is much more complex than previously imagined (Ibid:27-8).

Despite Read’s assurance, review of the literature above reveals the continued preponderance of stage theories utilising a third-person ‘spectator’ view to claim generalisable validity for their findings. The felt and evocative first-person narratives of migration are almost entirely absent, subverting the researcher’s potential for empathy by objectifying ‘migrants’ into a foreign species – suddenly it’s about *them*, not *us*. Although their specific research findings seem to corroborate the themes from my phenomenological analysis, the concept and method being formulated in my analysis insinuates variations from conventional research on cross-cultural ‘adaptation’. First of all, my ‘process’ emphasis avoids the prescriptive implications of stage theories, which epitomise a generalising sequential order which individuals are then expected to recapitulate. ‘Process’ acknowledges the lived intricacies and vast diversity of human interaction and therefore offers no generalised predictions (not-being-at-home can lapse into being-at-home and vice versa), while implying that experience remains more than whatever is encapsulated by any theories. ‘Stages’ and ‘traits’ appear discrete and discernable *within* an individual subject, while ‘process’ points to implicit flux that is never comprehensively described, has a unpredictable directionality (not expected to smoothly follow a sequence), and *is* interactively elaborated by daily situational living. The disadvantages of the extensive universalisation of stage theories are apparent in the field of bereavement studies, where theories of expected adaptation to grief have been imposed upon idiosyncratic experience, resulting in diagnoses of ‘risk factors’, ‘pathological grief’, and ‘unresolved mourning’ etc.⁶⁷

The concept of ‘culture shock’ is also complicated by the numerous accounts of co-researchers for whom difference and the unfamiliar is stimulating and actively desired; the ‘shocking’ is welcome. This is not to deny individual manifestations of person-place

⁶⁷ Recent developments in bereavement studies have supplanted this trend with ‘postmodern’ and existential approaches which avoid the thorny implications of ‘normality/pathology’ and the generalisation of individual experience into set ‘types’ (Madison, 2002; 2005; Klass et. al., 1996).

dissonance, but for co-researchers these are as likely to be experienced in the 'home' environment as in the foreign – why are there no studies of 'culture shock' originating at home? A process perspective does not presuppose which place is 'home'. An individual may be in an interaction they would label as 'feeling at home' for years, before returning to the homelessness and paradox of existential migration. There is no pre-set chronology, nothing on which to base judgements such as 'healthy' or 'pathological', (including no basis to advocate authenticity) except as experientially self-ascribed. The motivation for migration, including pre-existing values and sensitivities, remains suggestive of one's subsequent experience of 'adaptation' – a person desperately seeking difference likely implies different cross-cultural responses than a person relocating purely for career advancement. Though I'm indicating a distinction between existential migration and other modes of migration, it strikes me as possible that corporate relocations and the movement of refugees and exile populations, though not instigated as existential journeys, could perhaps *induce* individual processes of existential migration, as I'm suggesting above. Potentially any of us could succumb to, or embark upon, a *process* of existential migration, through choice, duress, and perhaps increasingly accidentally through career advancement in a foreign posting. In the most abstract, *a process of existential migration occurs when the interaction between person and place allows it, suggests it, demands it*. Though even when 'demanded' or 'forced' as in exile, such a process can presumably be resisted by retreat into hominess (or also perhaps into various 'problems in living').

Intercultural Training

The abundance of accessible stage theories, combined with failure rates of around 50% for expatriate management assignments (Robock and Simmonds, 1983; Copeland and Griggs, 1985; c.f. Jun et.al.1997:520) has generated intercultural competency training as a practical application for social science research (see Miyamoto and Kuhlman, 2001). Training is focused on managers' pre-departure, and includes raising cultural awareness, exposing trainees to assumptions of cross-cultural transitional stages, teaching trainees to understand how cultural differences influence our behaviour and offering briefings on the cultural differences of specific countries for relocation. However, recent researchers (Segalla et.al., 2000) have concluded that current best practice in cross-cultural research and intercultural training is not sensitive enough to reveal the impact of *individual values* upon relocation 'success' because these values are usually implicit and obscured by more easily perceived

cultural differences. Some researchers (see Jun,1997) are suggesting that pre-departure courses incorporate self-reflective 'empathy training' rather than the more knowledge-based deliveries, to facilitate favourable social contact in the new place and thus enhance adaptation. This suggests that more phenomenological approaches may be useful in revealing less obvious and more sensitive aspects of personal-cultural interaction that can impact significantly upon attempts to enter new cultures. It raises the question of what could be contributed to the field of intercultural training by a phenomenological exploration of candidates' deeper existential orientations, their attitudes to belonging, independence, difference and similarity, and the meaningfulness of home, similar to that attempted in this thesis. For example, training at present seems to be focused on lowering anxiety rather than exploring it, on making 'successful' adaptations rather than exploring life assumptions and one's reasons for leaving and whether, after exploring the possible ramifications, it is the best option for each individual. As a guess, I would speculate that 'existential migrants', with their developed adaptation capabilities and affinities for difference, might be well suited for international reassignments, though the compatibility of such careers with values of freedom, independence, and self-actualisation, might be more problematic.

In a twist on the usual international corporate interests underlying intercultural training, Kelly (1998) presents a paper exploring the negative effects of globalisation and the inadequate responses of university education to the demands of internationalisation. She proposes that there is a possibility of a more radical response from educators. She optimistically sees the opportunity in universities to prepare a community of portable graduates who could be open to difference across cultures, and self-aware regarding the limits of their own ethnocentrism. This, she proposes, would result in a more humane globalisation rather than one driven solely by profit and domination. While I find her intentions laudable, I wonder what would be the personal repercussions for these 'portable graduates' with their radical openness and their global mission. What would be the *personal* cost of such a workforce, what would be their experience of 'homelessness' and how would that affect their behaviour as 'effective professionals or leaders'? The description of existential migration cautions us against thinking that such a group of 'homeless ambassadors' would have straightforwardly positive attributes and be unproblematic from the point of view of the individuals involved.

