

# Chapter 13

## The Role of Interpersonal Communication in Re-identity of Voluntary Economic Migrants Living in South Africa



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### 13.1 Introduction

Developed and developing nations compete for domination, offering individuals with skills opportunities for economic prosperity. South Africa has legislated critical skills required to grow the economy of which the country is in short supply. There is significant statistical evidence to support the positive correlation between the process of globalisation and international migration, most especially the voluntary movement of highly skilled individuals in the labour force away from countries of origin to destination countries.

The number of degreed, highly skilled migrants has risen exponentially in the last few decades when compared to low-skilled migrants, driven by increased global competitiveness for skills in the pursuit of world domination at a national and organisational level. These individuals are highly sought after, and thus presented with multiple choices for destination countries, making them highly mobile and frequent movers. In making their decision to migrate, voluntary economic migrants engage in interpersonal communication with their personal networks to test out their reasons for migration and choice of the destination country. Remaining in contact with their personal networks has been made easier as the growth of communication technologies has transformed the communicative process for individuals, enabling them to construct and maintain membership of personal networks in a transnational context.

Social representations held in their interpersonal communication signal the processes and outcomes of their settlement process of re-identity. This chapter focuses on the transnational interpersonal online/offline communication of voluntary economic migrants as an enabler and facilitator of migration intentions, moving and

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settlement. The system coupling outcomes of individual voluntary economic migrants, a highly mobile group, can signal how quickly they can achieve their migration objectives. System coupling<sup>1</sup> outcomes provide an insight into understanding social representations that can influence the decision-making process of voluntary migrants with respect to their length of stay in their destination country. The unsuccessful migration of voluntary economic migrant individuals is costly financially and socially on the destination country, and this research provides a lens through which individuals' challenges may be better understood by recruiting decision-makers.

The chapter begins by discussing the growth of voluntary economic migration, and the role of globalisation and interpersonal communication patterns in spurring the growth on. The South African context concerning the recruitment of skilled migrants is discussed, before examining the individual motivations of voluntary economic migrants for moving. The chapter highlights the conflict created by the pressure faced by voluntary economic migrants to conserve and to change, through the acculturation process, with a resultant internal conflict arising – that is, a schism. The implications of schism on individual identity are discussed, including the importance of stabilising it in order for individuals and destination countries to realise their respective migration objectives, which may not always be aligned. The process of re-identity and resultant system coupling outcomes are discussed in the context of the results of data collected from voluntary economic migrants living in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The chapter concludes by contextualising the importance of individual re-identity process outcomes for recruiting countries as a signal of the potential duration of stay of individual voluntary economic migrants and suggests a possible intervention by recruiting organisations/countries.

## 13.2 Literature Review

The unsuccessful migration of highly skilled voluntary economic migrant individuals is costly financially and socially on the destination country, making it important for destination countries to understand individual motivations for the length of stay. Significant statistical evidence supports a positive relationship between the growth in the process of globalisation and exponential growth in international voluntary migration (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). The migration of highly skilled individuals is on the rise, a key element of economic growth in countries (Bailey & Mulder, 2017). The biggest rise in migration has been that of voluntary economic migrants,<sup>2</sup> who are also termed highly skilled individuals and self-initiating expatriates, although there has been no standardised term to refer to these individuals (Suutari

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<sup>1</sup>One of three possible outcomes in relation to how voluntary economic migrants settle into their destination country, namely *reject* (fission), or *blend* (integration) or *cling* (fusion).

<sup>2</sup>Voluntary economic migrants are defined for this study as individuals with some university education, who are highly skilled and have chosen to move for professional gain.

et al., 2018; Garcia-Rodriguez et al., 2015; Doherty, 2013). The migration of tertiary-educated individuals has been rising irrespective of global economic cycles (Garcia-Rodriguez et al., 2015). Kerr et al.'s (2016) study reports that the number of university-degreed migrants increased by nearly 130% from 1990 to 2010.

Governments and organisations engage in the global recruitment of individuals who are highly skilled experts, facilitating their easier mobility across borders (Shachar & Hirschl, 2013:75) compared to other types of migrants. This recruitment is bolstered by the help and word-of-mouth support of the personal networks of these individuals in those destination countries – that is, the network pull effects (Lemos & Portes, 2013:322). Voluntary economic migrants hold different personal networks globally as a result of their exposure through their education and professional lives (Garcia-Rodriguez et al., 2015).

