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Research Article

Post-Conflict Reconstruction: How Social Identity Change Informs our Understanding of the Ukrainian Experience of Forced Migration

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This research explores the experiences of 13 Ukrainian women forced to flee their homes in 2022 and seek asylum in the UK. Using a social identity change approach, the research examines how the various groups established to support Ukrainians, namely the UK 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme and local Ukrainian support groups, shape Ukrainian experience and offer pathways to support psycho-social wellbeing. In-depth interviews were carried out with each participant in either English, Ukrainian or Russian, and a 'talking stones' approach was used to help facilitate the accounts given. A thematic analysis of the data yielded three themes that reflected the nature of these pathways and provided insights about the 'severing and tethering' of identities post-migration. The themes of 'Helplessness', 'Solidarity' and 'Self-determination', suggest that the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC) provides a robust framework for understanding post-migration experiences. Further, emergent social identities arising from the Ukrainian community operating in tandem with the formal organisation of social support groups create a powerful double helix-style social scaffold which confers social cure outcomes. We conclude that social identity plays a significant role in both the nature of post-migration stress and that psycho-social wellbeing should be considered as a collective accomplishment. The limitations of this research are discussed, along with suggestions for future research with refugee communities.

Introduction

The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led to the largest and fastest displacement of people in Europe since World War II (UNHCR, 2023). Over eleven million people were forced to flee their homes, six million of whom sought refuge in other countries. In response, countries worldwide opened their borders, and their homes, to offer humanitarian assistance.

Among those countries, the UK offered support to over 210,000 people via the Ukraine Family Scheme and the UK Sponsorship Scheme, commonly known as 'Homes for Ukraine' (HfU). Homes for Ukraine allows individuals, charities, businesses and community groups to sponsor people from Ukraine (referred to as 'guests') and provide them with a place to stay. Families and communities not only provided shelter, administrative and legal help but also enabled strong friendships to be formed, language acquisition to be accelerated and a deeper cultural understanding on both sides (Kandiah, 2023). This, coupled with 'bespoke humanitarian' (Migration Observatory, 2023) legislation that allows Ukrainians a right to work and access to benefits, has set a remarkable precedent. Local government, families and communities, many with no previous experience supporting refugees, stepped up and provided physical shelter and the potential for meaningful social and psychological sanctuary.

Conflict on this scale, and the limbo experienced in exile, fundamentally challenges a person's sense of self and the social identities that constitute it (Anjum et al., 2023; S. Ballentyne et al., 2021; Bogic et al., 2015; Kellezi & Reicher, 2012; Muldoon et al., 2019; Smeekes et al., 2017). These challenges are often experienced as stress which undermines a person's wellbeing. In this context, we argue that social identity change can inform our understanding of the psycho-social challenges and stressors Ukrainian guests and other refugees face. Through in-depth interviews with 13 Ukrainian guests and drawing on the Social Identity Model of Identity Change as a framework for analysing their accounts (SIMIC - Haslam et al., 2008, 2021; Jetten et al., 2012; Muldoon et al., 2019) we examine the relationships formed through HfU and within local communities to explore how social identity plays a role in shaping the nature of, and response to, these post-migration challenges.

Stress and Wellbeing in a Post-Migration Context

To explore these questions, an understanding is needed of what 'post-migration stress', or 'secondary stress' means and how it relates to social identity change. Within research and practice,

there are two distinct approaches to conceptualising and supporting refugee wellbeing (Bangpan et al., 2017; Loughry, 2022). The trauma-focused approach identifies stress, often in the form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD, Bogic et al., 2015; Fazel et al., 2005; Katona & Brady, 2019), as arising from exposure to traumatic events brought about through war or the experiences of seeking asylum. For example, a recent study by Karstoft et al., (2023) reported almost one-third of Ukrainian refugees in Denmark showing signs of PTSD. However, wider research (Loughry, 2022; Ommeren et al., 2015) reports that whilst levels of distress are often high, on average, only 3-4% of refugees have serious mental health challenges. As such, specialised clinical intervention to treat the psychiatric symptoms of trauma (K. E. Miller & Rasmussen, 2010) is only required for a minority of the refugee population.

Of greater relevance to the broader refugee population, the psycho-social approach focuses on the interconnection between individual and social processes (Bangpan et al., 2017; Ommeren et al., 2015). Within this approach, the most significant stress is considered to arise from the everyday challenges people face, post-migration (K. E. Miller & Rasmussen, 2017). In their research of Syrian refugees living in Jordan, Alfadhli & Drury, (2018) identified three types of psycho-social stressors which they term 'secondary stressors', namely financial, environmental (exile structures) and social (directly related to social relations). They concluded that despite the presence of primary stressors experienced through exposure to war and conflict, secondary stressors that occurred in exile created the greatest challenge.

In mitigating the impact of these secondary stressors, research has consistently shown that a psycho-social approach also delivers the greatest efficacy. As Alfadhli and Drury (2019) went on to demonstrate, a significant protective factor in buffering the impact of these secondary stressors was the process of social-identity based support that emerged within Syrian refugee groups. Similarly, Farahani et al., (2021) and Morimitsu and Akerkar (2023) have demonstrated how social support and group-based interventions allow collective identities to be built which provide protective factors for sustainable well-being and can predict post-traumatic growth.

Adopting such research to publish its guidance, the Inter-Agency Standing Commission (IASC) Reference Group for Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support in Emergency Settings specifically identifies the important assets and resources that people have themselves to support their mental health and psycho-social wellbeing. At its core, humanitarian efforts to mitigate stress and support psycho-social well-being focus on two key areas: resilience and self-reliance (Bangpan et al., 2017).

Particular mention is made of community mobilisation and support, strong social networks, and community resilience to cope with long-term disruption (Ommeren et al., 2015). Whilst much is made of the term 'self-reliance', this is almost always framed as an outcome of collective efforts occurring within naturally occurring social groups (Meyer, 2013).

Within the social identity approach, group cooperation and assistance - intragroup helping - similarly demonstrates positive individual and collective wellbeing. Research by Bowe et al., (2019), Levine and Thompson, (2004) and Politi et al., (2023) all reveal how social categories and their associated social identities are instrumental in fostering helping behaviour towards others. These studies demonstrate how the salience of a shared identity at a community or superordinate level can override stigma consciousness and enable helping behaviour. In the case of Politi et al.'s (2023) research, the salience of a shared superordinate identity 'European' predicted willingness to help Ukrainians due to the re-categorisation of Ukrainians and potential helpers as being members of one, overall meaningful group.

Building on Alfadhli and Drury's research and drawing on insights from wider social identity research, there is still much to be understood about what processes impact refugee wellbeing. More specifically, the implications of social identity *change* require further investigation to build the embryonic evidence of its utility within refugee cohorts (S. Ballentyne et al., 2021). In this research, we adopt a psycho-social approach (K. E. Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Ommeren et al., 2015) and use social-identity to explore how the impact of group-based interventions such as HfU and wider social relationships, can be understood in terms of social identities that are maintained, disrupted or created anew.