Biases in migration studies

Crossing the developing concept of existential migration with the vast body of contemporary migration and acculturation research raises some challenging questions. One question that the new concept raises is 'to what extent are we obfuscating deeper issues of human being by accepting superficial presumptions of 'health', 'adaptation', and 'stress'? And another question asks whether being settled is fundamentally 'more healthy' simply by virtue of the fact that ninety-eight percent of the world's population *do not* migrate (Hammar et.al, 1997:238)? Don't we need to define and corroborate our assumptions of health and explain biases towards sedentary forms of life? Using economic models of understanding human activity, researchers (for example, Fischer et. al, 1997) point out the 'social capital' (society specific advantages) inherent in not leaving home; having longstanding friendships, being socially integrated, and being accepted at a specific place of residence are listed as significant advantages to staying. Relatively permanent residents have major economic, social, and political advantages that do not accrue to those who choose to be more mobile. This reinforces the view that the non-economic motivations in existential migration constitute a defining facet and one neglected by current economic assumptions and models of migration. If money were the major motivation for the co-researchers, staying would statistically be a better bet, or at least we should be able to ascertain a pattern of economic acquisitions or financially-motivated choice points in life post-migration. However, in general, individual forms of migration do not register on an international scene sensitised mainly for the mass influx. The concept of existential migration suggests that more nuanced insights may emanate from conceiving of migration and migration research as focused on the 'individual' process (where individual means interactive) rather than seeing it as 'entirely a social process' (Datta, 2003). Rapport and others (Rapport, 2003) have repeated this call for a re-orientation in migration studies.

Diasporas illustrate a unique combination of transnational loyalty and local citizenship, comprising a distinct form of 'homeworld' (Werbner,2002). In interview-based research with female diaspora, Yeoh and Huang (2000) argue that we need to avoid 'gender blindness' and look at how men and women experience diaspora and exilic communities differently. Their research consists of interviews with women who left home out of economic necessity and family duty and who live for the day when they can return home and be a full person again⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Of course from the preceding research we might question their ability to unproblematically fit back into that home, if indeed it really still is home once they return. Despite the assumption that returning home will solve all

(Yeoh and Huang, 2000:22-3). Their gender-specific roles seem further entrenched rather than disrupted by their sojourn abroad. Their experiences and traditional perspectives on home are clearly a counterpoint to those female co-researchers engaged in existential migration, who left for very different underlying reasons and whose attachment to 'home' and social role was never straightforward in the first place. I have not explicitly explored the differential experiences of men and women in existential migration and this remains a valid topic of research. Similar to the interviews recounted in my thesis, these authors report that many of their co-researchers found their research interviews 'cathartic', and the transcripts contained moments of poignancy, and deep emotion.

Stef Jansen (1998) in her chapter, 'Homeless at home: Narrations of Post-Yugoslav Identities', suggests that in some ways the war in Yugoslavia was precisely a war about the notion of 'home', as has been confirmed by Renata, one of the co-researchers. Jansen concentrates on the experiences of three women returning to their former homes to find that the Yugoslavia that existed before is gone and any kind of homecoming is impossible, since it now necessitates a journey not across space but back in time. The impact of lost homes (as *per* Read's oral histories of the settled population) and homelands *on the process of existential migration* is yet to be explored. Ladislav Holy, in 'The Metaphor of 'Home' in Czech Nationalist Discourse' (1998), presents a fascinating history of the Czech national identity and concludes that for the Czech people, home is always a place and always associated with their homeland. Specifically, home is the place they were born or the place where they established their own families⁶⁹. Though this may be his personal perspective mistaken for data, it raises the possibility of national and ethnic variations in the ontic manifestations of home, which has not been addressed in this thesis.

Possible Conceptual Elaborations

This diverse section sets out a few original elaborations and corroborates a number of points made previously, which I won't repeat here. Also, more than in other sections, most

the problems associated with temporary migration; for some individuals it might in fact add another layer to these problems.

⁶⁹ This raises the question of whether we conceptualise family as significant because it is a grouping that constellates around a 'home' rather than the reverse?

conceptual elaborations are included within the text as comments upon and critiques of other approaches. Here are a few points worth additional explication.

1. Stage theories generalise at a different level and with a different intention than is evident in the universalising of common existential attributes being explored in the concept of existential migration. The interests and values of researches are obviously constitutive of data and its interpretation. For example, much of the research cited above can be read by me as substantiation of the themes and analysis in this thesis. However, differences that elucidate presumptive positions are also discernable, for example anxiety, insecurity, and identity disturbance are seen by researchers as negative problems to be solved rather than opportunities for authentic confrontation with aspects of one's being. Also, the person of the researcher in most studies remains invisible and presumed not to be implicated in the migrant experience, which I would challenge.
2. As with researchers, the values and motivations of migrants are constitutive of their experiences, such that the co-researchers, incumbent in their desire to break open the shell of the hermetic homeworld, report seeking the same 'shocks' others avoid. However, relocations initiated by *other motives* might eventually spark a process of existential migration *no matter how uninvited or how at odds* with one's own proclivities, though diverse responses to such an occurrence still presumably exist, each with their own inherent consequences.
3. The process concept of existential migration is more fragile and nebulous than solid robust stage theories and as such is easily masked and unacknowledged though it may be operative in acculturation and repatriation difficulties.
4. Crossing existential migration with more conventional scientific research yields numerous new research questions and original avenues for exploration in both directions. There are also indications that integrating an existential-phenomenological component to intercultural training programmes may be of practical use.
5. Issues and variables such as gender, national variations in the understanding of home, and the loss of the homeland while abroad, have not been adequately explored in this thesis but remain topics for future research. Also, the strategies employed by those who have an affinity for existential migration but who cannot leave their countries for economic or political reasons is yet to be explored.

Orientation in early life, psychoanalysis, and therapy

Early familial and peer relationships frequently feature in decisions to leave home or the timing of the migration. It seems that these difficulties in relations may be expressions of, rather than formative of, desires to leave and associated sensitivities. However, it is clear that reasons given for leaving are not necessarily causes of leaving and individuals who acknowledged that early parental relationships often had an impact on their plans to leave frequently cautioned that their feelings about home and travel cannot be reduced to these dynamics. Difficult family circumstances seemed to coalesce around pre-existing sensitivities in those who left, differentiating them from siblings who stayed. Relations with the home culture and parental relations can become intermingled, so that an attitude of needing space from one is generalised to needing space from the other. It seems that situations in the original environment reinforce interests in the outside larger world, establishing a stronger trajectory in favour of world-relations and attraction to otherness.

