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HUMANITARIAN AID WORKERS' TRANSITION INTO RETIREMENT

A narrative inquiry

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HUMANITARIAN AID WORKERS' TRANSITION INTO RETIREMENT

Abstract

In this research, I have explored the retirement experience of 6 humanitarians who had retired from a humanitarian organization after a career characterised by frequent, global relocation and the need to live and work in physically and emotionally challenging conditions. I used a narrative methodology which viewed their written stories and conversations with me as situated in specific organizational, social and cultural contexts. I have also identified themes which arose in their narrative in the three areas of enquiry which has framed this research: finding meaning and identity in retirement, the importance of relationships in retirement and dealing with existential questions. The issue was becoming more relevant to the organization because of changes in the mandatory retirement age which are currently being implemented and the implications of this for individuals themselves, their decision making and the options for providing organizational support in the years prior to a later retirement. Each of the retiree's stories was as unique as the person who wrote it but nevertheless interesting conclusions were drawn which may be relevant for others: the inner, emotional journey of retirement can be as important and eventful as the exterior, practical journey. This group of men and women may be on the vanguard of globalization in that they assimilate at a deep level into their identities the idea of global citizenship during retirement. The organizational career management of humanitarians towards the end of their careers needs to reflect to a greater extent the challenges they have faced during their careers and those they will continue to face in retirement.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My interest in understanding the retirement experience of humanitarian workers began in 2012. I had been working in a humanitarian organisation for the first time in my career for two years at that stage and was just beginning to feel confident in my role in a relatively new area of human resource management: career management support. I was part of a small team of counsellors who supported staff as they navigated constant transitions during their mobile and challenging   careers in complex operational environments. I had grasped elements of the humanitarian career including the motivations of those attracted to such a career and also the shape of those careers including the challenges of navigating them from an organizational and individual perspective especially at early and mid-career. I felt that I knew far less, however, about the experience of those approaching the end of their careers and even less about the period afterwards. The issue was becoming more relevant to the organization because of changes in the mandatory retirement age which were being proposed at that time and the implications of this for individuals themselves, their decision making and the options for providing organizational support in the years prior to a later retirement.

At that time, I attended the retirement gathering for a man who had dedicated his life to humanitarian work. He was a well-considered person and his career had spanned many functional areas so his party was well attended by a crowd who listened attentively to his witty and moving speech delivered in a corner of the office canteen. I asked him for a copy of his speech thinking it would be useful to share with others, with his permission, especially as he had talked so eloquently about the choice points and dilemmas he had faced in his career. As we talked further, I was surprised to find that the confident and assured presentation about his past obscured a less confident view about the future. His situation was typical of many retirees. He no longer had many connections with his country of origin. His wife was from another culture and currently living and working in another country and his children were now

grown up and also living in different countries none of which were his country of origin. He was struggling with basic questions concerning just where he would spend his time as well as how he would spend it.

As the food and drink was cleared away and people began to leave including this man whom I will name John, I couldn't help wondering about the other thoughts, and feelings occupying him as he left the building alone. The short gathering seemed an abrupt ending to a career spanning 30 years. I wondered if the confusion over the question of where he would locate himself also mirrored a struggle over *who* he would be in retirement, in other words, how he would locate himself. After this struggle would a new idea of self for John emerge which would somehow hold all the possibilities now in view? How would he find meaning and purpose as well as an identity in retirement? Would he be able to make sense of the many sacrifices he and his family had made as part of this process?

On the 19th of August 2012, as part of World Humanitarian Day, a day of activities designed to recognise the sacrifices of aid workers globally, including those who had lost their lives in service, was organized. We stood in the atrium of the Headquarters building in silence as a mark of respect for the 5 workers in the organization who had lost their lives whilst working during previous years.   Articles had been published on the internal website describing the current experiences of workers in the deep field. One of them caught my eye from the Head of Office in Impfondo, in the republic of Congo. 'In addition to the anxiety of separation from family and friends, staff members have to deal with other constraining factors. Food and water are scarce and when available variety is limited and the prices exorbitant.'