The Social Identity Approach and Social Identity Change

The value of adopting a social identity approach within the field of forced migration, whilst nascent, has been significant (Alfadhli et al., 2019; Alfadhli & Drury, 2018a; S. Ballentyne et al., 2021; Bosworth & Kellezi, 2017; Kellezi et al., 2019a; Kellezi & Reicher, 2014; Muldoon et al., 2019). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974) and Self Categorisation Theory (Turner, 1982; Turner et al., 1987) state that our understanding of who we are in the world at any one time, our self-concept, is primarily determined by the social groups to which we belong, and importantly, identify with. As our different group memberships can be the basis of our identities, and since we are members of multiple groups, we have multiple identities which emerge in different group-relevant contexts (Iyer et al., 2014). Research has demonstrated that social identities provide a means for developing a sense of psychological

connection that builds support, self-esteem, agency, purpose and meaning (Greenaway & Cruwys, 2019; Haslam et al., 2021a; Jetten et al., 2014). Social identity arising from group identification, can therefore, confer a 'social cure' (Haslam et al., 2008; Haslam & Reicher, 2006; Jetten et al., 2012; Kellezi et al., 2019; Muldoon et al., 2017) by satisfying many important psycho-social needs.

In the context of forced migration, the social cure can be regarded as the outcome that social identification and belonging enables through access to resources that allow ordinary people to navigate and manage the challenges they face in extraordinary times (Drury et al., 2009; Haslam et al., 2008; Iyer et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2010). Further, as 'meaning-making anchors' (Iyer et al., 2014, p. 190), groups play a critical role in providing stability and continuity in times of change, which research shows, buffers the impact of stress (Alfadhli et al., 2019; Jetten et al., 2010). But, as with humanitarian intervention, the social cure is not solely defined by the ability to access and engage with the help and resources. Longer term, there is an ambition for those dealing with challenging life events not just to survive, but thrive (S. Joseph, 2013). In Muldoon et al.'s (2019) review of social psychological responses to trauma, they found that when old identities are maintained and new identities are formed, or reinvigorated, and when this supports self-continuity, people prove more resilient and this can be a basis for post-traumatic growth. As (Reicher, 2019) states:

> Our connectedness to others not only protects us from physical and mental health problems and helps us to recover from them, but also enables us to flourish more generally and realise our human potential, even in the face of the most extreme stressors. (p. 213)

Therefore, the social cure in the context of forced migration should also examine the potential for people to flourish and realise their potential as both individuals and as group members. This speaks to the resilience that humanitarian groups refer - a protective factor that not only buffers the effects of secondary stress in post-migration life, but also has the means to transform relations and provide the basis for collective empowerment (Drury & Reicher, 2009). Social identity, therefore, has implications not just for the psychological health and wellbeing of the person but for the identity that conflict and persecution often seek to dismantle.

However, as further research has also demonstrated (S. Ballentyne et al., 2021; Kellezi et al., 2019a; Kellezi & Reicher, 2012), an inability to maintain, acquire or adjust to new identities can also operate as a 'social curse', heightening stress and impacting wellbeing. Further, the emergent identity arising

from those forced to migrate can also lead to stigmatised, or frozen, identities (Mahendran et al., 2019) which may further undermine health and wellbeing (Stevenson et al., 2014). Kellezi et al. (2019) demonstrated the presence of a social curse through the burden, ostracism and distress of a stigmatized identity among immigration detainees.

As such, we argue, that the concept of social identities as a curse or cure in the context of forced migration, is more problematic than in other areas of social identity change (e.g., retirement, transition to university, illness). Whereas most life transitions lead to a shift in social identities, in forced migration social identities are often contributing factors in the need to seek asylum. Many refugees are forced to leave their homes because of who they are, for example: Palestinians, the Rohingya, Yazidis, Sunni Syrians, Ukrainians, LGBTIQ+ (UNHCR, 2023). Further, as the research on secondary stressors has shown (Alfadhli & Drury, 2018a; K. E. Miller & Rasmussen, 2017) the transition experience is not a single event but often a series of protracted life changes shrouded in uncertainty and instability (Loughry, 2022). Displacement should be temporary, yet sadly for hundreds of thousands of refugees, it can be generational.

The Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC - Haslam et al., 2008; Iyer et al., 2009) was developed to explain the role of identities in transitional contexts, yet remains unsubstantiated in the field of forced migration. SIMIC proposes that maintaining previously held identities whilst acquiring new and compatible identities supports psycho-social wellbeing (Iyer et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2010; Kellezi et al., 2019a). Continuity of self has been consistently demonstrated in research to be fundamental to psychological wellbeing (Sani, 2014) as has the construction and compatibility of new identities (Bentley et al., 2019; Iyer et al., 2009). Research by Drury also supports the significance of newly acquired identities showing how new, shared social identities can arise from emergency situations which in turn can facilitate collective self-organisation and support (Drury, 2018; Drury et al., 2009). 'Common fate' (Drury et al., 2009) among Syrian refugees living in Turkey was identified as instrumental in facilitating help and support from others and buffering the stress within their displaced communities (Alfadhli & Drury, 2018b).

In this paper, we explore how the experience of forced migration among Ukrainians following the 2022 invasion can be understood by employing a social identity approach, and specifically SIMIC (Haslam et al., 2008; Iyer et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2010; Muldoon et al., 2019) as an explanatory framework. Through a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 13 Ukrainian guests living in the UK, we aim to examine how they actively manage the social identity change process, identifying the

processes of social curse and cure, and examining whether and how these processes help achieve social psychological outcomes that support their psycho-social wellbeing.

Method

Participants

Between October and December 2022, 13 in-depth interviews, constituting over 20 hours of data, were carried out with Ukrainians who had come to the UK within six months of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. All participants were women whose ages ranged between 25 to 65 years, with a mean age of 31 years. Eleven of the thirteen participants were staying with host families under the UK government-sponsored Homes for Ukraine scheme, two were staying with UK-based family under the Ukraine Family Scheme.

All participants in this study were women, which was not intentional but reflects the demographic nature of the population of Ukrainian 'guests' within England. On February 24th 2023 Ukraine invoked Martial Law which prevented men between the ages of 18-60 leaving the country. During the period of recruitment for interviews (March 2022 – October 2022) the UK government issued 55,440 visas to women in England and 16,400 to men, approximating three women for every one man, between the age of 18-60. Within the recruitment district[11], 275 Ukrainians arrived in total (Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communitties, 2022).

Demographics

In investigating identity change post-migration, understanding the pre-existing social categories of the participants is important. Of the thirteen participants, seven were mothers accompanied by their young children. One participant also arrived with her own mother. Two older women were also mothers whose children were still in Ukraine (over the age of 18). One participant was a grandmother. All participants over 30 were, or had been, married. Two were widowed, one from fighting following the annexation of Crimea in 2014. All participants reported to have come from middle-income families.