In the narratives of leaving home, early and persevering family relationships were frequently referred to as exemplifying the issues informing departure. Before extending interpretations concomitant with my thesis stance, it is incumbent to address the contrastive psychoanalytic orientation as represented in the pre-eminent text on psychology and migration, *Migration and Exile* (1989), by Leon and Rebeca Grinberg, in which they construct an intrapsychic theory regarding the difficulties of migration. Straightforwardly, they presuppose an object relations system of internal representations *within* the individual resulting from disappointing real-world relations, usually with parents, which are determinative of subsequent attachment styles. The Grinbergs report that their interest is in the unique situation of *exile*, which is characterised by being *involuntary* and usually permanent, in their view generating various *anxiety symptoms* and *defence mechanisms*. Consistent with the previous section on mythology, the Grinbergs present cultural myths of migration, for example the biblical stories of Adam and Eve and of Abraham, in which individuals seek out and bear the 'pain of true knowledge' (Grinberg, 1989:5) in an attempt to achieve personal growth. The Grinbergs acknowledge that the experiences of voluntary migrants, including (their examples) a diplomat or international professor, are quite radically different from an emigrant fleeing poverty or seeking refuge. However, they also realise that there may be potential commonalities in the emotional reactions of migrants regardless of the mode of leaving.

In order to understand the motivations for migration, the Grinbergs reference the work of Michael Balint (1959), who coined the term 'ocnophilic' for the tendency to hold onto what is certain and stable, and 'philobatic' to describe the tendency to seek out new and exciting experiences, situations, and places. Ocnophiles are characterised by their attachment to people, places, and objects and find it difficult to live alone. In contrast, philobats avoid ties and tend to live independently. They seek pleasure in adventures, voyages, new emotions, and are able to leave people and places behind without pain or sorrow. From this the Grinbergs infer that ocnophiles have a pronounced affinity to remaining rooted in their origins, abandoning them with difficulty. Philobats, in contrast, exhibit a tendency to migrate in pursuit of 'undiscovered horizons and new experience' (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989:21). The Grinbergs assume that the individual ideal is to be firmly rooted in place as this offers valued security. Accordingly, they assume that if a person knows they are temporarily on an adventure that will undoubtedly culminate in returning home, they can enjoy the experience,

[enjoyment] is related, in our opinion, to the inner conviction that one's roots are safe: the subject may be far from home and his loved ones, but he does not feel uprooted. He knows where he is from and where his objects are. The parts of himself contained in abandoned objects and projected onto them are secure and not exposed to despair. Therefore, with his persecutory anxieties appeased and the fear of losing his sense of identity allayed, the subject can rest assured, enjoy the change, and be open to new discoveries, knowledge, and experiences (Ibid: 178-9).

While some co-researchers describe the importance of their home place (roots), others do not depict this association and it seems presumptive to equate rootedness with 'enjoyment' and being uprooted with 'despair', and spurious to assume one as normal and the other as pathological. Though the Grinbergs' intrapsychic mode of understanding is antithetical to the existential-phenomenological approach, some of their discussion about the dilemmas of leaving is substantiated by the co-researcher experiences. For example, two co-researchers described the significance of their family house in a manner consistent with the proposition that *for them* experience of rootedness (even from a geographical distance) might sustain continued world adventures. Other co-researchers also described the difficulty of feeling rootless. This contextual meaning of 'roots' requires explication, suggesting that comparison of psychoanalytic and existential approaches raises questions regarding the metaphysical status of many of the concepts in both traditions. The Grinbergs also suggest that leaving can be a 'long-harboured desire' that one suddenly becomes receptive to and that economic or other 'external' reasons for leaving can be rationalisations for concealed needs that others may not readily understand. At least one of the co-researchers, Eva, explicitly acknowledged that her desire for an improved material life was intricately tied to deeper life issues.

In discussion of voluntary migration, the Grinbergs do not recognise the *agony of choice* inherent in living with the dilemmas of ambivalence, and the anguish of feeling pressured to return *exactly because* it is possible. On this topic of returning home, the Grinbergs describe how the returnee hopes to rediscover what was left behind, but fears it may be gone forever. They see this as a desire to know the unknowable - what would that other life have been, inferring a need to assess the original decision to leave. In addition, the return home is viewed as a need to prove that everything is still there, so it can be quite disorienting to find many things greatly changed. This can arouse feelings of pain and jealousy, as we've previously discerned from our co-researchers, and a (unheimlich) feeling of strangeness, 'as if he were seeing the world from the perspective of the dead' (Grinberg, 1989:183). The return home constitutes another round of migration, or the continuation of a migration that

has never ended rather than an automatic resolution and termination of a process that has become exhausting. The reality is yet another experience of being a stranger,

...he sees the changes in people, things, habits and styles, houses and streets, relationships and affections... Not even his language sounds the same. Colloquialisms have changed, along with the tacit understanding of words, meanings, shared images, and past references, winks of complicity among the initiated – all the sublanguages that make up a language' (Ibid: 186-7).

Psychoanalytic presentations such as this, devoid of empirical *research*, augment criticisms that theory surreptitiously replaces experiential evidence, resulting in a kind of circularity in which theoretically-laden interpretations of client material are valid because they reify their pre-existing theory. This constitutes a recurrent concern with psychoanalysis, which in my opinion requires response but does not excuse constructive engagement with the perspective. Crossing the Grinberg's account with my own highlights that the co-researchers form a group characterised not just by philobate tendencies, but also by attachment to people and 'home'. They display ambivalent feelings and although not obviously 'rooted' at their origin, leaving was often nonetheless a difficult and gradual process. Though seeking 'adventure', this was not an indication that relationships were not important or that people were easily left behind. Though attracted to foreignness, stability was not inconsequential. The process of existential migration seems to undermine a simplistic differentiation into ocnophile and philobate as equivalent to, or represented by, static life and migration.

Steinbock's formulations of homeworld/alienworld explored previously underlines that our *world-relations* (the interactive individual 'self-environment') can be seen to pre-exist as the horizon for the so-called intrapsychic arena. The 'intrapsychic' perspective presupposes our world-relations and our individual responses to them. The metaphoric world of object-relations presupposes and elaborates upon the phenomenal world of these foundational interactions as the 'home' in which the ego etc. forms and belongs. The homeworld and not the ego, according to Husserl, is the first sphere of 'normality', subverting the contention that the ego-subjectivity is an original sphere (Steinbock, 1995: 188). This distinction between psyche and world offers a clarification of Freud's rendition of 'uncanny' as diverse from Heidegger's 'unheimlich' as presented earlier.