Exceptionally talented individuals have the privilege of their citizenship being fast-tracked as countries compete to buy the talents of skilled migrants in a bid for countries to remain globally competitive (Shachar & Hirschl, 2013). In 2014, the South African Minister of Home Affairs introduced the critical skills visa (DHA, 2014) in an effort to address the widely reported critical skills shortage in South Africa. In 2003, South Africa launched its first statistical report on migrants, which revealed the peak age of migrants being early thirties and the leading sources (sending areas) reported were Africa, the UK and the rest of Europe (Statistics South Africa, 2005). This report emphasised that, in documenting migrants in South Africa, the most important characteristics were age and occupation (Statistics SA, 2005:v). Migrants have become younger and more educated, have access to better information-gathering tools and resources, and are more open to taking risks than those that do not move (Bauernschuster et al., 2014). Migration is also a gendered process (Hoang, 2011), and overall, men are the ones most likely to migrate: men outweigh women in terms of global migration figures (Bajt, 2016). Nevertheless there has been a surge in the role of women as a component of highly skilled migrants, with Africa and Asia having experienced the largest growth of high-skilled female emigration (Kerr et al., 2016).

Most migrants in South Africa live in Gauteng, followed by the Western Cape (Meny-Gilbert & Chiumia, 2016), as these cities present most of the economic opportunities in the country. The source of migrants by country has remained largely the same, and in the most recent census in 2011 it was reported that three quarters of migrants in South Africa are African and largely from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Meny-Gilbert & Chiumia, 2016). The critical skills visa qualifications were drawn up to include a broad list of categories (DHA, 2014) which aimed to attract voluntary economic migrants to bring their skills for the benefit of South Africa.

Migration is a wholly social process that involves multiple consultations and interpersonal interactions before individuals move (Hoang, 2011), even when it is voluntary economic migration. Migration is thus a difficult decision to make (Harper & Zubida, 2016) because of the multiple people involved in making it. Individuals will test out their reasons for migration on those around them through interpersonal communication narratives and evaluate them based on the feedback they receive,

and this narrative development encourages their identity evolution (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014). The communication goals of interpersonal relationships may be shaped by geographic distance, changing cognition and behaviour towards stabilising the relationship (Crystal Jiang & Hancock, 2013) through online platforms. Those individuals who decide to move away do so having analysed all the push and pull factors of both their current and desired locations before making their decision (Zhou, 2016).

In the majority of instances, the economic mobility of voluntary migrants is considered a precondition for being allowed into the destination country, with them receiving special advantages, such as permits and residency, as well as the prospect of gaining certain class and social positions in the destination country (Hayes, 2015). However, these advantages can be a source of disgruntlement for locals in their destination country, especially in developing countries. Without precise statistical information about migration, the lack of information may contribute to negative stereotypes held about migrants in South Africa (Meny-Gibert & Chiumia, 2016).

Voluntary economic migrants are held to certain standards by personal networks in their country of origin while simultaneously being questioned about their willingness to embrace and conform to their destination country, especially in the workplace (Power, 2008). During the moving process, voluntary migrants experience a sense of loss of themselves and need to work on finding themselves anew within a short space of time to be successful. The loss experienced may be in the relationships with both their country of origin and their destination country, that is, they disassociate from who they were to build a new identity within their new country (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014). Feelings of isolation are commonplace and individuals may draw closer to traditional communities when they feel a sense of loss of an integral way of life or position or image, such as masculinity, poverty in the new setting, and so on (Abdi, 2014).

Remaining connected to their network in their country of origin through online interpersonal communication has become easier for voluntary economic migrants due to the ubiquity and wide adoption of communication technologies (Crystal Jiang & Hancock, 2013; Watson et al., 2002). The participation of individuals in online interpersonal communication is influenced by factors such as the individual's motivations for participation, their personality traits (Bazarova, 2015; Malinen, 2015) and their personal values linked to their cultures (Malinen, 2015). The convergence of mass and interpersonal communication has happened in different ways (Walther & Valkenburg, 2017). Social media is a merger of interpersonal and mass communication (Bazarova, 2015), allowing one to broadcast to an audience or communicate privately, as well as being able to choose to disclose differing levels of information. Advances in communication technologies have changed socialisation and given rise to social relations online where geographic closeness is no longer important and relationships have become more flexible (Basuki et al., 2015:246). Maintaining close relationships over long distances has become fairly common practice because of increased social mobility due to career pursuits and even migration, conducted through the adoption of communication technologies (Crystal Jiang & Hancock, 2013:556).

