International Journal of Intercultural Relations 35 (2011) 818–832

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel

Migration change model: Exploring the process of migration on a psychological level

Aidan S. Tabor, Taciano L. Milfont*

Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research, Victoria University of Wellington, Kelburn Parade, PO Box 600, Wellington 6012, New Zealand

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received in revised form 1 November 2010
Accepted 15 November 2010

Keywords:
Emigration
Pre-departure
Acculturation
Online communities
New Zealand

ABSTRACT

There have been many studies into how acculturation progresses for migrants upon arrival in their destination. However, outside of studies of forced migration, few researchers have examined the pre-departure period as important for understanding the context of the migration experience. This study was designed to develop a model of the migration experience beginning before migrants leave their country of origin and continuing through the acculturation process. Migration can be viewed as a major change in behavior, particularly when migrants are self-selected. We therefore modified the Stages of Change Model (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1982) into a proposed model of voluntary migration. A thematic analysis was then conducted on a dataset consisting of the posts made to three online migration forums for British migrants to New Zealand. The resulting Migration Change Model incorporates four stages of the migration process: precontemplation, contemplation, action and acculturation as well as a path for return or onward migration. The salient factors for the migrants in each of these stages included: intrapersonal factors and familial connections (precontemplation); macro and micro factors (contemplation); stress and coping (action), and psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation (acculturation). More studies that address the pre-departure period as part of a process of migration are needed, particularly for adult migrants who have a wealth of experiences before departing their country of origin.

1. Introduction

Cross-cultural psychologists view acculturation as a process (Sam & Berry, 2006). But when does this process start? Migrants' lives do not begin when their plane lands, yet few studies consider the pre-departure period. This area of acculturation research has been neglected, perhaps because it is not about the interface between cultures but about the baggage that migrants take with them to their new country. That includes expectations (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Yijälä, in press; Pitts, 2009; Zodgekar, 1990), family dynamics (Adelman, 1988; Bürgelt, Morgan, & Pernice, 2008; Tabor & Milfont, under review), cultural identities (Tartakovsky, 2009, 2010), personality (Boneva & Frieze, 2001; Frieze et al., 2004) and motivations (Savicki, Downing-Burnette, Heller, Binder, & Suntinger, 2004; van Dalen & Henkens, 2007). Research into forced migration (e.g., refugees and asylum seekers) has acknowledged how pre-departure experiences become a part of what makes up individuals (Ingleby, 2005), but in the situation of adults deciding to voluntarily migrate to a new country, life before arrival is rarely examined. There has been a growing emphasis placed on context in cross-cultural studies (Ward, Fox, Wilson,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +64 04 463 6398; fax: +64 04 463 5402.
E-mail addresses: aidan.tabor@vuw.ac.nz (A.S. Tabor), taciano.milfont@vuw.ac.nz (T.L. Milfont).

0147-1767/$ – see front matter © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.11.013

Stuart, & Kus, 2010), and examination of pre-departure experiences are an essential part of understanding the context of migration.

The terminology of pre-departure studies can be bewildering. An emigrant is someone leaving his or her country of origin to settle in another country (e.g., 'The *emigrants* said their good-byes to family members before leaving the UK'). The term immigrant references the person in relationship to the country that they have settled in (e.g., 'The *immigrants* faced challenges such as finding a job in their new country'). Thus, every immigrant is also an emigrant, though not every emigrant will become an immigrant, all of which results in unnecessary confusion. A preferable term is migrant, with two dictionary definitions (1) to move from one country and settle in another, and (2) to change location periodically (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2009). Taken together, these definitions contain a satisfying amount of ambiguity that captures the problematic nature of this type of research. People can and will change their minds about whether or not they leave their country of origin, settle permanently in their destination, or return at some future date. Thus for research that stretches from pre-departure through arrival and perhaps on again, migrant seems the best term to employ.