Four of the participants were in their mid-twenties and travelled to the UK with a close friend. When the war broke out, those under thirty were continuing their studies or in early professional careers. Ten participants were graduates, four with post-graduate qualifications. The women over 30 were

employed prior to leaving Ukraine in a range of occupations from logistics to engineering, psychotherapy and clinical research. One participant was retired. Participants have been changed to maintain anonymity.

Geographically, most participants came from central-south and eastern Ukraine, with one participant from western Ukraine. Six participants identified as Ukrainian Russian speakers and conducted their interview in Russian. Of those who spoke English, all could speak and understand both Russian and Ukrainian, with three opting to speak only Ukrainian post-invasion. The three other English-speaking participants spoke primarily Russian.

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

The interview began by hearing about the participants lives, pre-migration. They were asked where they lived, with whom and what life was life before the war started (e.g. 'Can you tell me about where you were living and what life was like at before the war started?') This gave the interviewees an opportunity to share information about their previously held identities as well as allow them to settle into a story telling approach. The interview then moved onto their arrival to the UK where they were asked about their early experiences meeting their host family and how they came to be in contact with their local Ukrainian support groups (e.g. 'I'd like to begin by finding out a bit more about how you came to be involved with (name of group)?'. The experiences of being part of these groups were then explored as participants were asked about other members of the group, what purpose they felt the group served and how they felt about being a member (e.g. 'When you with other members of the group, what do you have in common?') Finally, the interview moved on to their aspirations and reflections about what they feel has changed about their sense of self, and how they see themselves in the future (e.g. What, if anything, have you discovered about yourself since joining the group that you didn't know about yourself before?).

Procedure

Interviews were carried out between September 2022 and December 2022. All participants were contacted through local Ukrainian support communities, either via face-to-face or via social media appeals to Ukrainian Facebook communities. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and a half to two hours. Six interviews were carried out in English, six in Russian and one in Ukrainian. Non-English interviews were conducted with the assistance of a paid Ukrainian/Russian interpreter. The

interpreter was a primarily Russian speaker but could converse easily in both languages. Seven interviews were carried out in person, at the home of the participant, and six were carried out on-line.

The interpreter, Elysia, was invited to interpret other interviewees after she herself had participated. Elysia signed a confidentiality agreement and guidance was given to her based on *'Working with interpreters in Health setting: Guidelines for Psychologists'* (Tribe & Thompson, 2017). All participants who did not speak English were introduced to Elysia and consented for her to be present.

The research was approved by the ethics committee at Sussex University (Ethics approval Science and Technology C-REC ER/SB924/3). All the information and consent forms were translated for each participant by the interpreter. All names have been changes to maintain anonymity.

Methodological Approach

Narrative and Talking Stones

A semi-structured interview technique was used, and participants were encouraged to give a narrative account of their experiences. The interview structure was used to help focus on questions about identity change, but did so in response to the direction and interpretation of the interviewee's own experiences (Rogers, 2004). As Rajaram (2002) argues, the lives of refugees can become a site where Western ways of knowing are reproduced. Important experiences can be overlooked or obscured if an overly inductive approach is taken; a balance between the researcher's interests and the participant's reality is needed.

As the focus of the research was identity change, participants were asked to tell their story beginning with a summary of their lives before the Russian invasion in 2022, capturing more specific details from when they decided to leave Ukraine until the present day. For most participants, this reflected a seven to nine-month period. Focusing the first quarter of the interview on pre-transition experiences also allowed familiarity between the researcher and the interviewee to build. This also allowed for important context about the life and identities salient to the participants before they arrived in the UK, to be captured.

To assist the interview process, Wearmouth's (2004) 'talking stones' approach was adopted in which participants were invited to select a stone of varying sizes, colours and textures to represent themselves throughout their accounts. The stones served several research purposes: first, the projective element of the talking stones technique (Kelly, 1955) enabled participants to explore their

thoughts, feelings and beliefs about their everyday experiences and invest meaning in an otherwise meaningless object. This, in turn, gave participants an opportunity to use the stones to represent elements their social identities, and place them relative to one another. Multiple identities could then be represented over time, along with rich descriptions of the features and emotions participants perceived and experienced. Second, it provided a way to more easily and creatively articulate aspects of their sense of self, which may otherwise be too difficult, painful, complex or linguistically challenging to share (Wearmouth, 2004), particularly when communicated via an interpreter. Finally, choosing a stone and projecting meaning onto something which is intrinsically meaningless increases ownership of the stories which, along with the coherence it brings to feelings and experiences, increases a sense of agency (Hulusi & Oland, 2010b). The overall approach, therefore aimed to minimise the misrepresentation by, or privileging of, a "British psychologist's" perspective and maximising self-advocacy on behalf of the Ukrainian participant (Rajaram, 2002; Wearmouth, 2004).

All interviews were recorded, encrypted and stored prior to transcription. Each interview was listened to again in full and, along with the transcriptions, a summary analysis was made of each stone selection for each participant. Each transcript was then entered into NVivo and coded using Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis approach.

Analysis

A deductive, thematic analysis was taken following Braun and Clarke's approach. This allowed flexibility in exploring the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC) (C. Haslam et al., 2008, 2021b; Iyer et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2010; Muldoon et al., 2019) as a guiding theoretical framework, while allowing for patterns to be described about the nature of post-migration wellbeing and adjustment. Data was coded that described pre-transition identities; the experience of life immediately following transition (leaving Ukraine and arriving in the UK); how pre-transition identities were lived in the UK (continuity pathways); how new identities were formed (gain pathways); the experience of living multiple identities post-transition (compatibility); and the definition of 'wellbeing and adjustment' in a post-migration context. Codes were then explored for their prevalence across the participants' accounts. Where repeated patterns of meaning were found, codes were clustered to identify common, latent themes that underlie their descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once there was a suitable thematic map of the data, this was shared with the Ukrainian interpreter, Elysia. The broad range of themes were discussed, and sense-making was carried out

collaboratively, using Elyisa's Ukrainian perspective to ensure any assumptions were challenged and gaps identified. This enabled greater clarity of the thematic map and the identification of superordinate themes, as well as the interrelationship between them.

Results

This research set out to examine how Social Identity change among Ukrainians informs our understanding of post-migration adjustment and wellbeing. The analysis identified three themes representing the experience of Ukrainians forced to migrate to the UK in 2022 – see Figure 1. These themes describe important aspects of the process of social identity change. The first theme, 'Helplessness' describes the impact of the initial loss, disruption and lack of control, having been forced to leave Ukraine to find shelter in the UK. Sub-themes within this included the physical and psychological 'detachment' from both their identities in Ukraine, as well as within the unfamiliar host communities, and the overwhelming 'uncertainty' they experienced upon arrival.