Globally, emphasis is placed on improving governance mechanisms to build a supportive environment where destination countries' systems are responsive to migration rather than seeking to control the movement of individuals (Hanefeld et al., 2017:2359). This responsiveness can only take place if individual voluntary economic migrants are understood, especially their motivations and process of settling in and renegotiating and reconstructing their sense of self in the destination country. This requires research and analysis of who they are, how they process the conditions in their destination country and social interactions arising from their process of settlement through their interpersonal communication and arising social representations.

### 13.3 Theoretical Framework

Social representation theory, developed by Sergè Moscovici, focuses on processes of interpersonal communication (Breakwell, 1993) and is concerned with social reality, knowledge and symbols (Joffe, 2003:60). Interpersonal communication interactions can transform knowledge and facilitate building a shared understanding of the world (Ginges & Cairns, 2000:1347). Social representation theory helps provide tools for identification of social problems, as people move through different systems of relation (Bratu, 2014), observed through interpersonal, face-to-face, online, symbolic and other forms of communication. "Representations [are] rooted in language and culture because they are the work of collectivity, [and thus] cannot be entirely conscious" (Moscovici, 1993:40). People, as individuals and in social groupings, produce social representations through their interactions with others and interpersonal communication (Hoijer, 2011).

Through their interpersonal communication with destination-country personal networks online prior to moving, individuals begin to imagine, by processing social representations, what their migrant life will be like, through the eyes of their personal network. This narrative development encourages "identity evolution" (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014) in voluntary economic migrant individuals. The process of imagining social representations helps to transform unfamiliar representations into concrete common-sense realities (Jaspal et al., 2014) for individual voluntary economic migrants.

Voluntary economic migrants begin to experience the abstract more literally as their social representations meet those of their destination country in a process of acculturation. "Acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (Berry, 2005:698). The meeting of these different representations causes voluntary economic migrants a schism, to conserve their identity and past experience or to transform. Both a cognitive and an interpersonal conflict (schism) may arise because people do not concede when faced by someone with a different viewpoint or judgements, because they are afraid to lose face (Moscovici & Nève, 1971).

Voluntary economic migrants, upon migration, exist simultaneously in two places, experiencing transnational social fields (Yaylaci, 2015:247). The simultaneous transnational existence results in individuals experiencing a pull between the social representations of their destination country and those of the country of origin, that is, schism. Voluntary economic migrants' schism arises from socio-cultural pressures on their identity, from the transnational personal network members involved in their migration decision-making (Hoang, 2011). The arising disintegrative tendencies of schism threaten individual identity, where one struggles to perceive appropriate levels of socio-psychologically salient principles (Jaspal et al. 2014:120).

Unfortunately for many migrants, even more so for voluntary economic migrants, they are often lumped together into one undifferentiated group (Harper & Zubida, 2016) by those who interact with them in the destination country. They are frequently not considered as individuals each with their own unique identities, but grouped by their social category. Social categorisation theory described how individuals become representations of their group and this process generates stereotypes (Hogg & Reid, 2006). This phenomenon only increases the tension between voluntary economic migrants and the different destination societies they engage with and need to become part of to be successful in their migration intentions. The demand is for minorities to behave according to the social norms, but also to maintain being different (Moscovici, 2011:452) in destination countries.

These social struggles experienced by voluntary economic migrants are captured by the concept of schismogenesis, which is a process that is naturally borne out of human relationships and interactions (Morgan, 1981). Schismogenesis is defined by Bateson (1936:175, cited by Morgan, 1981:30) as "a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behaviour resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals." Schismogenesis, a consequence of a specific pattern of interaction, generates tension and potential breakdown between system elements and takes shape in emotionally charged situations of an intensely personal nature (Morgan, 1981:30). In relationships between individuals or groups, schismogenesis observes that the behaviour of one determines the reaction and behaviour of the other towards them, and can be symmetrical (escalation of the same behaviour), or complementary (which results in behaviours that are different but complement each other) (Morgan, 1981).

