"I'm just who I am": self-continuity and the dialogical self in a study of migrants

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Abstract

Drawing on Dialogical Self Theory this study aimed to develop understanding of the processes of self-continuity in migrants with complex trajectories. Twelve participants of various nationalities and ages took part in qualitative interviews in the UK and USA. An iterative, three-step analysis for multivoicedness suggested participants initially adopted stabilizing I-positions which acted as foundations for subsequent development and evolution of new selves. A clear and dynamic progression of positioning, repositioning, and innovation in the dialogical self emerged. Findings suggest that change and rupture may act as catalysts for positive development and innovation, resulting in a robust, enhanced sense of self-continuity.

Key words: Self-continuity and migration, Dialogical self and migrants, Dialogical self and development

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Migration, which of necessity entails adapting or attempting to adapt to an alien culture, provides an ideal space in which to apply Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Kempen, 1993) as it is improbable that I-positions would remain static in circumstances that challenge personal identity — a heavily context-dependent construct. Hermans (2001a) argues that the situation of migrants *requires* a dialogical self, as the theory posits an ability not only to accommodate conflicting I-positions, but also to develop fresh ones as necessitated by changed circumstances. Negotiating the interface between cultures entails questioning values, customs, and routines that have previously been taken as givens (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007), and adjusting successfully to the new cultural environment. This is not a matter of instant, straightforward choices and the complexity of inter-cultural identity must be acknowledged (Cohen, 2000; Bhatia & Ram, 2001). In place of explaining the interface between cultures as a pressure to adopt the new culture wholesale and precipitately, which might occasion the harsh abruptness of culture shock and a sense of conflict within the self, Dialogical Self Theory allows for a more malleable model to emerge. The very premise that the self is a landscape in which a multiplicity of I-positions operate (Meijers &Hermans, 2018) means that the dialogical self can potentially balance the decentering and centering movements of the self that naturally arise as the consequence of crossing borders and cultures.

The current study used Dialogical Self Theory as a framework for exploring specific I-positions that may facilitate self-continuity in individuals with complex cultural trajectories.

Self-continuity as a human need

It has been proposed that a sense of self-continuity is essential (Vignoles, 2011). Certainly a

feeling of unstable identity may result in psychological maladjustment (Lampinen, Odegard, &

Leding, 2004), while higher levels of self-continuity are related to positive affect (Troll & Skaff,

1997) and contribute to the maintenance of mental equilibrium (Hermans, 2006). That said, the

idea of an unchanging self flies in the face of modern knowledge. The Cartesian notion of the

self as a stable entity began to fragment in the eighteenth century with Hume's (1739/2007)

bundle theory of mind. At the end of the nineteenth century, James (1890) further suggested not

only the existence of identity positions — an external 'I-self' and an internal 'me-self'— but also

mooted the idea that an individual could house multiple selves in various spiritual, material, and

social spaces. By the mid-twentieth century, it was generally recognized that, in keeping with all

known things in our universe, human beings are a collection of separate parts — experiences,

memories, desires, beliefs, habits — making up a whole. In the twenty-first century,

neuroscience has so far found no seat of a core 'I' within the human brain (Broks, 2003, pp. 125-

126). Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose, as Klein and Gangi (2010, p.173) argue, that the self

is a "multiplicity of related, yet separable, processes and contents". Nonetheless, the Cartesian

concept of selfhood is proving extraordinarily resilient and "often unwittingly" (Hermans, 2003,

p.89) informs contemporary discourse on the self. As a species, even in the face of ineluctable

metamorphosis, we persevere in our perception that there exists an unchanging, permanent core

of 'me-ness', which might be discernible if only it could be unearthed.

Chandler and Lalonde (1998) observed that individuals are faced with a paradox of

sameness and change. Change inevitably occasions uncertainty, and while uncertainty does not

automatically presuppose negative effects on individuals, it can trigger a desire for greater stability (Jetten, Hogg & Mullin, 2000). Uncertainty may also act as a catalyst for development of the self by allowing individuals to behave in ways that are novel to them (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). However, if the self is multiple, it is interesting to consider how self-continuity can be achieved.

It appears that a self formed solely by circumstance could scarcely be regarded as a self (Sanchez-Rockcliffe & Symons, 2010), so in a bid to construct a sense of connectedness and self-continuity from a multitude of fragmented experiences and memories, Baggini (2011) argues that an 'ego trick' is performed. Individuals construct a personal narrative in which a continuous 'I' stars throughout. Empirical evidence suggests that this is achieved through a number of psychological processes involving autobiographical memory, nostalgia, emotions, artefacts, culture, social groups, and the stability of perceived personality traits (e.g. Kadianaki, 2010; König, 2009; Sedikides et al., 2016). From a dialogical perspective, the self is thought of as "a continuously emerging experience of 'being a centre' (of being an ego) of the here-and-now experience" (Salgado, Cunha & Bento, 2013), giving a subjective impression of ego and continuity, while remaining multiple, rather as Baggini (2011) suggests. The present paper seeks to elucidate how, in the face of the uncertainty generated by migration, individuals achieve stability, connectedness, and self-continuity.