In 'The Uncanny' (1919), Freud distinguishes a class of the frightening which leads back to what is deeply familiar; something disturbing is seen where it is least expected. Feeling at

home is both familiar *and* secretive, as in drawing the curtains to keep something private from the view of the neighbours. This is reminiscent of the insular home that our co-researchers found suffocating. Not feeling at-home (unheimlich) is the opposite of this definition: the experience of the unfamiliar and foreign rather than the hearth, but adding the implication of something hidden coming to light, opening the curtains. The uncanny thereby seems in fact to be a mix of the strange and the familiar in a process of revelation – the strange in the familiar or familiar in the strange. There are examples of this from the co-researcher descriptions; uncomfortable experiences of *misappropriating* a culture as similar to ones own only to find it is deeply but subtly unfamiliar, or accounts of returning home to find it changed, both signify an uncomfortable melange of unexpected and familiar.

Unlike Heidegger, Freud suggests that the uncanny may be traced directly or indirectly back to childhood castration complexes (Ibid:234). Throughout Freud's account, complex lived experience is radically condensed into intrapsychic phenomena, in essence, the return of the unconsciously repressed. Only a few specific situations turn the frightening into the uncanny, and in Freud's description, returning home after some time in a foreign land or the anxiety of not feeling at home in the world, are peculiarly not amongst his examples. If the unheimlich is explained as return of the repressed perhaps what was 'repressed' originally was this experience of not being-at-home in the world rather than infantile Oedipal conflicts. What makes the uncanny special cannot be a return of the repressed if what distinguishes it is *consciously felt*; though it is not clear, if it is felt, it is not unconscious. For Freud, anxiety signifies the presence of the repressed, whereas for Heidegger anxiety is an existential given. In light of the phenomenon of existential migration, it makes more obvious sense to explore an understanding of the unheimlich that is deeply *of* the world, not a product of intrapsychic hydraulics. In psychoanalysis, the uncanny loses its world significance and its universally shared potential. It is called a 'state of disorganisation, or reorganisation', a split between 'me' and 'not-me', associated with trauma and abuse, a 'cognitive-affective paralysis', leaving the person vulnerable to 'dissociated self-states' (Eshel,2001:556). It becomes a walled-off subjective disturbance and in this form, not readily applicable to the phenomenon of existential migration. The analytic developmental causality hypothesis is problematic as an explanation for existential migration if we recall that often the co-researchers were the *only* members of a family to leave. Presumably siblings would incur similar object-relations and be prone to departure but in the absence of a discernable pattern to support this we are at least back to the question 'why did *this* individual react to their 'impaired' development by

leaving'? Additionally, data from acculturation studies suggested the possibility that virtually anyone seems capable of commencing an experience of existential migration, at least in the form of the *unheimlich* associated with international relocation. If, even in adulthood, anyone has this potential, then it is in the order of an existential possibility rather than an intrapsychic developmental *disorder*. Other voices in the psychoanalytic discourse, for example Farhad Dalal (1999), dispute the client's identity as an 'internal phenomenon, born out of some notion of a 'true self'' (161).

Preliminary Therapeutic Considerations

Therapeutic care of migrants has been focused primarily upon refugee populations. This priority may have contributed to the current hegemony that involuntary migrants are seen as more at-risk 'psychologically' than voluntary migrants (see Cohon, 1981, for list of studies). In these studies the refugee's lack of choice compared to the immigrant is a definitive component of their distress. For a review of psychosomatic complaints resulting from the various losses experienced by refugees, see Ahearn (2000). Kunz (1973) argues, resonating somewhat with my position and Read's (1996) research, that the refugee is a 'distinct social type' and that it is the '*reluctance* to uproot oneself, and the absence of positive original *motivations* to settle elsewhere, which characterises all refugee decisions and distinguishes the refugee from the voluntary migrants' (130, *italics added*). Cohon (1981) resorts to theories of 'individual psychodynamics' of refugees, suggesting that all people form a complex relationship to their native land as part of the object relationship to the mother, so that the physical environment is perceived as an extension of the mother. It is unclear why maternal interaction and relationship to the homeland could not both be viewed as expressions of a deeper existential orientation toward homeworld and the *unheimlich*.

Papadopoulos (2002) points out the curious situation in the psychotherapeutic literature that refugees, ostensibly people who have forcibly lost their homes, are primarily associated with issues of trauma rather than issues of home. He is the first to ask, 'If the main problem with refugees is their [forced] loss of home, why do they need psychotherapy?' (Papadopoulos, 2002:3). In response, he posits that there are many forms of homecoming and perhaps therapy might be one of them. Papadopoulos' analytical understanding of therapy compels him to suggest a link between early development and issues of home,

Home can also be seen as a psychological category which combines the basic psychological processes which facilitate early human development. Once approached from this perspective, it could be argued that therapeutic care with refugees has the possibility of restoring some of the important processes that are associated with home and thus providing an invaluable boost for refugees that can activate their own resilience. Thus, although most refugees who end up in exile in other countries may never return to their geographical homeland, this does not necessarily prevent them from recovering from *all adversity* and being enabled to lead full and creative lives (Papadopoulos, 2002:5, *italics added*).

If, as I've argued, the dilemmas of home and homelessness are fundamentally existential, then the above orientation implies that psychoanalysis is tasked with curing the human condition itself or at least with reasserting the 'camouflage of life'. It seems paradoxical, or hopelessly optimistic, to espouse a theory that pathologises and then sets out to *cure* the plight of human dwelling. Associated to more fluid views of self/other, client/therapist, Chan and Loveridge (1987) argue that therapists in refugee transit camps must themselves have some idea of the 'psychological journey' involved in leaving home in order to react in a more than superficial way. Presumably, openness to one's own issues of 'home', feelings of the meaning of home, reactions to homelessness, etc. should be a crucial aspect of an empathetic response to refugees. This recapitulates a point referenced in the initial literature review, contending that those who work with migrants must be conscious of their own feelings about psycho-social transitions, loss, and their feelings about home (Huntington, 1981).