Central to identity are the relationships people hold and their commitment to those relationships (Stryker et al., 2005). The relationship of commitment to identity is critical for understanding why individuals behave the way they do (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). The definition and representation of identity is complex, ever-changing, dynamic and dependent on context, and shifts across theories in definition and meaning (Pozzi et al., 2014:19; Breakwell, 2010:61). Theories on identity focus primarily on three categories of identity, at a simplified level. These are national identity, social group (ethnic/cultural) identity, and individual identity, organised in a hierarchy where national identity reportedly enjoys the highest position. Identity, according to Hogg et al. (1995), is a key concept that links social structure with people's individual actions.

In the short term, while they work to settle in, the challenge to voluntary economic migrants' identity experienced through transnational social representations needs to be resolved. The "inevitable end" is an often unspoken and sometimes explicitly voiced expectation of destination countries for voluntary economic migrants to simply assimilate (Khattab & Mahmud, 2019; Berry, 2005; Ginges & Cairns, 2000), in effect being expected to discard their existing identity on migrating. Destination countries though, while placing such expectations on migrants, also build invisible boundaries to voluntary economic migrants becoming part of society (Yaylaci, 2015) through various laws, policies and social behaviours. Individuals' social identity has multiple layers, made exponentially complex online, as they are influenced by communication norms in their real-world and online communities, using networks that fulfil an individual need (Voloacă et al., 2011).

Whilst unresolved, individual voluntary economic migrants remain dislocated and their identity in a state of flux until they resolve their schismogenic acculturation. This struggle and the resolution thereof takes place through their interpersonal communication with their personal network members in their transnational context, both online and offline. The resolution of the schism is beneficial for their employer organisations and their professional reputation, as it can result in the retention of voluntary economic migrants' skills in the destination country for longer periods of time.

The degree of change demanded by the process of reconstruction of voluntary economic migrants' identity has a much more immediate influence on individual identity within a limited timeframe than organic identity processes. Their struggle to internalise a new identity (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014) may be prolonged by being held to certain standards by social networks in their country of origin and the hostility experienced against their process of renegotiation of their identity. Voluntary economic migrants also experience being discriminated against in the destination country because of their foreignness, although well-educated migrants battle fewer entry restrictions and have access to the labour market (Bajt, 2016).

Re-identity, as conceptualised by Sitto (2019), describes the short term process of settling in and resolving the schism experienced from migration acculturation. The process is simultaneously conscious and subconscious as the individual voluntary economic migrant undergoes it. As voluntary economic migrants settle into their transnational context, they simultaneously change their personal networks and change with respect to their own identities. The outcome of this process is reflected in their social representations of system coupling outcomes produced through their interpersonal communication with their personal network members online/offline. The process of re-identity is defined by Sitto (2019:61) as:

...a short-term social process of autonomous reconstruction of identity in order to attain schismogenic stabilisation during the initial phase of settlement in a new context(s) through the personalisation of social representations arising from acculturation.

There are three possible social system coupling outcomes from the process of re-identity in the re-presentation of social representations, namely rejection (fission), blending (integration) or clinging (fusion), illustrated in Fig. 13.1. Re-identity as a

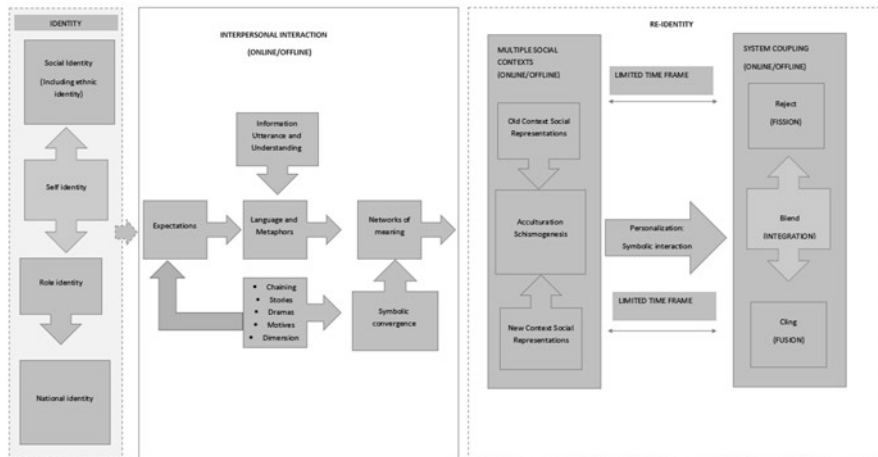


Fig. 13.1 Amended schismatic framework for social analysis and re-identity. (Sitto, 2019)