The second theme 'Solidarity' describes the 'common fate' (Alfadhli et al., 2019; Drury et al., 2009) that defines the experience of Ukrainians arriving in the UK. The 'we-ness' that arose from being 'Ukrainian guests' in the UK operated as a shared social identity which conferred significant social psychological support in the form of help and cooperation. The benefits of having access to different groups in the UK were described in terms of the various 'Resources and Knowledge' that groups provide, which helped replenish a continuous sense of self and enabled access to new identities. However, having access to, and gaining advantage from, social groups was moderated by the sub-theme 'Communication'. Understanding others and being understood was fundamental to minimising the impact of 'Helplessness' and maximising the chances of adjustment and wellbeing which was most prevalent in the final superordinate theme, 'Self-determination'. Speaking and understanding the same language as others within their social groups, be it Russian, Ukrainian or English, significantly determined the impact of identity change, specifically around identity construction and compatibility.

The final theme, 'Self-determination' describes the opportunities and risks in constructing a post-migration Ukrainian identity. Descriptions of a future social reality, rooted in prospective rather than descriptive social identities (Reicher & Haslam, 2009) are represented by two sub-themes 'Possibility' and 'Conflict'. Both emphasise the inherent tension that exists between the continuity and gain

pathways (SIMIC - Haslam et al., 2008, 2021; Iyer et al., 2009, 2014) as the struggle for self-continuity (Iyer et al., 2014) and the need for compatibility with new identities, give rise to both hope and despair.
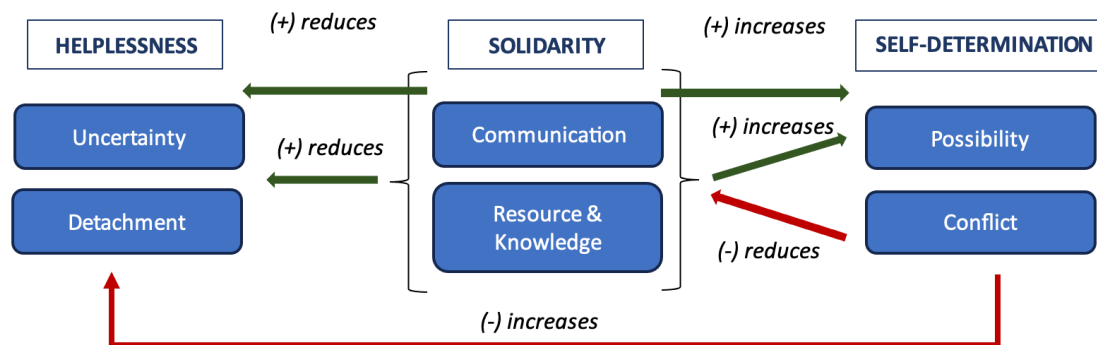

Figure 1. *Thematic map showing themes, sub-themes and the relationships between them, either positive (+) or negative (-)*

Theme One: Helplessness

Seeking asylum in another country when family and friends are left behind is an overwhelming experience. Participants described the physical and psychological dislocation as a protracted period of 'uncertainty' and 'detachment'.

Sub-Theme: Uncertainty

Participants described how displacement forces the familiar anchor points of normal life to be swept away, leaving them feeling acutely anxious and despondent. The uncertainty about loved ones left behind, the significant amount of administration and organisation that was required, along with the social ambiguity of arriving to a new 'home' created significant secondary, or post-migration stress (Alfadhli & Drury, 2018a; K. E. Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). These three accounts illustrate how the selection of stones enabled participants to articulate the experience of post-migration stress:

Stone - White coral:

> I was edgy… I was on edge of anxiety, so bit stressed, you don't know what's going to be, you can't work, you can't do anything. You just lose people. Because of the unknown situation, you don't know what's going to be next. You don't know what's going to be with your life, how it's going to be. (Elysia)

As with war, the asylum life of Ukranian guests was at the mercy of social forces and expectations beyond their control. Asked about their experiences of the first few weeks in the UK, many participants described their uncertainty in terms of a lack of fit within their new homes, feeling like a disrupting presence and creating social unease:

> At first I was unsure what I was and wasn't allowed to do, where I could go or not go. The family told me to 'treat it like your home, help yourself to food etc' but I unsure... I was worried they may not like me. The first few weeks I was very low. (Daryna)

The theme identified in these accounts characterises what Stevenson et al. (2014) refer to as 'stigma consciousness'. Stevenson et al reported that when perceived differences emerge between those who provide a service (such as, in this context the 'Homes for Ukraine' hosts) and those who receive it (the Ukrainian 'guest') relations can break down and create intergroup differences. Such divisions can undermine trust and prevent the further formation of a shared social identity between Ukrainian guests and host families. In the early days of the transition to the UK, this uncertainty and dislocation can create a 'social curse' (Kellezi & Reicher, 2012; Stevenson et al., 2014) whereby the shared social identity that has formed between guests and hosts in advance of their arrival comes under strain and can destabilise wellbeing and adjustment on both sides of the relationship. As such, this highlights the liminality (Hynes, 2011) that Ukrainians first experience and the importance of social relationships to psycho-social well-being from the outset.

Sub-Theme: Detachment

Before the Russian invasion in February 2022, all participants were settled within their Ukrainian communities, among family, with jobs and living everyday routines. Forced displacement removed them from almost all their meaningful groups. The impact of this detachment was experienced by participants in two ways. First, by severing a meaningful and continuous sense of self:

> When you live in your country, you have friends, you have a job. You have classmates, neighbours, maybe previous lovers, a husband, and common friends. And friends of yours, parents of your children, and you communicate and you have career. And you have a social level. When you come to another country, without language, without friends, without a husband. You are zero, your level is zero. And you should start to change it... if you have resource. No one understands you here. And you are always zero. (Svitlana)

In Svitlana's account, she describes the function of social relationships, referring to a scaffold that metaphorically raises people up to a 'social level'. Forced migration dismantles this, detaching important connections, causing the social structures and platforms to fall away and leaving a person back at 'zero'. However, Svitlana's account also points to connections, 'change' and 'resource' as the important features of how social scaffolding is built. This is discussed in the second superordinate theme in this analysis ('solidarity: resources and knowledge').

A second way that detachment occurs within the data is described in terms of the incompatibility that is experienced between how participants believe themselves to be (a previously held identity) and how their current social world positions them. This is often most felt in terms of employment:

> I'm a housekeeper in a hotel, five hours a day. But I don't tell anyone about it, 'cos I used to work as manager, dress up nicely and work in the front of the computer. [Selects an oyster shell to represent her current work identity]: This one, it's an ugly one. In Ukraine I was more like this [a piece of sea glass], I felt kind of calm, in my place, it's easy, I didn't need to learn anything. But now...it's work but it's not like pleasant work. I don't feel like this [glass], when you clean after someone that's, it's really unpleasant. Not work of my dream, just not my place... (Ruslana)

The 'ugliness' of the battered oyster shell is set against the sea glass to represent the distinct differences in employment identity. The detachment from her past self is an 'unpleasant' experience, unaligned with her any future sense of self, 'not of my dreams', and leaves her feeling out of 'place'. That she also tells no one about her housekeeping role, which exacerbates this detachment further; it is a version of herself which hold little subjective value and constrains opportunities to build more meaningful social connections.