In terms of therapeutic innovation, Read (1996) advocates the concept of 'place bereavement', and laments the fact that most residents who lose their homes do not receive grief counselling for their feelings of loss, that in fact the 'psychological effects' of place deprivation are ignored. Though this is a serious issue, the construction of yet another psychological specialty, "place-bereavement" is not the only response and I cannot agree with Read in his insistence, 'We need a second Elizabeth Kubler-Ross to advance place-bereavement as a continuing theme of contemporary distress' (Ibid:198). As previously cautioned, another Kubler-Ross implies another stage theory for therapists to impose upon their client's experience, which presumably eventually will be dismantled and replaced with more sensitive phenomenological interventions. However, increased therapeutic sensitivity to the profundity of themes of home, loss of home, and homelessness, would certainly be welcomed as one possible outcome of the current study.

In accordance with the existential-phenomenological positioning of the thesis, themes of contemporary existential modes of therapeutic practice are compared in order to determine their consistency with the thesis presentation and to contemplate whether the concept of existential migration might impact upon their practice. In terms of the research methodology, as noted in the interview section of Part One, the process of phenomenological dialogue itself reportedly constituted a therapeutic dynamic. This finding is endorsed by Marcus (1995), whose hermeneutic semi-structured interviews on the topic of 'house' instantiated 'therapeutic' encounters. In both studies the emphasis is on mutual dialogue revealing increasingly more reflected consciousness in contradistinction with an expert clinician engaged in interpreting the interviewee's unconscious contents. Given the sensitivities of those engaged in existential migration, it might seem reasonable to assume that a democratic and mutual dialogue offering exploratory space and freedom to construct one's own dialogue might be appealing for this sub-population.

Crucial features of the current methodology and conceptual delineation are consistent with existential approaches to therapy (Spinelli, 2005; Cooper, 2003), for example, suspicion of linear causality and dualist notions of self, emphasis on embodied interaction and intersubjectivity in place of contained subject and unconscious contents, a balance between notions of existential givens and postmodern constructivism (self is process rather than fixed core), a non-diagnostic and non-pathological stance, a deconstruction of 'stage' and 'category' theories, an emphasis on the ontic-ontological with individual and universal in a mutual process of revelation, and a tendency to value the mysterious non-explicable dimensions of existence. Within this consistency more original practical constructs may be generated, for example, the need to question our individual values represented within stances towards the dual definitions of home, homelessness, foreignness, and belonging, and how these are expressed in our idiosyncratic responses to settled or migratory life. Through future delineation of such themes as recontextualised in the consulting room, a form of 'home therapy' may transpire as an invitation not only to migrants, but also to everyone seeking contemplation of these aspects of our chosen ways of being. Constructing therapeutic narratives around 'home' may also incorporate practice innovations for specific work with refugees, migrant workers, international students, and individuals embarking upon intercultural relocations or recently returned from abroad, not to mention the promise of enhancing empathy in therapists working with such clients. The ambiguous status of the 'homecomrade' suggests nuanced thinking regarding the practice of cultural 'matching' in

therapy, in which therapists are often referred to clients based upon obvious cultural and ethnic similarities. At least in the case of individuals exhibiting aspects of existential migration, it seems plausible that these obvious bases for 'matching' may be counter-indicated and that individual sensitivities and values such as those described in the co-researcher narratives might form a more appropriate basis for pairing these clients with empathetic therapists. Therapist-client 'matching' might be considered a reverberation of the person-environment matching that I've suggested is instrumental in the experience of home, in which case the therapeutic relationship symbolises an interaction in which, even momentarily, the authentic experience of home may become manifest, presumably for both participants.

Possible Conceptual Elaborations

1. The concept of existential migration challenges and is challenged by, the intrapsychic theories and developmental prescriptions of psychoanalysis.
2. The concept of existential migration may enhance acknowledgment of the intense dilemmas and affective potency of *voluntary* migration – that choice does not eradicate distress. There is evidently significant overlap though also distinctions in the responses to migration inherent in its various modalities - exile, refugee, and immigrant.
3. Evidence from acculturation studies and this thesis seems superficially to be more compatible with Heidegger's conceptualisation of the *unheimlich* than with Freud's *uncanny*. This impression requires focused research study.
4. The concept of existential migration points toward possible development of a strand of 'home therapy' with nuanced client-therapist 'matching' within the broader approach of existential-phenomenological psychotherapy.

Discerning Existential Migration From Exilic Literature

The migrant's reputation often includes an aesthetic dimension, with the 'view from afar' characterising a whole genre of modern literature (Kaplan, c.f. Malkki, 1995: 513). Though the co-researcher narratives may comprise the first known phenomenological *research* into this form of voluntary migration, they may also constitute the first recorded *biographies* framed around the issues of existential migration. Andre Aciman (1999) presents an edited collection addressing basic questions regarding the experience of migration, but in his text I note that an account of something akin to 'existential migration' is conspicuous by its absence. It seems possible to piece together an approximation of this experience by cutting and pasting bits from the exile, the expatriate, and the *émigré*. For example, Aciman induces an important distinction between 'uprooted' and 'unrooted' pointing to those without roots, as distinct from those whose roots have been ripped up and left dangling. Those without

roots, the 'permanent transients' resemble the notion of existential migration. But it is not strictly accurate to say that the co-researchers (and myself) have *no* roots - if that were true presumably we could settle anywhere and nowhere and 'home' may not even be a comprehensible issue for us. But as Renata described, one begins to sink roots in a new place where the ground is inevitably stony, maybe we can grow around the stones or maybe the earth is rock. Part of the stoniness surely is the fact that the new ground is not the familiar ground of home. We had *something* there, perhaps only shallow roots, an incarnation of the ambivalence felt when one doesn't belong at home. It is this mode of diachronic ambivalence that seems one unique feature in narratives of existential migration.