In this age of globalization, countries compete for highly skilled migrants to meet skills shortages and make up for population decreases caused by low birth-rates (Boddington & Didham, 2008; Katseli, Lucas, & Xenogiani, 2006). In the year 2000, 20 million highly educated migrants aged 25 or over were living in the OECD countries alone (United Nations, 2006). The "brain drain" is lamented particularly in economic circles (Carr, Inkson, & Thorn, 2005), as countries both loose and gain such migrants. Self-selected (sometimes termed voluntary) skilled migration is a very different situation than expatriates, who are a type of sojourner. Though much of the research has focused on the flow of migrants from low-income countries to high-income Western nations (Massey & Espinosa, 1997), attention has recently been drawn to the movement of citizens between high-income countries (Tan, 2008). Because relatively few studies have focused on this type of migration, little is known about why people would leave prosperous nations. This paper examines this situation through the case of British migrants to New Zealand.

Over the past few years, the phenomenon of British citizens leaving the UK has sparked heated political and popular debate (Johnston, 2008). Most go to another high-income country, with 32% settling in Australia or New Zealand (Office for National Statistics, 2009). British migrants were the largest group accepted for entry to New Zealand under the skilled migrant path for every year from 1998 to 2009, most coming through the skilled migration stream (Department of Labour, 2009; Merwood, 2007; Shorland, 2006). Today's British migrants to New Zealand are continuing a pattern that began more than 150 years ago. From the earliest days of assisted passage with the New Zealand Company to the "10-pound Poms" (a slang term used to describe British migrants who only had to pay £10 for their passage) of the post-World War II era, British settlers have dominated migration to New Zealand, forever changing a place the Māori (first peoples) called Aotearoa. These new migrants are part of a colonial pattern, as much as they are part of a diaspora (Braziel & Mannur, 2003). To arrive in New Zealand today is to enter a world created by British settlers: place names, house styles, food, sport and legal system all harkens back to the cultural influences of mother England. This impression of home in a far away land may be part of the continuing draw of New Zealand for modern British migrants. As a result, New Zealanders are still developing their own sense of national and cultural identity as distinct from Britain (Bell, 2009). Though migrants are typically grouped as an ethnic minority, British migrants to New Zealand are somewhat different, in that the majority group Pākehā (British descendants), often identify themselves as being ethnically British (Pearson, 2005). Though normally considered an opposing relationship (Gong, 2007), in this situation migrants may be able to identify with the majority ethnically more than nationally.

Not only is there the question of *why* British people leave their country (along with their jobs, friends and familiarity), but there is also the question of *how*. How is migration experienced? So far researchers have not systematically examined the processes and stages that migrants experience before they depart their country of origin. Certainly, there is a gap not only in the research literature, but also in the theoretic basis of the research. What is missing is a theoretic model that recognizes the departure period and the stages that migrants pass through before they arrive in their destination as well as after.

1.1. Model for a psychology of the migration process

Stage models, such as the U-curve, have gone out of fashion as predictors of acculturation (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998), but as a theoretical tool for understanding a process there is greater utility. Perhaps the best way to view stages are less as rules that each migrant must experience, and more as a structure to base further research and exploration. There is an assumption that people move in a linear fashion toward their goal of emigrating, however this is as much the exception as the rule. The human agency of individuals is reflected in their constant ability to change their mind, thus at any point in the process described, many will decide not to pursue the goal of emigration.

Given that voluntary migration is above all a major behavior change, requiring conscious choice to break out of the routine, a psychological model of migration process should address this change. The Stages of Change Model was originally developed to help understand how people overcome maladaptive behaviors through four stages: precontemplation, contemplation, action and maintenance (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1982). DiClemente and Prochaska argued that in the early stages of a change a person uses more cognitive steps and in later stages these move toward behaviors that accomplish the change. This model has since been widely implemented in health and organizational settings (Floyd, Zebrowski, & Flamme, 2007; Harris & Cole, 2007). For example, Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, and Maman (2001) adapted the change model to the situation of abused women. Based on extensive interviewing, they observed that these women go through precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance stages during the process of leaving a violent partner.