Travelling to and from Impfondo is challenging as direct roads do not link to other centres and travelling by water is even riskier… a remote town has little to offer in terms of entertainment. Rather entertainment comes from an unlikely source: repatriating families. Whilst returning home, refugees sing and dance as they cross the mighty Congo River and enter their homeland, the DRC…'[1]

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[1] Organization Intranet article, 19th of August 2012.

The article helped confirm my view of just how tough the conditions faced by humanitarian workers are, but also how skilled they are at finding meaning and rewards in unexpected ways. A man like John, has lived in these conditions and circumstances at times during his working life. The intensity of these experiences is often not matched by experiences in what humanitarians call 'real life'.

Another senior colleague once confided to me that she had 'given up' trying to explain her experiences in the field to friends and relatives at home because she had lost hope over the years that they could understand. I remember asking her to try to explain to me as I was working with her in a career counselling capacity and we were exploring ways she might return to full-time work after a period of serious work related illness. She was unable to do this. Throughout our work I was aware of a reduced sense of connection with her which appeared to mirror that which she was explaining to me. I wondered if this was the result of her experiences which might have been similar to John's. Perhaps her relationships and ability to connect with others had been affected by years of separation from her family and constant renegotiation of entry and exit from her social networks and family life.

This research seeks to answer some of these questions and to assess the impact of their unique career journey on their relationships and well-being during retirement and old age and how they cope with the transition. Humanitarian work is about caring for others; it is important to understand how these workers then care for and understand themselves when they transition from full time employment to retirement.

Szinovacz, (2003) describes retirement as a concept with 3 distinct phenomena: *retirement as an institution* refers to the societal structures that regulate older workers' exit from the workforce and also provide financial support during retirement. *Retirement as a process,* concerns decisions on and patterns of the exit from the workforce. *Retirement as an experience* refers to the changes in life brought about by retirement. The same author notes that research in the latter has often focused on how well individuals adapt to retirement and yet answers to this question remain vague and limited. This research focuses on subjective individual accounts of

transition into retirement and seeks to take a wider perspective than looking at indicators of well-being only.

Subjective, individual accounts of experience are deeply interesting to me as a counselling psychologist in my seventh year of a study and research journey on a doctoral program. Counselling psychology as a discipline prioritizes looking at the wider causes of distress and on the whole, taking a relationship focused approach to working with people. Counselling psychologists who undertake research are encouraged to be explicit about the world view which underpins their approach to their counselling and psychotherapeutic work (Morrow, 2005). My model of psychotherapy is relational, privileges the intersubjective and is built upon a social constructionist understanding of reality and being. My approach to research is very much informed by this approach to practice.

The study takes a narrative approach and seeks to collect and study the stories of retirees as they choose to tell them. It is an approach rooted in the work of researchers such as McAdams (1993) and Josselson (1995) who both understand stories as essential vehicles of identity at the same time as elements of identity. 'Stories provide a conscious record to us at critical junctures in our lives about our capacity for relationships and constructive action in the world. They express our most salient self-images, and help us to reconcile these images into a coherent sense of identity' (Singer, 2001, p.276).

My interest in retired humanitarians and their experiences is related not just to the fact that I am working with humanitarians at all stages of their careers, but also to the fact that I have much in common with them in spite of never working in the sector until relatively late in my career. I have lived in 5 different countries outside of the country where I was born. My partner is from another culture to my own and we have 2 children who have negotiated the challenges of learning and living in more than one third culture. This has meant that many times as a couple and as a family we have made friends and then said goodbye with very little expectation of meeting again other than virtually or very occasionally.

I am still some 10 years from retirement but it has often occurred to me that choosing this area for research was as much about making sense of the consequences and implications of my own transitions as it is about understanding those of others.

I try to capture the transition stories of the retirees from a global humanitarian agency whose mandate is the protection of refugees worldwide. The organization runs a moving and effective story telling campaign in social media sites where refugees relate the impact of the traumatic events on their lives. By contrast, little is heard of the stories of those who care for them. This research seeks to encourage the writing of their stories at a critical life juncture and to raise awareness at the organizational level and at large of the challenges faced by these workers, the way they approach these and how they find meaning, purpose and significance at the end of their working lives.