Aciman suggests that 'When exiles [forced or voluntary] see one place they're also seeing – or looking for – another behind it. Everything bears two faces, everything is shiftily because everything is mobile...' (1999: 13). He describes how the exile examines each alien land to assess whether it could become his, or hers, and that this process never terminates, but continues even after a 'good enough' place is found. Aciman reveals that in his case, he experiences a strong desire for *everything* to remain the same, stressing that this is '... typical of people who have lost everything, including their roots or their inability to grow new ones...' (Ibid:21). Yet, from the co-researcher interviews we read two impulses, the desire for the 'homeland' to remain unchanged, even if one could never envisage living there again, and the personal *attraction* to dynamic diversity, continual foreignness. Of course there is significant individual variation, but it seems that existential migration often includes this dynamic of being attracted to exploration, 'perpetual transition' in Aciman's own words, while maintaining contact, though at some distance, with the homeworld. In certain manifestations, existential migration may be conceived fancifully as a mode of *failed time travel*. It is inseparably future-oriented, sometimes past-obsessed, and usually cyclical, continually circling but going nowhere. Aciman's account also enables the discernment of '*root envy*' in exilic and existential migration; the envy of another's solidity in the world as amply suggested in the co-researcher narratives. However, such envy arises from a distance, but in proximity its flip side arises: witnessing the daily routines required to tend to those roots often creates a feeling of disdain for settled life.

Eva Hoffman was a Polish teenager who was brought to Canada by her family. She does not exemplify voluntary migration but she does hauntingly describe relevant aspects of migration that contrast with, and sometimes compliment, the concept under development. Her

autobiography, *Lost in Translation. A Life in a New Language* (1998) is a beautiful homage to the particulars of love, hate, and disorientation entailed in an un-chosen leave-taking and grudging adaptation. Hoffman makes an evocative appeal to our own experience as instancing a universal,

We feel ejected from our first homes and landscapes, from childhood, from our first family romance, from our authentic self. We feel there is an ideal sense of belonging, of community, of attunement with others and at-homeness with ourselves, that keeps eluding us ... On one level, exile is a universal experience (Hoffman, 1989:40).

Hoffman lists the significant positive effects of exile, which we have seen can be extrapolated to existential migration. These include 'a certain fertile detachment' giving one creative new ways of seeing, a confrontation with aspects of life that otherwise would remain obscure, an opportunity to explore 'fundamental problems' from another vantage point.

Exile places one at an oblique angle to one's new world and makes every emigrant, willy-nilly, into an anthropologist and relativist; for to have a deep experience of two cultures is to know that no culture is absolute – it is to discover that even the most interstitial and seemingly natural aspects of our identities and social reality are constructed rather than given and that they could be arranged, shaped, articulated in quite another way' (Ibid:51).

However, Hoffman is concerned about the inversion of values occurring in our postmodern world. She is not convinced that 'uncertainty, displacement, fragmented identity' can be transmuted into victories. She believes this positioning, 'underestimates the sheer human cost of actual exile as well as some of its psychic implications, and perhaps even lessons' (Ibid). In other words, something is lost in our loss of 'loss'. If this postmodern future is actualised, how would we even express those aspects of our human condition that we can currently refer to as existential issues of home; the *unheimlich*, search for identity, actualising potentiality, freedom and choice, belonging...

Real dislocation, the loss of all familiar external and internal parameters, is not glamorous, and it is not cool. It is a matter not of wilful psychic positioning but of an upheaval in the deep material of the self' (Hoffman, 1999:50).

In this emerging world, change will come as surely to those who stay put and seek stability as much as to those who are mobilised (in all senses) by the uncertainties of a globalised world economy. We've already witnessed various, and extreme, international reactions to these trends, partly perhaps due to the intrusion of Otherness into 'home conceived of mostly as a conservative site of enclosure and closure, of narrow-mindedness, patriarchal attitudes, and dissemination of nationalism' (Ibid:58). This *excessive* at-homeness, over-determined by the need for security in an increasingly groundless world, is a stagnant pool cut off from the ebb

and flow of the world. Hoffman expresses her experience of loss by quoting the following poem, 'A Room and a Half', by Brodsky (1986: Section 18, *italics added*):

For a while he is absorbed with new vistas,
absorbed with building his own nest,
with manufacturing his own reality. Then
one day, when the new reality is mastered,
when his own terms are implemented,
he suddenly learns that his old nest is gone,
that those who gave him life are dead. On
that day he feels like an effect suddenly
without a cause... What he can't blame on
nature is the discovery that his achievement,
the reality of his own manufacture, is less
valid than the reality of his abandoned nest.
*That if there ever was any-thing real in his
life, it was precisely that nest, oppressive and
suffocating, from which he so badly wanted
to flee. He knows how willful, how intended
and premeditated everything that he has
manufactured is. How, in the end, all of it
is provisional.*

In her experience of being brought to a foreign land as part of a family migration (similar to Kumar, a co-researcher) Hoffman seems pushed into a process of existential migration that would not have been her wont had she been left to live her adolescent trajectory into adulthood in her native Poland. She needs to find a way to lessen her alienation and to belong, to 'bend toward another culture without falling over' (Ibid:209), to settle in order to achieve the precondition for 'gravity' that she as an individual requires. Unlike our cohort, she left her home 'regretfully' and 'brokenheartedly' yet she is able to appreciate some ecstatic and creative moments that this process offers her,

But as the plane lifts above the cloud line, there is the heady pleasure that repeats itself every time I travel. The whole world lies below me, waiting for articles to be written about it. There is the great ocean below, and the great sky above, and nothing between me and pure possibility (Ibid: 253).

There are only hints in Hoffman's autobiographies of the unnoticed migrants who pass through ports and arrivals lounges alone, who chose to leave in order to express or to address something about life itself, the young gay men and lesbians, the first-born, the youngest or only child who never quite fit in, the child smothered by expectation, the outsiders who usually arrive one by one and who often have no one to meet them on their arrival. Isn't this

‘undocumented’ migration in fact a small but continuous current in an alternative human history?

Presenting a contrast to Hoffman, the influential cultural studies theoretician Edward Said presents feelings and experiences perhaps more representative of many of the co-researchers. He was an exile, an expatriate, and an immigrant and accounts of his leaving are captured in his memoir *Out of Place* (1999a) and a few personal essays, for example ‘No Reconciliation Allowed’ (1999b),

For as long as I can remember, I had allowed myself to stand outside the umbrella that shielded or accommodated my contemporaries. Whether this was because I was genuinely different, objectively an outsider, or because I was temperamentally a loner I cannot say, but the fact is that although I went along with all sorts of institutional routines because I felt I had to, something private in me resisted them. I don’t know what it was that caused me to hold back, but even when I was most miserably solitary or out of synch with everyone else, I held onto this private aloofness very fiercely. I have envied many friends... who had lived in the same place all their lives, or who had done well in accepted ways, or who truly belonged, but I do not recall ever thinking that any of that was possible for me. It wasn’t that I considered myself special, but rather that I didn’t fit the situations I found myself in and wasn’t too displeased to accept this state of affairs (1999b:102-3).