Dialogical self theory

Inspired not only by Bakhtin's (1929/1984) polyphonic voices theory, but also by James's (1890) and Mead's (1934) classic theories of self, Hermans and Kempen (1993) elaborated the theory of the 'dialogical self'. Dialogical Self Theory bridges the gap between the internal domain of the

individual, and the external domain of society. Hermans posits that individuals contend with a multiplicity of internal voices, a 'mini-society' (Hermans, 2015), representing different positions as 'I' and vying for attention, and sometimes dominance, in the psychological landscape of their minds. Hermans suggests that, in contrast to the Cartesian model of a fixed a-historical self composed of mind and body, personal identity is fluid, contextual and, crucially, developmental in nature. There are a number of selves, all of which identify as 'I', but which take different positions *vis-à-vis* the world which the individual inhabits. These positions may be thought of as comprising two rings, an inner one embracing positions which relate intimately to the individual, and an outer ring embracing I-positions in relation to others.

For example, a self may simultaneously have internal I-positions and external I-positions. In an internal I-position, the self is positioned towards the outside, and the position is expressed as 'I as …': 'I as a wife', 'I as an atheist, or 'I as a jazz enthusiast'. An external I-position is expressed in semantically possessive terms: 'my family' or 'my values and beliefs', 'my interest in jazz', demonstrating that the otherness has been internalized as part of the self.

Both inner and outer rings are encompassed by the outside world which informs self-constructs, for example via gender, economic status, language institutions, and culture. At any given time, these I-positions are in dialogue with one another, their 'voices' becoming more or less powerful according to an individual's situation, possibly conflicting with each other, but nonetheless all constituting the self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Crucially, the repertoire of I-positions can be drawn on according to the situation, and is always open to development (Hermans, 2001b).

Beyond I-positions, Dialogical Self Theory proposes that individuals can adopt meta positions — positions that allow for a longer-term, more holistic view of situations. Meta positions are characterized by the fact that, while they may be more drawn to existing positions than others, they provide the individual with distance, and thus perspective. In so doing, they afford a more comprehensive view of both internal and external positions in the self and on the connections between those positions. Furthermore, meta positions supply a longitudinal observation and evaluation of the interplay between past, present, and future positions. The resultant clarity means the individual can now access the various positions and may prioritize some positions over others. The enhanced awareness of the direction of change, and the recognition of the importance of particular positions, are both significant in the context of the development of a future self (Meijers & Hermans, 2018). As Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) suggest, it is the development of meta positions more than any other position that promotes organization and continuity in the self.

While, as Bhatia and Ram (2001) point out, the challenge to Dialogical Self Theory is to explain how individuals living with 'hybridized and hyphenated identities' in migrant communities reconcile their often opposing cultural and personal I-positions in order to maintain a sense of self-continuity, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) propose that a partial answer may lie in what they term 'promoter positions'. While meta-positions act as organizers of the self in spatial terms, promoter positions do so temporally (Hermans & Gieser, 2011). Building on Valsiner's (2004) promoter *sign*, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) argue that promoter positions prevent the self from descending into a disorganized, cacophonous confusion of voices. Instead, they facilitate higher levels of development by synthesizing pre-existing and new voices

and act as catalysts for evolution of the self in a range of scenarios (Hermans & Gieser, 2011). Promoter sources may be essentialist representations of a cultural group, such as literary, artistic, musical or other historical figures, but also, more modestly, they may be inspiring teachers, parents, or simply favourite characters from a childhood story. Such external promoters have the potential to become internalized as "others-in-the-self" (Hermans, 2002), giving rise to new, *internal* promoter positions, particularly when the promoter appeals to positions in the self that were "hidden, neglected, or waiting to become actualized" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). In times of transition and uncertainty, promoter positions increase the individual's ability to tolerate ambiguity and to welcome not only one's own, but also other people's, dialogical offerings. In the context of migration, it is not difficult to see that the adoption of promoter positions allows the individual better to respond to, and engage with, that which was once unfamiliar. This may pay dividends by simultaneously socializing the migrant to the new culture and personalizing his or her experience. Perhaps the most salient feature of the promoter position is that it is developmental, in that it is characterized by an open attitude to emerging and future selves.

Interestingly, not all promoters are benign, inspiring heroes to be conjured up at will for new direction or self-innovation. Anti-promoter positions are readily identifiable in auto-dialogue (Josephs & Valsiner, 1998) and in the dialogues an individual has with "inner-others" (a disapproving parent, or officialdom, for instance), and these positions can in turn generate novel internal positions, often to the benefit of the individual.