CHAPTER 2: CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

In this Chapter I review literature on the retirement experience in 3 areas: *finding meaning and identity in retirement and later life; the importance of relationships in retirement and dealing with existential questions.*

1. FINDING MEANING AND IDENTITY IN RETIREMENT AND IN LATER LIFE

The time will come

when, with elation

you will greet yourself arriving

at your own door, in your own mirror

and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.

You will love again the stranger who was yourself.

Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart

to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored

for another, who knows you by heart.

Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes;

peel your own image from the mirror.

Sit. Feast on your life.

Derek Walcott, (1992)

Derek Walcott's poem conveys the idea of a homecoming after a long absence where a lost, but deeply satisfying self-integration is possible. The reader is invited to arrive at his or her own door, to sit and take in nourishment before coming to terms with aspects of him or herself perhaps for the first time. The journey to this door seems to have lasted many years just as many of the organization's retirees' careers may have. As part of this they may have to sort through artefacts from their lives, *the photographs, the desperate notes,* ideas about themselves which are no longer relevant. Walcott is suggesting, perhaps, that there is emotional work needed before it is possible to stay and *Feast on your life.*

Life stage theories of human development such as Erikson's (1998) suggest the kind of work which might be involved. He proposes an adult stage of development at the end of which retirement falls characterized by a potentially creative tension between generative activities and stagnation. If this stage is successfully negotiated the ego quality of care is developed. The successful integration of generative activities such as establishing a working commitment and perhaps beginning and caring for a family at the beginning of this stage are key. For Erikson, the ending of this stage ' is a wonderful time to be alive, cared for and caring surrounded by those nearest and dearest…one may also become involved in the community and many of its diverse activities.' (1998 p.112). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the generative activities of humanitarian aid workers are centred around work both in caring for 'the populations of concern' to their organization and building reciprocal mutually satisfying and sometimes intense relationships with colleagues who are experiencing life in the same restrictive and basic conditions. This begs the question: what becomes of the humanitarian aid worker when these possibilities for generativity are ended by retirement? Erikson (1998, p.112) notes one rather ominous possibility: 'if one should withdraw altogether from generativity, from creativity, from caring for and with others entirely, that would be worse than death.' What compensatory strategies do retired humanitarian workers use? And what thoughts, feelings and behavior accompany these? An idea is given in this extract

from 'Dialogue'[2] magazine, the staff published newsletter where a long term employee contemplates the retirement years ahead:

'What life have I just lived with XXXX? From Cairo to Athens, my first to last assignments, with lots of stops in between – Dar es Salaam, Lusaka, Johannesburg, Moscow, Jakarta, Geneva. A difficult, ultimately rewarding life. One I would repeat. Athens - a great duty station to prepare. What life will now be lived? What will one do with that leisure, that freedom? In life some people revert to doing what they are happiest doing, where they received great satisfaction. Humanitarian work always gave me that satisfaction. Others, given the chance, will do something completely different. The combination of these two ideas – an attractive proposition. A simple thought, a straightforward conclusion, still a complex issue - retirement.'

The writer seems to recognize that he may continue to do Humanitarian work in some way as it gave *great satisfaction*. It is as if he is contemplating what activity may provide him with satisfaction and well-being post retirement. Insights from continuity theory (Atchley, 1989) and life transition (stress) theory (Wheaton,1990), can be used to identify the mechanisms through which life course transitions such as retirement influence well-being in a more specific way than the life course perspective taken by Erikson (1998). Although the research from which they emerge is often positivistic and does not give insight into the individual co-researcher meaning making process.

The quoted staff member is sharing his thoughts with us on others and notes that people seek to do what gives them satisfaction once they are retired. He reflects that humanitarian work has always given him great satisfaction. Continuity theory of normal aging (Atchley, 1989) holds that continuity is an adaptive strategy that is promoted by both individual preference and social approval. Older adults try to maintain existing internal and external structures during transition and they do this by using strategies tied to their past experiences of themselves and their social

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[2] Dialogue Magazine, December 2004

world. Are humanitarians more likely to use these strategies given that their lives have been so characterized by discontinuity and change? If they do, how are their choices framed in their individual stories and how much does their social world influence them?