concept emphasises the assertion by Breakwell (2010) that agency is critical to the formation of identity. This includes reconstruction and re-presentation of identity in the short term to ensure settlement of individual voluntary economic migrants in their destination countries. The outcomes of the process of re-identity through system coupling outcomes socially represent the relationships that individual voluntary economic migrants form and how they grow their transnational personal networks (see the second panel in Fig. 13.1). System coupling outcomes may also provide insights into individuals’ possible length of stay as well as their professional performance using their skills. Whilst voluntary economic migrants, as highly skilled individuals, migrate in a cyclical pattern, understanding their system coupling outcomes may indicate their tie-strength – that is, their commitment to their destination country.

The process of re-identity is illustrated in Fig. 13.1 and explained below.

Individuals or an organisation can have the process of re-identity triggered by a change in their social context as system participants. The expanded schismatic framework begins by acknowledging that agentic voluntary economic migrant individuals are the sum of their identities, whose complexities play a pivotal role in them making their decision to migrate. Migration as a social process requires interpersonal interaction of individuals with members of their personal networks both in countries of origin and their destination countries. These interpersonal interactions carry their social representations of identity, communicating their expectations arising from their social interactions. Their interpersonal communication carries language, non-verbal cues, and metaphors, thus building networks of meaning, that is social representations as processes and products. These networks of meaning are produced through transnational social contexts, involving country of origin and destination country social representations simultaneously online and offline with their personal network members. The processing of social representations involves the



meeting of different social representations, and arising acculturation schismogenesis. Participants undergoing this process only have a short space of time to resolve the schismogenesis in order to settle, realising their migration intentions and coping in a new system context, that is, their transnationalism. During this short time, participants will go through a process of personalisation of social representations, ultimately leading to three broad likely social outcomes between participants and the system in the new context. The system coupling outcomes – reject, blend or cling, can be flexible in retaining and forming new identities, depending on individual objectives of social outcomes as participants in new social contexts and systems.

### 13.4 Methodology

Eleven voluntary economic migrants working and living in South Africa and twelve of their personal network members participated in the study about their migration experience from their country of origin to their current cities of residence. The two most economically popular cities (South African Tourism United States, *n.d.*) were chosen for contextual sampling and the sampling of participants was purposive snowball sampling with criteria for selection of individuals formed upfront (*a priori*) (Bryman, 2012). These individuals were spread between Johannesburg and Cape Town. These 11 migrants were from different parts of the world (see Table 13.1 for participant profiles), some having migrated from other parts of the world to South Africa. In total, 23 interviews were conducted for this study. The research participant cases data collection was a balancing act for the researcher between participant availability and willingness as well as theoretical saturation, but also allowing for deeper case-oriented analysis (Bryman, 2012:425).

**Table 13.1** Participant profiles

Participant label	Sex	Location/City in South Africa	Continent of origin	Length of time in South Africa
VEM 1	Male	Johannesburg	SADC	+15 years
VEM 2	Female	Cape Town	North America	+5 years
VEM 3	Female	Cape Town	North America	1 year
VEM 4	Female	Johannesburg	Europe & Caribbean	+10 years
VEM 5	Female	Johannesburg	United Kingdom	+5 years
VEM 6	Female	Cape Town	SADC	+3 years
VEM 7	Female	Cape Town	United Kingdom	+5 years
VEM 8	Male	Johannesburg	Caribbean & Europe	+1 year
VEM 9	Male	Johannesburg	East Africa	+1 year
VEM 10	Male	Johannesburg	West Africa	+1 year
VEM 11	Male	Johannesburg	East Africa	<6 months