Mediators of self-continuity in migrants

The existing literature on self-continuity provides excellent insights into the strategies employed by migrants. Davis (1979) argues that nostalgia is a by-product of discontinuity of identity, galvanizing "psychological resources for self-continuity", and it is notable that in nostalgic accounts, the self tends to feature prominently (Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006). Sedikides et al., (2016) built on this idea, positing that nostalgia increases social connectedness or a sense of 'belonging'. That desire for belonging is also seen in the tendency for migrants to ascribe importance to routines, material objects, artefacts (Grossen & Orvig, 2011), and architecture: the Italian Chapel in Orkney built by prisoners of war being just one example. Similarly, Habermas and Paha (2002) suggest that past selves and distant others (e.g. school friends, family) are brought closer to the present self through objects. Additionally, maintaining the routines of everyday life by cooking familiar foods, engaging in the hobbies and customs of the native country, and celebrating holidays, may bolster self-continuity (Mahmoud, 2010).

A number of studies have explored self-continuity in migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. For example, Aveling and Gillespie (2008) examined the dialogical structure of the self in second-generation Turkish adolescents; Märtsin (2010) researched identity construction in young Estonians on study visits in the UK, Dunlop and Walker (2014) compared the self-continuity strategies used by immigrant Asian-Canadians and non-immigrant Euro-Canadians; O'Sullivan-Lago, de Abreu and Burgess (2008) explored cultural discontinuity among immigrants and asylum seekers in Ireland. Sanchez-Rockliffe and Symons (2010) conducted an interesting study into the effects of migration on the dialogical self in a sample of 38 migrants to

Australia. However, no studies have investigated whether facilitators of self-continuity are common and consistent across participants of varying ages and cultural backgrounds.

Two research questions guided this study: (1) are there any commonalities of I-positions in migrants of different ages with complex cultural trajectories; and (2) if so, do any of these I-positions facilitate self-continuity?

Design and Participants

In order better to understand participants' experiences of migration, the I-positions adopted as a consequence of migration, and the impact these may have on self-continuity, the design was qualitative and based on a semi-structured interview schedule (Flick, 2009). The research focus was two-fold as it sought to explore past and present I-positions, and also to discern any ongoing, dynamic processes that might contribute to self-continuity. Therefore, mixed open and theory-driven questions were used. These are described below.

The dataset discussed in this paper covers 12 interviews conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom between May and July 2016. Participants were eight females and four males from diverse cultural backgrounds (e.g. Sri Lanka, The Netherlands, Russia, Italy, Japan) and with equally diverse reasons for migrating (e.g. emotional ties, employment relocation, refugee of war, educational opportunity). Participants ranged in age from 26 to 92 and were drawn from the first author's extended personal network. The criterion for inclusion in the study was that participants had migrated at least once, whether voluntarily or not. A wide range of ages and nationalities was deliberately sought in order to reduce the possibility that being part of a cohort might in part explain commonalities among participants.

Interviews

The method of data collection was by individual semi-structured episodic-narrative interviews, which is one of the appropriate techniques for the exploration of identity construction, subjective views, and personal experience (Flick, 2009). Interviews are conceptualized as dialogues, with the aim of allowing individuals to articulate their own representations through various positions (Kraus, 2000). Participants were free to choose those episodes that they wished to recount, and to recount them purely descriptively, or in the form of a narrative. Participants also chose the order in which they recounted memories and observations. Questions were designed to elicit past and present I-positions as well as future trajectories. Unstructured narrative questions were formulated to generate a free and open-ended response, for example: *Please tell me about an experience or event that you remember from one of your migrations.* Key-word narrative questions required more concrete examples or explanation: *Could you tell me which culture you see yourself as belonging to now? Can you give me an example of the traditions or customs you have maintained from your native country?*

This research followed the British Psychological Society's ethical guidelines and was approved by the Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee at Oxford Brookes University. Interviews took place in a quiet location of the participants' choosing in both the United States and the United Kingdom and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Ten of these interviews were conducted face-to-face, and two via Skype. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. References to identifiable people and places were removed from the transcriptions. To ensure anonymity, all participant names throughout this paper are pseudonymous.

Analytical Method

The analysis was iterative and followed Aveling, Gillespie and Cornish's (2015) three-step

model of analysis for multivoicedness. To answer the question 'who is doing the talking?', the

data were coded first to identify and label the various I-positions from which participants spoke.

Second, to identify within those utterances the voices that Aveling, Gillespie and Cornish (2015)

term 'inner-Others' (these include not only concrete, real people such as parents and spouses, but

also imagined or generalized voices, such as the voice of officialdom or the voice of the British

people); and third, to identify and explore the interactions between these voices within the self.