Said echoes many of the cohort by emphasising that ‘always’ there was something different about him. In response he tried to clothe himself in the expectations of his family and culture. Unlike Hoffman, Said stands in favour of the postmodern values of ‘contingency’ and speaking simply from his own life experience, he accepts the ‘provisional satisfaction which is quickly ambushed by doubt’ as *personally* preferable to the ‘sleep of self-satisfaction’ he perceives in the envied settled life (1999b:114). It may be significant that Said’s journey occurs at an age where he could take up and choose for himself his imposed departure. Being sent to school in America initiated a long period of loneliness and unhappiness but it also rescued and freed him from an oppressive homeworld and established his lifelong trajectory. He, like the co-researchers in this study, feels the ‘anxious moodiness of travel’ as well as a form of envy for those who remain settled and unscathed by dislocation. Said never really ‘settled’, even after nearly forty years of living in New York he described his tenure there as provisional. He preferred motion and being slightly ‘out of place’ to the self with gravity, with a firmly rooted centralised theme to life. In *Reflections on Exile and other Literary and Cultural Essays* (2000), Said presents the darker side of his experience,

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history

contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever (Said, 2000:173).

Said points out that much of modern western culture, especially in the United States, is the work of émigrés, exiles, and refugees (from fascism, communism, and other repression). These immigrations are easier to document and thus easier to credit than the mostly solitary existential migrations in which less tangible motivations for leaving dissolve when compared to newsworthy international turmoil. What is the contribution to society of those of us who have always been on the edge of belonging? Can this way of being, these 'existential sensitivities', offer anything to academia, the intelligentsia, aesthetics, or politics? If, as many commentators have concluded, this is the 'age of the dispossessed' (Said,2000:174), are individuals who somehow seek and embody *dispossession* in a critical position to describe the experience, and to conceptualise what increasing populations seem headed for regardless of the consequences? The tables are turning and one question is whether 'existential migrants' are oriented towards chronicling this new inversion?

Charles Simic, cast out of Belgrade as a child, recounts the 'treacheries and horrors' that eventually resulted in his family landing on the shores of Eastern America (1999). His story is one of total disenfranchisement, brutality, bureaucrats and dehumanising border queues. This phase of the refugee's flight is the antithesis of the concept of existential migration; no ability to pursue one's own individual potential, no opportunity to exercise the sometimes painful but precious need for independence, freedom and choice. 'Immigration, exile, being uprooted and made a pariah may be the most effective way yet devised to impress on an individual the arbitrary nature of his or her own existence' (Simic,1999:123-4). However, as a young boy of 16 years newly settled in New York with his family, Simic's experience suggests that the individual's mode of migration may occasionally supersede the 'categories' (refugee, exile, migrant worker, émigré, 'existential migrant') and that these categories should perhaps be held lightly, taken less concretely. Simic's response to his refugee status was the converse of Hoffman's experience (she also relocated as a teenager) and was nothing short of enthusiastic,

It sounds nice intellectually to claim that an expatriate can never feel at home anywhere again. It's definitely not true of a sixteen year old. I was more adaptable than a cat or a goldfish would have been. I was eager to see and taste everything (Simic, 1999: 127).

Simic's fellow 'homecomrades' spent their time soaked in nostalgia, imaging their triumphant return home when the grafted Communist regime would be inevitably toppled. But, interestingly, Simic's response to this new world was not a longing for the old, but rather a kind of individual re-evaluation similar to the narratives of our co-researchers,

It's terrible when collective sentiments one is born with begin to seem artificial, when one starts to suspect that one's exile is a great misfortune but also a terrific opportunity to get away from everything one has always secretly disliked about the people one grew up with (Ibid:129).

America gave Simic an opportunity to free himself from socially assigned roles that would have quickly descended upon him in his home country. New York gave him a welcome exposure to many other cultures and ways of life. His openness to this diversity produced in him the sense of being a 'free individual', with a clearer idea of the workings of the world and of his own preferences; 'I prefer that solitary knowledge to the jubilation of the masses in Red Square or at some Nuremberg rally' (Ibid:134). Of course these are extremes few would associate with, but Simic's way of being independent was not a superficial response to the excesses of left or right. He developed into an acclaimed American lyric poet, describing this form of verse as,

... the voice of a single human being taking stock of his or her own existence... The poem is both a part of history and outside its domain. That is its beauty and its hope. A poet is a member of that minority that refuses to be part of any official minority...' (Ibid: 135).

Reading these words it is tempting to speculate regarding Simic's pre-existing proclivities before being displaced. His sentiments certainly converge with the felt experience of many of the co-researchers. How many refugees secretly taste freedom rather than loss even in a forced evacuation from home?

These references to literary figures and their evocative autobiographies and contemplations on home and migration largely recapitulate the themes and conceptual elaborations presented in Part Two. One original elaboration arising from this section is the prospect that future volumes of exilic and migratory literature might include a discrete account emphasising 'existential migration' with its discernable original motivations for leaving home and its recognisable sensitivities toward being.

Summary Comments

At the culmination of this project I am left deliberating the success of the idiosyncratic structure of the thesis, namely developing the concept through phenomenological analysis and *then* further elaborating it via ‘crossings’ rather than the more conventional presentation of a comprehensive literature review *before* the research is undertaken. My sense is that the unavoidable repetition inherent in this structure may be excusable *if* it enabled me to retain *experience* rather than *theory* at the centre of the conceptual development. If experience, evidenced in the reader’s *felt* response to the text, remained a touchstone during the elaborations in part two, then I would argue that the thesis continues its phenomenological intent. Only feedback from readers can vindicate or repudiate this attempted innovation.