The first of the three sets of data collected were video-recorded in-depth interviews with the voluntary economic migrants (11), self-reporting their migration journeys and their experiences of moving to South Africa. The second set was their Facebook data, which included voluntary economic migrants' full online activity publicly available on their Facebook wall. The video-recorded interviews with nominated members of the voluntary economic migrants' personal networks (12) living in South Africa, with whom they were in frequent communication, was the third set of data collected. The aim of the interviews with the voluntary economic migrants was to determine how their self-reported interpersonal communication shaped their process of re-identity online and offline. To collect their communicative representations, the researcher used questions that elicited narratives during in-depth interviews with voluntary economic migrants and members of their personal network.

Voluntary economic migrant individuals were asked about their journey to South Africa, their experiences prior to moving, personally and professionally, as well as how they experienced their arrival in their city of choice. They were then asked about their interpersonal communication with their personal networks, professional and personal challenges experienced since migrating, and any changes in themselves and their interpersonal communication patterns with their transnational personal networks. All questions were followed up in terms of any details following the order of the interviewee's narrative.

The personal network members were asked about their relationship with the voluntary economic migrant, their first impressions of them personally and professionally, and how they perceive them to have changed from their initial meeting of them. Additionally, personal network members were asked about their interpersonal communication patterns with their voluntary economic migrant, their online and offline relationship with them and any changes that have happened in their interpersonal communication. Again, all questions were followed up in terms of any details following the order of the interviewee's narrative.

The data gathered and analysed from the in-depth interviews with the 11 voluntary economic migrants resulted in themes (Saldaña, 2015) related to how they socially represented their re-identity. This included an analysis of their social representation theory processes of anchoring and objectification before, during and after their voluntary economic migration to South Africa. The Facebook data analysed through Kozinet's (2015) netnography yielded themes of social representations of their re-identity process online. The interviews with members of their personal networks yielded themes with respect to the online and offline social representations of the voluntary economic migrants in their interpersonal communication with members of their networks. The results of their system coupling outcomes and their migration intentions are discussed in the following section.

### 13.5 Results and Discussions

The voluntary economic migrant individuals reported that they had consulted with their immediate and broader families and personal networks of friends about their migration decision before making it. Their transnationally located personal networks were important consultative groups engaged through interpersonal communication online and offline. Voluntary economic migrants ultimately made their decision driven by their individual professional motivations and evaluated the benefits of the opportunity as outweighing concerns their personal networks had about their migration.

The consistent and recurring theme running through their in-depth interviews and their Facebook netnography data, as well as their network members' interviews, was the centrality and importance of their professional identities. Not only had they evaluated the attractiveness of South Africa as a destination country on their professional growth, but also on socio-cultural benefits with respect to their global exposure. There were different social representations from voluntary economic migrants' in-depth interviews that alluded to or directly referred to their processes of re-identity, such as their experience of a culture shock. These included terms such as "readjustment", "shift", "change", "adapting", and "development". Some reflected on this adjustment during the interview (see Table 13.2), acknowledging that these were not deliberate changes from their end.

Their process of settling in could not be a wholly individual process because people "need others to develop the ability of self-recognition, to build relationships with others and to become self-conscious and agentic" (Howarth & Andreouli, 2016:330). Voluntary economic migrants also recognised experiences of their ingroup/outgroup membership boundaries in their transnational setting within their personal networks and their social privilege in their destination country. Three factors identified from the data themes proved critical for determining the length of their process of re-identity, which were:

- (i) fulfilment of professional aspirations of voluntary economic migrants;
- (ii) time to their attainment of financial stability; and
- (iii) their lifestyle (or other secondary) purpose of migration.

The system coupling outcomes analysing their interpersonal online and offline communication during their process of re-identity proved a potentially good measure in this study of the individual attainment of their migration objectives. Most of the voluntary economic migrant participants developed social networks outside of the workplace, contrary to Kerr et al.'s (2016) assertion that such individuals build their networks in their employer organisations. The participants arrived into existing personal networks, confirmed in narratives from personal network members; some built among other voluntary economic migrants from similar regions of origin, or did not build personal networks in the destination country, having moved with their immediate families. These outcomes signalled system coupling outcomes, which have implications for their projected length of stay.