This final step uncovered several instances of auto-dialogue (Josephs & Valsiner, 1998), along

with shifts in I-positions, position leaps, and occasional contradictions within individual datasets.

The careful study of these voices shed light on which inner I-positions individuals deem

worthy of preservation and how internal conflicts between voices played out, thus leading to a

clearer picture of how self-continuity was achieved.

Analysis

The data revealed two striking elements, the first of which was that all participants held the

following I-positions in common: 'I as narrator', 'I as nostalgic', 'I as home-builder', 'I as

identified with my culture of origin', and 'I as member of an in-group'. The second was a

distinct and dynamic progression of three key I-positions: 'I as newly arrived cultural outsider',

'I as puzzle-solver and adopter of host culture', and 'I as self-analyzing, evolving hybrid'. These

positions are examined below.

I-Positions Held in Common

I as Narrator.

Many participants were inclined to give a vivid narrative account of their lives and the early parts

of their migrations. Some used the word 'story' with the chief protagonist as the 'continuous I':

"I'll start with the story of my coming to England …" (Francesca C), thus demonstrating a

recognition of a past and present self. These narratives were typified by autobiographical

reasoning (Habermas, 2011). In the case of Levi S., the autobiographical reasoning (underlined)

causally related a specific event to long-term biographical consequences:

> I was approved to go to England amongst those 10,000 children … my father was arrested after
>
> the *Kristallnacht* and he was sent to Buchenwald and I ... spent one day in prison, <u>but since I was</u>
>
> <u>only 13</u> years old ... they let me go and … <u>I was left in Germany just</u> <u>with my mother</u>. (Levi S)

while in this instance, it referred to the developmental status of the participant:

> <u>The first time I moved was probably the most … memorable-slash-traumatic experience because</u>
>
> <u>I was so young</u> … I had just graduated from primary school. (Sung Q)

I as Nostalgic.

Nostalgia featured prominently in many of the interviews, with several participants

spontaneously reminiscing about their native countries. Many mentioned festivals, including

Sinterklaas (The Netherlands), St Nicolaus (Germany), Christmas (UK, Australia, Italy), Vesak

(Sri Lanka), Passover (Israel), and the Dutch tradition of decorating chairs to celebrate birthdays.

I sometimes feel a little bit of loss about … special days in Holland ... I remember the excitement of

Sinterklaas when I was, let's say, ten. The shops were all lit up, the music was there, you'd go home

in the dark in December and you would ... have a party and your surprises. You'd have your sweets

and so on and spend time as a family … (Stijn W)

Seven participants mentioned traditional foods and the pleasure they derived from being

able to maintain native customs in the host country.

… literally I could buy things from some shops in London I could find from my garden back in Sri

Lanka so that is ... unbelievable … (Ravi S)

I as Home builder.

The need for artefacts to sustain psychological well-being was manifest in some of the

participants' responses, and acutely so in one participant's — her use of autodialogue (Josephs &

Valsiner, 1998) bringing the "traumatic experience" closer to the present:

It's not even that I'm materialistic, but … I've become so obsessed with not losing things, not

having things damaged, because I've just moved so many times and I've lost a lot of things along

the way … I lost things that my high school friends had made for me on my graduation, my CD

collections, all my souvenirs from my travels...I lost all of that. I think that was such a traumatic

experience and a part of me was like, *'Well, don't get too attached to material things because you

could just lose all of that!'* I've become so … paranoid of losing things. (Sung Q.)

This would bear out the assertion that tangible objects aid in the construction of identity by ensuring "a positioning of diasporic groups through their metaphorical effect, their metonymical value and their accretion of meaning" (Tolia-Kelly, 2010, p.24).

I as Identified with my culture of origin.

Native culture, particularly music, film, television, art, and literature, was cited as a feature of maintaining cultural identity. One participant saw music as an integral part of his cultural identity, or perhaps his identity as a whole, emphasizing how deeply entrenched, and how central to sense of self, culture can be:

> ...funny enough that's something that defines me, is mine [Dutch music]. I play it in my car and everybody hates it and that's why I love it. Because it defines me as that funny foreigner. *[You see yourself as a funny foreigner?]* Sometimes. That's part of my identity, yeah. I like that. (Stijn W)

while another had this to say about the twinning of literature and national identity:

> … to me it's impossible, I know I sound silly, it's impossible for me to be Russian without Pushkin. … I was reading some Dovlatov, who's a Russian writer who died in New York City in the eighties ... and he says that Russians relate to their literature as some other people relate to their religion. And it's a very interesting thought … I've never thought about it that way, but it's true … (Masha D)

I as Member of an in-group.

Identification with the national group of origin was marginally more mixed, with the majority of participants (British, Russian, Dutch, Australian [2], Sri Lankan, Italian and German), strongly allied to their national group; but one not allied at all, to the point almost of rejecting it. In this participant, there was evidence of dialogical tension as these statements were followed by the declaration that being Korean was "definitely important in that it's part of me".