The thesis is comprised of a research study into the under-acknowledged activity of voluntary migration and a subsequent exploration of the significance of existential motives in migration as revealed by that research. The conceptual development of ‘existential migration’ is based upon existential-phenomenological principles of revelatory description and co-constitution, prioritising interactive *process* over naïve realist representation. The thematic structure of Parts One and Two acknowledges the constructive, co-generational status of these themes and their exploration – themes and concepts are constructions, not discoveries. However, the significant level of corroboration of these themes in a review of appropriate research and scholarly literature suggests that they form some useful metaphors of generalised migratory experience. Any original elaborations from Part Two require assessment by the co-researchers and by the readers in order to verify whether they ‘carry forward’ their own personal experience beyond what can be represented in this text. If so, the project remains true to the intention of conceiving itself as a process, recapitulating the departure from the known into the *unheimlich*, never summative and complete, but an attempt to transform the familiar into the strange within the various reader’s own responsiveness.

As a concept, ‘existential migration’ could be characterised as a definitive exemplar of predominant issues and controversies in science, phenomenology, philosophy, and particularly in the ‘essentialist’/‘postmodern’ debates. As I’ve developed it, existential migration is a *process* concept, a subtly nuanced integration of ordered responsiveness with *something* essential, not mere arbitrary construction. This formulation lifts out the tension

between individuality and relatedness, with the concept of existential migration exemplifying the first person account as a reference point for exploring world-relations. These facets of the concept are perhaps best embodied in the innovation of a definition of ‘home’ as interaction. This definition represents many of the emphases within the thesis, offering an instructive contrast to conventional definitions of home and their variant assumptions.

Existential migration emerges with psychological, philosophical and spiritual dimensions. The concept does not prescribe an axiological hierarchy or pathology to modes of responsiveness – the ‘fallen’ and ‘authentic’ remain *descriptive* terms characteristic of us all, though the latter has greater emphasis in the thesis as counterbalance to its modern neglect. Existential migration offers; an other-directed ethics, a future-orientation that includes melancholia, and a pronounced individualism (though not subjectivism). It reveals binary definitions of home, homelessness, belonging, and foreignness, amounting to an illustration of the ontic-ontological significance inherent in individual experiences of relocation. Other contemporary theories generalise at a different level and with a different intention than is evident in the universalising of common existential attributes being explored in the concept of existential migration. A possible corrective emanating from the comparisons in Part Two, regards acknowledging apparent biases in empirical and conceptual literature towards the sedentary and fixed over the migratory and fluid, but without celebrating dislocation as a new aspiration. I propose, somewhat figuratively, that individuals embarked upon existential migration may comprise a permeable and intangible alternative human history.

My hope is that this thesis might enhance acknowledgment of the intense dilemmas and affective potency of *voluntary* migration – that choosing to leave does not eradicate distress. While there is evidently significant overlap in the responses to migration inherent in its various modalities, exiles, refugees, immigrants, the co-researchers in this study also depict particular sensitivities. A tendency to self-contemplation seems to connect the individual with a ‘call’ to realise their potential through migration, which seems to potentiate these possibilities through chosen confrontation with alienness and the non-ordinary. These discussions clarify that ‘home’ in its conventional sense may constitute ‘true exile’ from valuing the ineffability of existence.

As a preliminary conceptual proposition, this thesis raises numerous unresolved questions as well as possibilities for further research; many of these are documented throughout the text.

One central conceptual issue requiring explication remains; the variant *kinds of process* described by the concept 'existential migration'. This issue is illustrated by inquiring, 'since I advertised for voluntary migrants, how did I get a number of people engaged in 'existential migration'? Is it so common? One response is to counter that this conceptual formulation is an artefact of my cohort: academics and therapists, some interested in phenomenology. Another possibility is that my own interests and autobiography over-determined the constitution of themes within co-researcher narratives. However, neither critique accounts for the affective depth of the interviews, suggesting co-researchers were transforming *their own* understandings rather than adopting mine, nor the degree of co-researcher verification of the description at the end of Part One, nor the potential for the evolving concept to elaborate upon outcomes and theories from various academic discourses.

The new concept refers to various process manifestations. For example, 'existential migration' may encompass the prime motivation and characteristics for some individuals who choose to leave home, in fact likely a number (but not all) of the co-researchers interviewed. However, it may also be implicated as a largely unacknowledged aspect in many migrations posing under more commonly ascribed motivations. In the first instance it suggests a *way of being* while in the second it may be an '*unseparated strand*' informing a way of being characterised by other main features. As alluded to in the previous sections, a process of existential migration may commence unbidden within experiences of forced migration, exile, economically-inspired relocations; an original motivation may be usurped by unexpected primordial unconcealment. To reiterate, it is conceived as a self-ascribed *process*, abstracted out from lived experience for the sake of explication. Although we live holistically, not in separate process strands, my intuition is that a number of individuals who have left their homelands to live as foreigners will, to various degrees, recognise themselves in these textual descriptions, and have a felt response to the process described herein. This is yet to be seen.

Other outstanding questions remain: what becomes of individuals who ascribe to a process of existential migration but who cannot, due to commitments, or for economic or political reasons, leave home? And to what extent are the premises of the thesis also translatable to portions of the settled population? During the tenure of this project I have found that without exception people respond to questions of home, belonging, and difference, with uniquely emotional stories, regardless of their positions on the continuum of settled to mobile. Such conversations recurred over the past four years with comparative strangers on trains, with

acquaintances at professional conferences, with students, friends, and colleagues. Whether the person has left home to become a foreigner, or not, each seems able to readily recount deeply felt constellations of home. Ask about 'home' and the likely response, I've found, is a snippet of personal affective biography. There appears to be *something* universal in narratives of home, though this thesis stands as testament to my sense that the narratives of choosing to leave home are uniquely different, one aspect of that distinctiveness being the potential opening to the *unheimlich* inherent in living through difference. However, there are other views, and in the interests of continuing dialogue I would like to close with a brief passage from Martin Buber, though it sounds antithetical, I perceive a similar concern,

If we had power over the ends of the earth, it would not give us that fulfilment of existence which a quiet devoted relationship to nearby life can give us. If we knew the secrets of the upper worlds, they would not allow us so much actual participation in true existence as we can achieve by performing, with holy intent, a task belonging to our daily duties. Our treasure is hidden beneath the hearth of our own home (1948:31).

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