Marina describes a further consequence of the detachment and absence of a meaningful social scaffold:

> I was doing clinical research with big international company, pharmaceutical one. So, I was quite happy with this company, and I was well appreciated...[But] several people think that all Ukrainian ladies are hookers and that we come only to be baristas, and, like, we are hunting their men. But for god's sake, it's like it's, no, no way. Sorry. That is some kind of ugly thing I would appreciate not to be told. (Marina)

In Marina's account, she describes her anger at how Ukrainian women have been described in particularly pejorative terms within the UK, setting this out against her own identity as a professional career woman. Her account describes how the absence of important social connections and identifiers can leave a vacuum that risks new arrivals being defined by out-group perceptions. As Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) describe in their research among Bosnian refugees in Australia, the socially disadvantaged and culturally distant social categories that are associated with forced migration are acutely felt by professionals as a 'void status.. full of uneasiness and opprobrium' (p. 343) deepening a sense of social curse.

Theme Two: Solidarity

The aim of many UK-led Ukrainian support groups is to welcome, accommodate and serve Ukrainian guests who arrive in need of sanctuary. The comments from all participants demonstrated how vital this role was to their wellbeing and adjustment:

> I was meeting [the hosts] on the first day and I just understand with my soul, I think: these are good people, and I just keep in touch with them all all, *all* time and they helped me. They just did it, they applied, forms, visa, and others… they did it for me. It was really lucky, I was really lucky to find these people. I understood with my soul that these are good people. I just understand: Yes, it is my people, I want to be there. I believe by my soul. (Larrissa)

Sub-Theme: Resources and Knowledge

Whilst not all Ukrainians were so fortunate to have such supportive hosts (BBC, 2022), all but one participant described the immense support their host families and local support groups provided. These relationships were fundamental in offsetting the liminality of immediate and early post-migration life. Through providing a home, information and social connections, hosts gave their guests a secure space from which to take stock of their lives, enabling participants to meet their immediate physical and psychological needs, and consider their next steps. Access to resources and knowledge in this way also allowed participants to continue to adapt and move forward, constructing and re-constructing themselves in ways that allowed them to continue along the change pathways and prevent the liminality grinding them to a halt:

In the beginning, that time of adaptation, you need to work, need time to adapt, need people to help you through this, a chance to try yourself in everything, or only stay at the same point. (Daryna)

Furthermore, the energy and direction the hosts and groups provided helped scaffold another social advantage: intra-group cooperation. When participants were asked about their perception of the other Ukrainians in their neighbourhood, almost all participants described them as 'very different to me' (Natasha). However, there was an important difference between how identity was *talked* about at an individual level, or in terms of other social categories (for example, when individual comparisons were made based on age, or role, e.g. being a mother), and how identity was *performed* at the collective level. Here Svitlana describes the goal of helping others, referring to 'we' and 'us' and the obligation to support one another. Importantly, she also describes the effect this cooperation has:

This is a goal, a nice goal, to help all people who arrived from Ukraine. Because we have a lot of different questions. A lot of new things. And only, this group can help. People always can, we have common chat in Telegram, and people always asking, "can you ask [name], can you ask [name] about it, about this". And people who come here, they always crying or sadness and bad mood, but after we ask step by step, they smile, they relax, and it's so important for us. It's a support for this group. (Svitlana)

Often these encounters were supported through local networks and initiatives:

I would say that our Ukrainian café is about charity, I would say it's kind of very helpful as well because all Ukrainian people they meet other Ukrainians people and they can exchange their information (Olena)

As demonstrated in other research with refugee groups (Alfadhli et al., 2019; Politi et al., 2023), the shared social identity that emerges from being part of a forced migrant group - the 'common fate' (Drury et al., 2009) conferred intra-group cooperation and helping behaviour. This was despite a keen sense of difference interviewees perceived between group members. As such, when the group was defined in terms of what it does, and how 'knowledge and resources' are shared, a shared social identity of 'us' came to the fore. As Politi et al. (2023) found when asking 'who is willing to help Ukrainian refugees and why?', this data similarly suggests how the superordinate identity, in this case, 'being Ukrainian in the UK', alongside the emergent identity from their common fate, superseded other individual and social differences and drove helping behaviour.

Sub-Theme: Communication

Whilst support in the form of 'resources and knowledge' was fundamental to the experience of identity change among participants, 'Communication' was equally referred to by participants. Resources and knowledge can only benefit group members if those members can make their needs understood, and in turn, understand what information they are being given. Communication and resources go hand in hand as they enable connection to both people and ideas, as Svitlana explained:

> He would help us to do medicine insurance, register with a doctor, be a paper expert – there's a lot of application forms. First week, we work every day with [forms], and he'd always follow us to the job centre and translate and explain all things... You know, someone who doesn't know English, even basically, they have problem, or bad mood and they feel in a vacuum, because they can't connect, they connect only with Ukrainians (Svitlana)

In this extract Svitlana suggests that 'only' connecting with Ukrainians is problematic, and, as with the earlier themes of 'Uncertainty' and 'Detachment', leads to an inertia which, in turn can impact their psycho-social wellbeing.

'Understanding and being understood' (Daryna) was expressed by all participants as a necessary pre-requisite to managing the demands of a new life, post-migration. New arrivals needed access to, and information from, social groups, but for groups to confer a social cure, a shared language was fundamental. For all participants, the English language was a key determiner in their choice of country having left Ukraine:

> I decided to go to England, because in our schools, in Ukraine we are studying English. Nobody speaks German... it's much easier to understand people, to speak, to live here. (Angelika)

Speaking English was also the key to enabling better -- and more compatible -- employment, as Milena illustrates having chosen a battered oyster shell to represent her work identity as a dishwasher in a local restaurant:

> I don't really like the work but I have no choice because I don't know English. But when I'm gonna learn it, like, fully, I'm going to change the work once I've got more English language. (Milena)

English language classes were, therefore, of utmost importance to allow social relations to build, acquire group resources, and secure greater opportunities. But speaking -- or learning to speak -- Ukrainian was just as important and as socially consequential, as Elysia explained in her description of the Ukrainian groups in her community:

> Most in the group, like the Western [Ukrainian] people usually just speaking like "let's speak only Ukrainian, no Russian". "Only Ukrainian", and they're very proactive. They're proactive, there was a lot of arguments in the Telegram group we created. Like, "speak only the Ukrainian or we kick you out of the group". (Elysia)

All participants spoke about the tensions between people over the languages of Russian and Ukrainian within their social groups. The language spoken was considered an indication of the new norms (Reicher, 1996; Tajfel, 1974) forming as part of the Ukrainian community. Daryna explained why this tension exists and what the perceived social consequences for the continuity of Ukrainian identity:

> Language is really important because when you speak Russian, you have Russian ideas... historically Russia has been erasing the Ukrainian identity and so by using Russian language you are doing the same. People who speak Russian should try and speak Ukrainian. I really appreciate it when Russian speakers try to speak Ukrainian. I wouldn't be rude or dismissive to a Russian speaker, but also I wouldn't spend time with them or become friends with them. (Daryna)

Communication was therefore not only a means to make social connections and access resources but a potential tipping point between social cure and social curse. Whilst the support of the Ukranian community towards one another could help, the shared social identity among 'Russian' speaking Ukrainians, hindered. Due to the actions of Russia since 2014 and the invasion in 2022, 'Russian' as a social category has become stigmatised among Ukrainians, and Russian as a language an emblem of the out-group. To navigate away from this stigmatised identity (Bowe et al., 2019), and avoid the social curse, the Ukrainian language had to be adopted or acquired. Without it, help and cooperation would be jeopardised and participants would risk stigma, which would return them to the unwelcome state of 'detachment' and 'uncertainty'.