> If anything I think [a] Korean passport just means that there's some sort of a disjuncture between my sense of who I am and how the world or how the law sees me as who I am. (Sung Q)

As the sociologist Strauss (1959) observed, autobiographies of immigrants to the US who later returned to their native countries show that they had retained little of their affinity for 'home' having assimilated the new culture, identified with new social groups, and effectively become American. This phenomenon was vividly illustrated by the Korean participant who had migrated first to Australia as a child, and later to the US:

> I'm happy to identify myself as Australian on certain occasions ... if Australia playing against England I'm totally cheering for Australia.

> ... being American defies all other labels ... because America is a country of people from all sorts of backgrounds, people who are mixed, people who may have been born overseas, but who've lived in America most of their lives … I feel accepted in America as one of them ... one of the Americans, and to me I think that's what being American is. (Sung Q)

In two cases, participants used a hyphenated identity label: one a national/national group (Japanese-American), the other a cultural-religious/national group, (Jewish-American). Interestingly, one participant felt a heightened sense of identification with the in-group of origin by virtue of living in a host country:

> I can be more Dutch in England than I could be in Holland. I can use ... my country of origin and our culture and our ... values to actually … be more defined. (Stijn W)

The remaining participant described himself once as "American" (allying himself with the host country), but also stated that his heart was "split in two" between the native and host countries. In contrast to Strauss's findings, this participant further stated that he found it "very difficult" to leave his native country when he went there, so while firmly identified with the US, he had in fact retained a robust affinity for home.

Each of the five I-positions described above is a natural, almost instinctive position, easily accessed and freely available to *any* individual. Used as strategies, they are also widely documented as mediators of self-continuity in migrants and non-migrants alike, thus they would be as effective in a transition from London to Leeds as Colombo to Chicago. In this sample, these I-positions appeared to be acting as building blocks of self-continuity in the early stages of migration. They were the initial stabilizers of the new psychological terrain in which these migrants found themselves, called upon to counteract the uncertainty brought about by migration.

Progression from I-position to meta and promoter positions

    I as newly arrived cultural outsider.

As might be expected in the context of a major environmental change, when providing

unstructured narratives of their migrations, most participants reported having had mixed feelings.

These were characterized by uncertainty, anxiety, excitement, and a sense of personal

opportunity. Uncertainty and anxiety were occasioned by language difficulties, the search for

jobs and housing, loneliness, and lack of social networks:

> I didn't know a single person here ... I had met some of the colleagues that I would be working with,
>
> but I only knew them as vague colleagues, so I didn't have any friends or family or anything at all,
>
> and I was quite worried that I wouldn't be able to hack it and that I'd be homesick. (Anne G)

In this section of the interviews, some participants used autodialogue (Josephs & Valsiner,

1998) to illustrate the emotions felt by their past selves. This autodialogue (indicated in italics)

acted as a distancing technique, almost as if protecting the speaker from an imagined 'worst case

scenario':

> I sort of thought '*Well, how bad could it be? What could go wrong?*' ...of course you can always be
>
> … stabbed in the street or something, but beyond something absolutely catastrophic like that...
>
> '*What's the worst that's going to happen?*' (Anne G)

Conversely, excitement and a sense of opportunity were also present in participants'

discourse. It is interesting to note the dialogical tension in Anne G's position: in one short

moment she is 'worried' and in the next 'excited'. This switching of I-positions, or position leaps

(Hermans, 2001b) provides clear evidence of the I that "fluctuates among different and even opposed positions" (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1992, p.28).

> I moved here … and for the next year I woke up excited every morning. It's true. Because it was such a big adventure for me, because I'd been living in [city in the UK], and living a pretty sort of mundane life going to work and going to the pub and hanging out with my friends and ... not doing anything very exciting ... a very average [city in the UK] person's life and then I had this opportunity to move to another country. (Anne G)

I as puzzle-solver and adopter of host culture: acquiring meta positions.
Hermans (2015) notes that adults use internal dialogues "in the service of openness and curiosity" and suggests that middle-aged individuals in particular use these dialogues to further their possibilities and explore novel experiences. Encounters with people who have different cultures, languages, and values have been shown to have a transformative effect on identity, promoting change in the ways people perceive and define themselves (Chryssochoou, 2004). In the current study, this transformation became evident as participants (of all ages) began to reveal a new I-position, one in which the host culture no longer seemed quite as unfamiliar or threatening, and in which they very deliberately set about solving the challenges facing them. In this I-position, participants take the 'helicopter view' (Hermans & Gieser, 2011) of themselves, as is transparently illustrated here:

> I think if you live outside your culture, you get a bird's eye view of it and you can step back and go
>
> 'Oh! I never realized I was doing that for that reason' ... I dunno, you can just look in on yourself ...
>
> (Anne G)

Participants in this sample arrived at a meta position that allowed them to reconcile the past 'I as cultural outsider' position not only with the immediate reality of being a migrant (I as migrant here and now), but also with the future self that they will become. The mechanisms by which they achieved this new position were broadly pragmatic: participants spoke of learning the language, figuring out the system, fitting in, actively joining new social groups, appropriating local social norms, accepting differences and tolerating ambiguities, and absorbing the politics, literature, sport, music, and popular culture of the host country.