**Table 13.2** Readjustment of self-identity

Theme – Readjusting notions of self and identity	
Sub-themes	Participant responses
Subtle shift in self-perception	VEM 1 – “You get humbled as a human being, you learn and you appreciate certain things.”
	VEM 8 – “...maybe I did become more humble I think...”
	VEM 9 – “So, that I’ve surprised myself, I was not actually sure that I would live through.”
Recognition of personal change in notions of self	VEM 1 – “I’ve got a lot of friends locally, but I don’t see people as much anymore, ever since I became a parent.”
	VEM 3 – “It’s crazy how much you can change in a span of a couple of years.”
	VEM 6 – “I think, I always tell people that the first time I realised I was black was when I moved to Cape Town, literally. And not the concept of just skin colour but the concept of what black is, theoretically and academically.”
	VEM 8 – “...South Africa changed for that is, would be that it gives, it forces you to have a more open-minded point of view on many, many topics...”
	VEM 9 – “I have learned. I can actually you know persevere, I’ve stayed at a place longer than I thought I could...”
	VEM 11 – “I feel like I have like just even in the way I dress and stuff, like when I first got here I feel like because everyone dresses really prim and proper and like, tucked in shirts, trousers, shoes and all that. So, that’s definitely changed...”
Recognition of changes in interpersonal roles	VEM 1 – “I no longer use my free time on friends. My free time is with my wife and my daughter.”
	VEM 4 – “...that’s when I met my now husband...”
	VEM 7 – “Married, two kids, own a house, have a car, full time employment.”
	VEM 8 – “I mean obviously now we are less friends than we were before, because we don’t, we don’t do things together.”

Three of the voluntary economic migrants participating in the study have since re-migrated – that is, moved again to other destination countries, specifically to developed countries, though not their countries of origin. Their move may be linked to the overarching theme from participant interviews of their perceptions of the term “home” – of the construct more as an emotional tie rather than a physical place for voluntary economic migrants, in relation to their self-identity. Their moves within 12 months of their participation in the study demonstrated the high mobility of voluntary economic migrants, as well as the strength of their transnational personal networks in facilitating their moves across the globe. It also demonstrated the theme of their propensity for personal mobility and new experiences through their recruitment by countries, providing voluntary economic migrants special status, making them more highly sought after and thus spoiled for choice. For developing economies such as South Africa, losing these individuals leaves them worse off from an economic and skills-availability perspective, given the global competition for highly

skilled migrants explained in literature (Bailey & Mulder, 2017; Kerr et al., 2016; Garcia-Rodriguez et al., 2015).

## 13.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The intentions of recruiting destination-country governments such as South Africa and recruiting employer organisations may be noble with respect to the desired outcomes and achievements of attracting highly skilled professionals. However, the aims and objectives of policy makers, individual voluntary economic migrants and destination country societies do not always align. Voluntary economic migrants seek professional growth, recruiting countries seek the acquisition and retention of their skills, and receiving societies expect them to assimilate in spite of being treated as outsiders by them.

Interpersonal online/offline transnational communication with personal network members plays the critical role of helping individuals imagine and concretise their decision to move their destination countries. Upon migration, voluntary economic migrants need to work through their acculturation processes, arising from the meeting of different social representations and causing identity conflict/schism. To reach schismogenic stability and system coupling outcomes in line with their migration goals, individual voluntary economic migrants undergo a process of re-identity. Through the agentic process of re-identity, individuals rebuild, reconstruct and represent their identity in the short term to attain stabilisation of their schism. The system coupling outcomes of re-identity as represented in the extended schismatic framework, can influence their intended length of stay and openness to remigration.

There seem to be minimal skills sharing or transfer by such voluntary economic migrant individuals, given their intention for migration once they fulfil their professional objectives in a specific destination country, which are individualistic and not altruistic. This study highlights that while voluntary economic migrants are individuals, their decisions with respect to settling in their destination country are influenced by their online/offline interpersonal social interactions with members of their transnational networks. Recruiting countries and organisations need to facilitate such individuals building local personal networks beyond their professional settings, as that may encourage them to remain longer in the destination country. This action may assure recruiting destination countries of retaining and benefiting from these individuals' skills long enough for skills sharing to take place, as they integrate or cling to the destination country social representations.

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