Theme Three: Self-Determination

All participants spoke about their arrival to the UK as a chance to begin a 'new chapter' (Kataryna) of their lives or the opportunity to 'turn over a new leaf' (Svitlana), seizing the possibility to change in better ways. Despite being forced to leave their homes, often in egregious circumstances, there was a clear sense that this significant life event offered the opportunity to not only survive but also the potential to thrive (S. Joseph, 2013). Kataryna described this in her selection of a stone that represented what 'arrival to the UK' meant to her:

> The white stone... it's like, it's been been...you can manipulate it. You've crunched it, it's malleable, you can make a new form out of it... it's white and beautiful. And because of its form, it looks, kind of, like not a round form, but there's a room for improvement. If it was round, like regular form, there's no room for improvement. Realizing the dream, being able to be the things I want to be. It makes me smile. (Kataryna)

Similar sentiments were shared by other participants who described the opportunities that arose from their arrival to the UK:

> Now I'm doing more of what I wanted actually to do, now I get more freedom, 'cos in a new country, I think that gives you a new ambition of your life, that gives new possibilities...I think, what happened, is you kind of review your whole life, it changes. Actually, it might change who you are (Elysia)

Sub-Theme: Possibility

All these accounts evidence the importance of the SIMIC gain pathway (C. Haslam et al., 2008, 2021b; Iyer et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2010; Muldoon et al., 2019), and the theme of 'Discovery' which was identified in similar accounts of given by Syrian refugees living in Brazil in 2016 (S. Ballentyne et al., 2021). This data also aligns with Muldoon et al.'s (2019) research that found the significant self-*dis*continuity that occurs following extreme and often traumatic events leads to a re-evaluation of self and a greater awareness of the possibilities and purpose in life and shift in priorities. This is illustrated in Daryna's account as she selected a stone to represent her current and future self:

> Now, this stone [small, white glistening stone with a black dot]. There are changes and some uncertainty, but also the chance to explore and begin to develop myself. In

Ukraine, my life wasn't mine but my parents... now I feel liberated from that control, I can be independent. In the future, I want this [white coral]... it's interesting, different, a lot of different shapes that have developed in new ways. (Daryna)

In the context of forced migration, therefore, there is scope for what Muldoon and colleagues would argue is Post Traumatic Growth (PTG - Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). But, as Muldoon et al. found, this possibility of a better, more enriched identity is contingent upon access to, and identification with, others (Muldoon et al., 2019). As Daryna stated earlier describing the need for 'resources and knowledge': 'You need time to adapt and people to help you through...' Without 'solidarity,' the potential for growth, and ultimately 'self-determination' is curtailed.

Sub-Theme: Conflict

Reconstructing identity is a collective endeavour, and whilst a shared social identity emerged that scaffolded the post-migration transition, incompatibilities arose alongside these opportunities which created 'conflict'.

As with many forced migration contexts, the most salient and vulnerable identity is that which has led people to flee their homes (Meyer, 2013). In the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, maintaining a meaningful and continuous sense of being 'Ukrainian' was by far the most significant concern. Within all accounts, there was an urgency to protect the Ukrainian identity and secure its existence from the threat it faces. Svitlana's quote illustrates the intensity of feeling the Russian invasion has invoked:

I hate, it's a new feeling for me. You know, when you have lost friends, or you see suffering people, and you saw killed people... hate. I dislike Russia, because I know how they stupid, how they like wild animal. I know how they have a slave moral. That's why I hate it. I hate it. (Sviltana)

Svitlana goes on to describe how the actions of Russia have led her to redraw the boundaries around other important identities, that of family, and the influence this intensity of feeling and threat has on her own thoughts:

[Selecting a long, grey pointed stone] Yeah, like this. Because trouble. I would like, I told all my friends, all my familiar people told me, I dream to delete all Russian, from this country. This is problem. I know it's not right. Not all Russian stupid, wild, I know, on

my side, the same, my brother, cousin, the same age, they really think it's not about Russia. They didn't try to understand, I can't explain, because it's, impossible. Russians. I would like just kill them, because this [stone] looks like a knife... Or a gun. It's very sad to feel like that about family. It's new for me. I dislike it inside me. But I have it...it's there. (Svitlana)

Conflict expressed itself in many ways, both through the very real conflict between nations taking place in the early 2020s', and in the struggle for collective self-continuity and the re-drawing of the boundaries that it creates. As described under Theme Two: 'Solidarity', language is the primary way in which this conflict continues to take place as the re-definition of the in-group challenges other, deeply held beliefs about self. As Olena described, Ukrainians need to choose sides:

It's not a perfect stone [battered Oyster shell], it has some holes and it's not smooth and I would say, that if you are Ukrainian you need to choose one side to be and what you want to become, not choose something else, you can't be Ukrainian but you're speaking Russian. So you can't be chasing two rabbits, it doesn't match. (Olena)

Post-migration identity reconstruction therefore creates intra-group conflict which yields both social cure and social curse, as the next three quotes illustrate. Whilst many took delight in the efforts of other group members to adhere to the new norms of 'being Ukrainian'...

(Picking a bright white sparkling stone):

It's like pride. I would say that I am truly supportive. (Larisssa)

...others, primarily from the east of Ukraine who primarily spoke Russian, felt very differently either in terms of feeling cast-out:

(Selecting a dark piece of sea glass):

It's edgy. It's got this dark kind of colour, muted. 'Cos I felt like if you don't speak the language [Ukrainian] you will not be chosen, like they urge you to silence somehow, and just resent who you are. (Elysia)

Or in terms of the new normative expectations being incompatible with other significant social identities, such as family:

I cannot [speak Ukranian] because I have a family. My cousins, they speak in Russia...It's

my family. I cannot throw it from my life here, just because they speak Russian. I know

that they are Ukrainian in the heart and they feel the same as all of Ukrainian people.