> You learn to eat peanut butter sandwiches and say 'God! Yummy! Gee!', you know. I mean, I hated
>
> them, but that's neither here nor there ... No, you do have to sometimes change. (Piero B)

In the case of migrants to the UK, three participants mentioned acquiring what are often regarded as British habits: saying 'sorry' and queuing, for example, but more indicatively, they expressed an appreciation of social discourse and interaction:

> … in my work I've never seen [the] British dealing with the subject in a very unpleasant way, but if
>
> dealing efficiently and correctly means being very open and very straightforward without losing any
>
> time and efforts … I welcome that! In Italy, it's a dance. .. I've 'gone British' for that. (Francesca C)

Perhaps most crucially, participants expressed an aversion to living on the fringe — turning away, in other words, from their initial I-position of 'I as newly arrived cultural outsider'. The sense of not wanting to be seen as an obvious ex-pat or immigrant came across strongly from several participants. One had become a citizen of the United States, not out of allegiance to the country, but rather out of a sense of civic duty, a desire to vote, and the belief that being a citizen gave her political views more "validity". An overt dislike of the behaviour of some fellow migrants was a tangible motivator in the creation of this new I-position:

I didn't want to be somebody who lives … in a little compound with other Brits doing British things, looking out at the natives, OK? So I was very much like, no, 'I'm going to assimilate and that's going to bit a bit tough, so I'm going to make sure I give myself some rules so I assimilate well'.

There's something about the ex-pat approach that I don't like. ... That whole ex-pat sort of British Raj that go out to India and drink their gin and tonics, and go to the tennis club, and live that sort of ex-pat life, where you're not really ... other than experiencing the climate, you're not really living in that other country and I didn't want to be like that. (Anne G)

These attitudes towards integration are in harmony with Hermans and Gieser's (2011) assertion that individuals consider their current position in the context of other significant positions: there is the position of 'I as current migrant', but it is situated alongside 'I as making an effort to integrate', 'I as aiming to be a successful migrant', and it is this 'observing ego' view (Hermans & Gieser, 2011) that allows the individual to make decisions that are not only relevant

at the time of speaking or thinking, but also pertinent to the individual's future, and in some cases, pertinent to the future generation.

I as self-analyzing, evolving hybrid: adopting promoter positions.

This I-position was overwhelmingly positive in nature, with all participants describing a net gain in both sense and continuity of self. In their responses to semi-structured questions, many participants commented on gains they had made in terms of personality, experience, and identity, and they did so largely from a developmental perspective. Some attributed the evolution directly to the experience of migration; others also acknowledged the process of aging:

> ... as I grow older I guess I feel a little bit more comfortable in myself ... I feel fine saying that, 'Well, I'm just this combination of different cultures and I don't have to act like an English person ... I don't have to act like an American person.' (Sung Q)

It is obvious from Sung Q's statement (above) that a liberation has occurred. This liberation is probably derived from what Hermans and Gieser (2011) term a 'developmental impetus' of I-positions within the internal domain of the self. Several times, Sung Q. expressed a strong dislike of identity labels:

> I don't know if it's because I have trouble labelling myself or because I just don't like labels generally ... the label 'Korean' isn't so important to me ... I'm just who I am and whenever people ask me, I don't say that I'm Korean-American or Korean-Australian.

The position leap made by Sung Q. denotes an evolution in the self: there is no need for an identity label. Instead, a new label-free I-position allows her to be "just who I am". Such a position is influential in that it enables individuals "to find their way in a greater diversity of situations" (Hermans & Gieser, 2011).

The most obvious external promoter positions seen in the current study came from literature and history. Two participants made particular and frequent reference to new heroes from their host countries:

Henry James would be a good example … or Mark Twain. But … I think Russians are more connected to Mark Twain than Americans are. Seriously. Because I would make a reference to ... Tom Sawyer … Like, 'Oh, I'll let you paint for half an apple' and most Americans ... they are not going to understand me, they're just not going to understand me. And all Russians, pretty much everybody, is going to know exactly what I am talking about. (Masha D)

Look, I know German language, I can read Schiller and Goethe and Uhland and all those great German poets but I … but do I accept Germany? No way. It's not my thing. … My heroes are not … Siegfried and Brunhilde and … those are not my heroes. My heroes in America [are] … Thomas Jefferson and George Washington and Madison and so I can identify with people … I mean Alexander Hamilton was an immigrant, you know. (Levi S)

From the utterances of these two participants, it is clear that literary and historical figures already occupied a central and affirming position within the self, and were thus pre-existing voices, and that a by-product of these particular migrations was, in effect, the acquisition of a

new voice, one that might be termed 'I as adopter of new heroes'. The synthesis of the old and new voices results in an innovation or new 'layer' of the self.

What then of the anti-promoters? In this study, anti-promoters were largely seen in the interaction between I-positions and the voices of inner-Others:

> I could really choose the experiences I wanted, not the experiences I was thought to have by my family. Because would it be up to my father, I would have a neat little office job somewhere ... (Liese L)

While there is clearly a conflict (daughter's wishes versus father's wishes) it is interesting that the I-position is still in a position of strength, still — as it were — 'in charge'.

Within the society of mind, internal and external positions "construct and reconstruct each other" (Hermans & Gieser, 2011). In two of the interviews, certain dispositional statements made it especially noticeable that comparisons were being drawn between the participant's current situation and the situations of friends left behind, and that from those comparisons an evolved version of the self was emerging:

> I have many friends left in Italy they really struggle … they never had the courage to make a change … (Francesca C)

> I've gained a lot of life experience that people living their same life in Germany wouldn't have … I've still got friends in Germany and they've got their little contained life but ... it partly feels so boring and so normal in comparison to what I do. It just feels like ... ten years down the line they still

have the same friends, they still have the same job, they still live in the same village. It just doesn't

feel like they've developed themselves to their true potential. (Liese L)

Arguably the most unexpected, intriguing part of the self-analyzing, evolving position was

concerned with the idea of acquiring a 'hybridized identity' (Bhatia & Ram, 2001). Among these

participants, hybridization seemed to be a welcome development, enhancing and augmenting the

sense of self:

That's a really good question! … I'm sort of fascinated. Do I feel American? I don't know if I do. …

I'm something in the middle, I think. Even though I have American citizenship, I sort of don't really

think I'm an American ... underneath it all, I'm more British actually even though I think probably a

lot of my behaviour and attitude is no longer very British but I think I'm still British. (Anne G)

Like Anne G., many seemed content to self-identify as 'something in the middle': a

combination of things, a hybrid —

… identity ... how I perceive myself is just ... all this complex mixture of things and my past

experiences. I guess identity is more important when it's understood within the context of your

interaction with other people. (Sung Q)

Consistent with the idea of promoter positions as innovators of the self (Hermans &

Hermans-Konopka, 2010), which by definition implies a work in progress — an ongoing

construction of self, whether by the individual or by circumstance —references to 'experiences' and 'creating' the self featured prominently in this sample:

Identity is about what I've done as an individual … What I've created out of where I started off 56 years ago as a little baby, that is my identity. I guess my identity is what I did myself after I finished secondary school. That's sort of where I see myself having taken charge of my own destiny, my own life. (Stijn W)

[I'm] probably a very world-open German. ... Because even though I adopted lots of British standards…, I don't feel like I'm British, I just feel like I'm somewhere a little hybrid model in between ... I'm fine with that. Helps me to survive in both cultures. (Liese L)

To summarise, from the three I-positions discussed, it is clear that participants had been through a sequence of positions that concluded with an unscathed, arguably even enhanced, sense of self-continuity. Despite the disparity in ages in this sample, and the materially different cultural transitions of the individuals, these positions were common to all participants.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to research commonalities and consistency of prevailing I-positions and their role in facilitating self-continuity in a disparate group of people who had experienced one or more migrations. Individuals who migrate to other countries and cultures experience biographical disruption (Habermas & Köber, 2015) and, as Sedikides et al. (2016) observe, changes in circumstance may disrupt self-continuity. This subject is germane in this century, not only because of globalization, but also, poignantly, because of the diasporas fleeing

war, famine, and racism. Hermans and Kempen (1998) labelled the borderland between one

culture and another as a 'cultural contact zone'. Both literally and metaphorically, it is an 'edgy'

and sometimes far from benign space that migrants occupy. Some migrations may even be

characterized as 'ruptures' (Zittoun, 2007). Further, the stigmatizing categories into which

migrants may be placed can be highly unsettling for the individual's sense of self, especially

when such categorization is patently untrue (Kadianaki, 2014). It was expected that the current

research would reveal several differing I-positions, and that at least some of these might reflect a

sense of discontinuity or uncertainty in the self that needed to be resolved through processes in

the dialogical self. Consistent with the findings of other researchers (e.g. O'Sullivan Lago, de

Abreu & Burgess, 2008) that individuals employ particular strategies to maintain continuity of

identity, the first phase of analysis resulted in five shared I-positions representing the foundations

of self-continuity. These mechanisms offset the destabilizing nature of uncertainty, especially in

the early stages of migration.