(Valeria)

These responses illustrate the challenges Ukrainians in the UK face in securing and revitalising a Ukrainian identity. In the face of adversity, there is a powerful sense of 'us' evolving, a 'blossoming of Ukraine' (Natasha), which all participants identified with. Reicher & Haslam (2009) describe this as a move towards Collective Self-Realisation (CSR), where goals are framed by what's important to the group and efforts to transform the group's values into social reality, reducing group stress (Jetten et al., 2010), increasing agency (Reicher, 2019) and enhancing mental and physical wellbeing (Tewari et al., 2012). But CSR in this post-migration context presents a dilemma: to secure a continuous sense of self as Ukrainian (or achieve CSR for the group), other meaningful identities and relationships risk being lost or jeopardised. Therefore, the important contribution that CSR makes to post-migration wellbeing is tempered with a curse: the ongoing process of identity change and re-construction means the boundaries of significant and vulnerable identities such as being 'Ukrainian' are continually being contested and re-drawn. This, as Olena states, is 'the problem that Ukrainians need to solve...or there will just remain distance between us.'

Discussion

In this paper, we argue that social identity change among Ukrainians 'guests' in the UK informs our understanding of post-migration adjustment and wellbeing. In particular, we explored relationships and social identities among Ukrainian 'guests' as a vehicle for understanding post-migration stress and psycho-social wellbeing.

The analysis presented the experience of forced migration as a series of severing and tethering of identities, described through the themes of 'helplessness', where identities are fractured and meaning-making anchors (Iyer et al., 2014) lost; 'solidarity', where identities are scaffolded and new identities emerge; and 'self-determination' where a re-imagining of prospective identities gets underway. The SIMIC (C. Haslam et al., 2008; Iyer et al., 2009) framework helped make sense of this pattern of findings within the data, in particular, capturing the nature of secondary stress in identity terms and the significance of identity continuity and gain pathways. It also provided a blueprint to extend the framework and consider the notion of 'Collective Self-Realisation' (CSR - Hopkins &

Reicher, 2011; Khan et al., 2016) as an important addition to our understanding of 'post-migration wellbeing'. However, whilst the theory accounts for the curative aspects of identity change through these pathways and potential outcomes, our findings substantiate the need to elaborate the SIMIC framework by recognising the constraining factors that operate within the context of forced migration. The social curse (Kellezi & Reicher, 2012), inherent within the forced migration experience, can arise as a consequence of efforts to protect and re-invigorate an identity under threat.

Looking at the three themes as a whole account of the experience of post-migration stress and wellbeing, the second theme, 'Solidarity' (with the sub-themes of 'Communication' and 'Resources and knowledge'), carries the greatest explanatory power in supporting an understanding the relationship between the two. We suggest solidarity and its important interrelationship with 'helplessness' and 'self-determination' can best be understood as social scaffolding in the form of a double helix (see Figure 2). Two critical strands of scaffold operate here: one organisational and the other experiential. The organisational strand is the groups: the HfU scheme and local community hubs that stood up to help those forced to migrate. The experiential strand is the Shared Social Identity that emerges both because of the 'common fate' (Drury & Reicher, 2009) of the Ukrainians experiencing the forced migration and by virtue of being users of, and contributors towards, the organisational stands of assistance. In other words, the support of UK hosts and groups not only confers access to important resources and knowledge about life in the UK, but also enables space for, and connection between, other Ukrainians, strengthening a sense of common fate and Shared Social Identity.
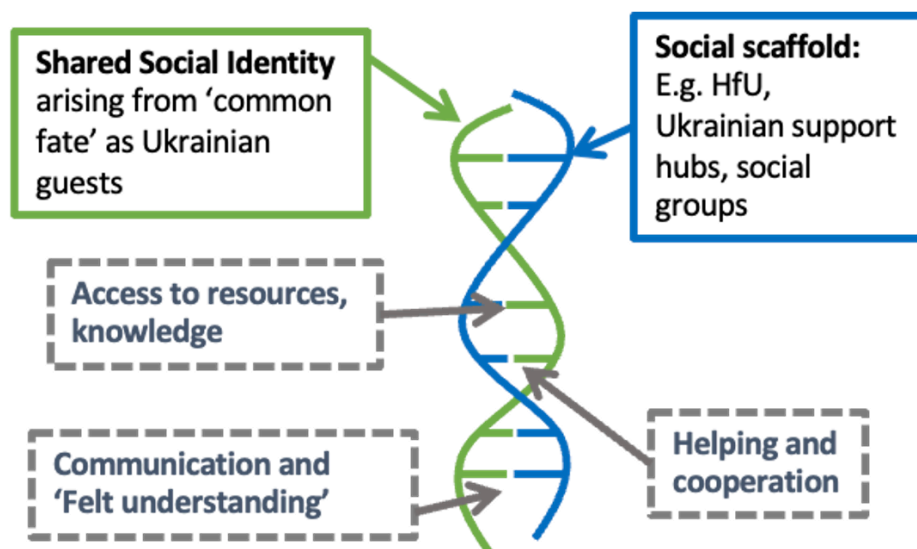
Figure 2. *The function of 'solidarity' represented as social scaffolding in the form of a double helix*

Within the double-helix, both strands complement one another, interacting at various points to form a socially-structured space within which to hold and re-construct important identities. These two structures confer a social cure by directly impacting the challenges of forced migration in multiple ways. First, by substituting the anchor points of life that the war and migration had swept away, it provides coherence, connection and understanding, which mitigates the sense of 'uncertainty' and 'disconnection' (theme one: 'helplessness') first experienced on arrival to the UK. For example, the need to 'understand and be understood' (Darayna) benefits psycho-social wellbeing by conferring what Livingstone (2023) refers to as 'felt understanding'. Having a 'voice' and being heard by outgroup members is crucial to building meaningful and rewarding inter-group relations, reducing loneliness, strengthening wellbeing and increasing life satisfaction (Lun et al., 2008). The function that solidarity provides as an enabling scaffold also echoes findings from other research with Ukrainians. Morimitsu and Akerkar (2023) and Fricke et al., (2023) similarly concluded that coming together with others to reflect and make sense of their experiences and relationships removes communication barriers, which positions them to make positive changes following displacement. The double-helix scaffold described in terms of 'solidarity' is, therefore, a tethering point from which Ukrainians can orient themselves to life in a new country and connect to others like them. One conclusion of this study, therefore, is that if support groups are present and a shared social identity

emerges, the impact of 'social' secondary stress (Alfadhli & Drury, 2018a) on psycho-social wellbeing is mitigated.