However, migrants are not a homogeneous entity, and the effects of migration on self-

continuity will depend on the individual's interpretation of migration (Kadianaki, O'Sullivan &

Gillespie, 2014). The interpretation of migration and the psychological integration seen in this

sample was largely characterized by a strong sense of optimism, and especially opportunity,

whether personal, economic, or educational. Negative feelings of rupture or discontinuity, when

mentioned at all, resided in past selves and were often explained through autobiographical

reasoning (Habermas, 2011). Disruption and uncertainty seemed to have had little, if any,

detrimental impact on the individual's present self — in fact in some cases, quite the opposite. It

is worth noting, however, that the age and experience of many of the participants allowed for a

reasonable period of looking back, which may account for the fact that feelings of disruption

were less critical. In a sentiment reminiscent of Abbey and Valsiner's (2005, para. 1) assertion that "all development is necessarily based on uncertainty" one participant had this to say: "I don't like using the word 'grow'. I think it's overused. But … we have to grow and … the moment that you stop growing, that's when the trouble starts" (Piero B.). It is interesting to conjecture whether the meaning of the often-used 'grow' is in fact 'remain in flux' rather than becoming a fixed, static entity of the Cartesian type.

The second phase of the analysis suggested that beyond the building blocks of self-continuity laid down by the individual, a very definite process plays out in the dialogical self. This occurs when the individual possesses both openness towards the social norms of the new culture and a willingness to adopt promoter positions. It is in this construction zone of self-development and evolution that the characterization of Dialogical Self Theory as a 'bridging theory' (Hermans & Gieser, 2011) becomes palpable: the self can tolerate ambiguity; it can accommodate the centering nature of some dialogue (agreement, cooperation), but equally it can accommodate decentering (disagreement, conflict, change, rupture) because in doing so, it evolves. To borrow the words of one of literature and philosophy's most famous self-examiners, Montaigne (1580/1962): *Je m'avance vers celui qui me contredit, qui m'instruit* — individuals learn from contradiction and change, and such change may be the catalyst for positive development and innovation. In this sample, what was most notable was the sense of gain for the present self that had been derived from the experience of migration and, hand in hand with that gain, an optimism and openness towards the future self.

In the introduction to this paper, it was noted that the Cartesian concept of selfhood endures in spite of incontrovertible evidence to the contrary. Individuals still tend to think of the self as having a core — something to excavate. Dialogical Self Theory and, most saliently, promoter

positions within the dialogical self, suggest that far from being comprised of a core, the self is a series of layers. Thus, self-continuity is an ongoing process of self-innovation requiring construction, not excavation. The migrants in this sample, at both ends of the age spectrum, appear to be using this layering greatly to the benefit of their own self-continuity.

The current research and results are limited. This sample consisted of individuals who had moved for diverse reasons, some through choice; others not. A similar study using participants all of whom had migrated as the result of marriage (for example) might produce further insights. Additionally, the interviews generated an extensive, far-reaching dataset that one paper cannot adequately address. For example, no comparisons were made between the responses of participants who had migrated to the UK rather than the US — it is possible that comparisons might result in the identification of context-specific I-positions. The wide age range of participants was deliberately sought to reduce the possibility that being part of a particular cohort might explain commonalities. In further research, it would be worth considering whether broad life experience contributes to a clear picture of meta and promoter positions.

While the three-step model for multivoicedness (Aveling, Gillespie & Cornish, 2015) used here proved highly effective in identifying I-positions, a more in-depth, semantic analysis of the lexical choices made by participants in their responses would be interesting, particularly given that only three participants spoke English as their native language. Equally, an analysis similar to that undertaken by Gómez-Estern and Benítez (2013) of the thematic characteristics of the narratives would no doubt shed light on the devices being used in identity construction. Questions beyond the scope of the current study also arise: for example, what are the long-term effects of promoter positions on the self and on self-continuity? Do internal and external promoter positions influence self-innovation differently? Likewise, the openness that led

participants to meta-positions is deserving of more detailed study: what fosters it; what mechanisms bring it to the fore in a new cultural situation? Uncovering more of these processes might prove extremely useful for migrants who, unlike these participants, live in less benign situations, and are therefore arguably in greater need of strategies for protecting and innovating the self, and fostering its continuity.

Few empirical studies have so far elucidated the role of meta- and promoter-positions in the dialogical self. In line with Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's (2010) thinking, Mattos and Chaves (2013, p.134) describe the self as being "in motion" and suggest that promoter positions facilitate the "emergence of new identities". By providing a novel developmental analysis of both meta- and promoter positions, the study highlights the evolving principle of self-innovation within Dialogical Self Theory.

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