However, our research also demonstrates that solidarity does more than mitigate and stabilise. As depicted in Figure 3, solidarity can be conceptualised as a scaffolded pathway that moves those forced to migrate along the transitionary route from helplessness to self-determination, providing a means to both stabilise a continuous sense of self, and connect past to future selves.
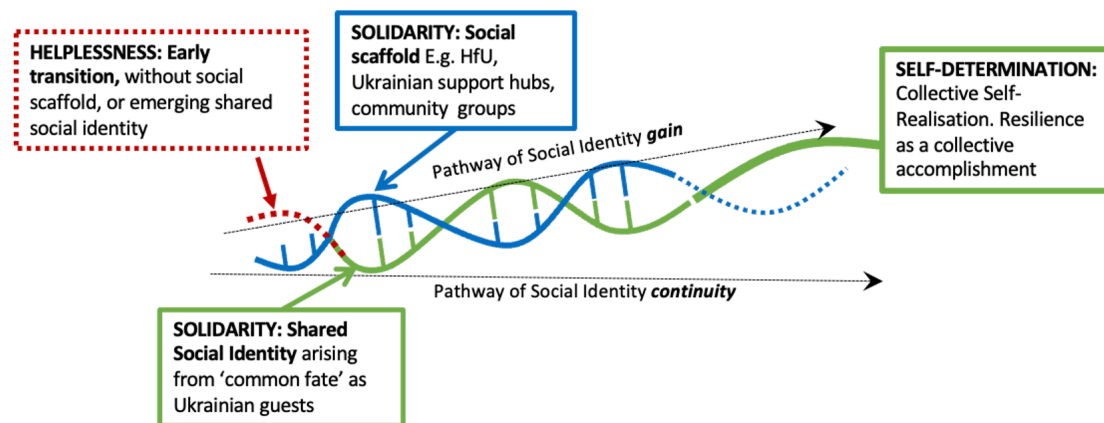

Figure 4. *Social scaffolding arising solidarity, providing a pathway away from 'helplessness' and towards 'self-determination', set within the SIMIC framework of identity gain and continuity pathways*

In the context of forced migration, a future self plays a significant role in psycho-social wellbeing experiences. A positive, prospective identity suggests a way to diminish stigma consciousness (Stevenson et al., 2014) and the social curse that it may instigate. Our research shows how the possibility of 'turning over a new leaf' (Svitlana) frames change in positive terms enabling people to both thrive and survive (S. Joseph, 2013) the experiences of forced migration. Solidarity, and the double helix of scaffolding it represents, provides an opportunity for identities to be reflected upon, re-constructed and re-invigorated (Muldoon et al., 2019). This is particularly significant for identities under threat and, as our analysis shows, serves as an important pre-cursor for self-determination. The empowerment arising from solidarity provides meaning and collective motivation to manoeuvre through the daily stresses, towards a life defined on one's own terms. This is particularly consequential when it confers the opportunity to protect, enthuse and re-invigorate an identity under threat, such as that of being 'Ukrainian'. Whilst far from home, well beyond the front lines of war, the

opportunity to re-construct and live what it means to be 'Ukrainian' allows for a sense of agency and collective contribution (Drury & Reicher, 2009) after a protracted period of fear and disenfranchisement.

Yet, like all battles, the 'cure' such a prospective identity offers does not come without its sacrifice. 'Conflict' was inherent within the theme of 'self-determination' as the re-drawing of identity boundaries excluded those who no longer fit the new normative expectations of the group. In the reimagining of a future identity, previously accepted hallmarks of being 'Ukrainian', such as speaking Russian, was cursed. For some, the incompatibility this presented with other meaningful and continuous identities, such as family and community identity, served only to 'urge us to silence' (Elysia), returning them to a state of 'detachment' and 'uncertainty'. Psycho-social wellbeing therefore risks being undermined as new identities are contested. The virtues of collective empowerment are not available to all, a challenge of post-migration life which participants recognised as 'a problem Ukrainians need to solve' (Olena).

Strengths, Limitations and Future Research

This research is the first study to explore the potential influence of groups and social identity change on the experience of forced migration. It adds to earlier published research with Syrian refugees (S. Ballentyne et al., 2021) that explicitly examines the experience of post-migration stress and psycho-social wellbeing as relational phenomena in which the institutional and experiential structures of group life serve to buffer the impact of exile. This contributes to the growing evidence base about the presence and impact of social cure and social curse processes, along with the utility of the SIMIC framework in real-life contexts. However, whilst this study is based on over 20 hours of in-depth personal accounts of life post-migration, some limitations should be considered. First, the sample was small (n-=13) and was an entirely female sample. As Lauren and Dumont (2023) cite in their review of integration challenges Ukrainian women face, the daily secondary stressors between men and women are different; and from a social identity perspective, these differences are significant. For example, women are more likely to experience care burdens (as a parent and carers of elderly mothers), risks of exploitation (as lone women), and the breakdown of family units that create future uncertainties (being part of the family group), all of which relate to the various identities they hold and struggle to preserve. However, Lauren and Dumont's research also found that Ukrainian women

tend to have stronger social networks, which suggests the potential for stress-buffering through existing group membership, and/or easier access to different social groups.

A further limitation recognises the voices that were not heard, those who were reluctant or unable to give a meaningful account of their post-migration experiences. Secondary accounts were given of other Ukrainian guests who were struggling to cope with their host family or day-to-day life in the UK. Being unable to access these potential participants and represent their stories suggests the presence of the social curse may be more prevalent and corrosive than this research suggests. Reasons why such individuals may not have come forward may have easily related to some of the challenges identified here. For example, the presence of an eastern Ukrainian Russian translator may have impacted their willingness to have their experiences told through a third person. Equally, as the principal researcher was British and from the local community, this may have limited the honesty or ease with which participants could feel they could honestly share their experiences and opinions. Therefore, whilst not all research findings in this paper are necessarily generalisable to a wider refugee population, the general population of Ukrainian guests were women where formal support structures were present. Therefore, whilst care should be taken to consider how the secondary stressors identified among the 13 participants may relate to other refugee groups, the emergence of a shared social identity and presence of social scaffolding is consequential in the process of buffering these stressors and should be considered more widely in understanding the experience of forced migration more generally.

These limitations should be considered in the design of any future research which should attempt to better represent those whose experiences are not represented here. Future research with both men and women would allow for a more nuanced examination of how secondary stressors operate within the different social-structures, particularly around issues such as access to the labour market. For those unwilling or unable to come forward, there is an argument that a Participatory Action Research approach would be more appropriate. This would not only ensure greater accessibility, and cultural sensitivity, but would also confer two distinct advantages. First, to build power and agency for refugees to be able to speak for themselves (Farahani et al., 2021), and second, it would enable the researcher to act on the knowledge elicited through the research to improve the lives of research participants (O'Mahony et al., 2023).

Conclusion

In the quest to better understand the experience of forced migration, this study suggests that we re-think the nature of post-migration stress and psycho-social wellbeing in terms of the 'severing and tethering' of identity that takes place, and the role that Shared Social Identity has in defining self-reliance and resilience as a collective accomplishment. Our research underscores the need to recognise the interdependence between collectively and individuality (Drury & Reicher, 2009). By addressing the issues of forced migration in this way, we can elaborate the SIMIC pathways by highlighting the importance of solidarity as a double helix of scaffolding that arises from organised groups and an emergent social identity, both of which confer advantages at the individual and collective level.

Footnotes

[1] The geographical area where the research was carried out has been anonymised to protect the identities of participants.

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