The humanitarian quoted also notes that aspects of his working life have been difficult. Life transitions associated with retirement have been associated with stress (Szinovacz, 2003) but transitions out of stressful roles can be a relief and reduce levels of stress hitherto experienced (Wheaton, 1990). What is the experience of humanitarians? Is retirement just another transition more easily negotiated because of the many others that have gone before or are they more vulnerable in retirement because of this? Perhaps retirement is experienced as a relief from the sometimes intolerable pressures involved in doing a practically impossible job?

STRESS, TRAUMA AND FINDING MEANING IN HUMANITARIAN WORK

Blanchetiere, (2006) identifies a wide range of stress factors experienced by aid workers during their working lives which she divides into 4 groups:

1. Situational factors such as insecurity, attacks on personal well-being, health risks and poor facilities.
2. Job related factors such as dislocation: social, cultural spiritual, job insecurity and tense relationships within the team.
3. Organizational, management factors such as excessive bureaucracy, unrealistic programme roles and objectives.
4. Personal Risk factors such as limited contact with home and pressure from home, unrealistic expectations and motivations and poor self-care behavior.

All these form the context where it is difficult for humanitarians to integrate their experiences into their identities once they return from duty. They are challenged by

the complexity of finding coherent meaning in their actions during and after assignment. They may experience the incongruence of their feelings or suppress them as a protective strategy. The physical and moral disconnection with others in the host or home country can reinforce the feeling of not belonging and inadequate organizational policy can result in insufficient attention to both the security and psychological risks of their work (Bosch and McKay, 2013).

Wigley (2005) applies a systems psychodynamic lens to explain the excessive bureaucracy identified by Blanchetiere as a significant stressor in the culture of one humanitarian agency. The organizational defenses constructed to alleviate or suppress the anxiety created by an enormous and complex task are driven by a desire to exert control and predictability over an environment that is inherently difficult to control or predict. It is easy to imagine that the experience of individual field workers is of secondary concern in such an organizational culture. The same culture would also limit the possibilities for individual meaning making during an individual's exposure to it.

The key role that organizational factors play in the mental health of humanitarians is further highlighted in a study of over 2000 humanitarians in one organization (Suzic et al, 2016) which indicated that a measure of work place stress, Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI), had the strongest predictive indicator for all mental health outcomes measured in the study. These included anxiety, depression, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder, secondary stress and burnout). These results supported the central tenet of the ERI model (Siegrist, 2011) which proposes that a lack of perceived reciprocity between effort and potential rewards leads to emotional distress and other negative health effects in the work domanin. Rewards include money, esteem (perceiving that one's work is valued by others), promotion prospects and job security. The reasons for these results are not explored in depth in the research, but from a counselling psychology perspective, the unconscious restitutive dynamics underlying humanitarian motivation to help others in need (McClaughlin, 2005) may make the conscious achievement of a successful balance between effort

and reward particularly difficult. The perceived imbalances may extend into retirement making finding meaning difficult or impossible and making separation from an apparently uncaring organization a painful process. The hope of ever achieving the needed rewards must be given up definitively along with the work itself.

The wide range of stressors to which humanitarians are exposed including that of excessive bureaucracy and a lack of perceived reward are not the only factors which may make finding meaning difficult for humanitarians during their working lives and subsequently during retirement; the consequences of trauma or vicarious trauma may be another reason why achieving an integrated sense of self is difficult. The majority of humanitarians in the field will experience at least one seriously frightening or disturbing incident during their working lives (Connorton, et al., 2011). The impact of these events is often dismissed by the humanitarians themselves. They see their own suffering as less significant than that of the people they seek to help (Barron, 1999) and perhaps they identify with traditional images of helpers as selfless and tireless. They neglect their self-care and well-being but by ignoring the consequences of their emotionally and physically demanding work, they eventually find themselves paying the price (McKay, L. 2007). Approximately 25% of people who experience a traumatic event go on to experience trauma related difficulties (Bosch and McKay, 2013).

The symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) develop in response to incidents that are or perceived to be threatening to life or bodily integrity (DSM IV TR). They can also arise after witnessing or hearing about violent acts committed on others. During the course of their careers my co-researchers would have been exposed directly or indirectly to events with potentially traumatizing impact. The symptoms include: re-experiencing the event in various sensory forms, avoiding reminder of the trauma and chronic hyperarousal. The psychological effects strike at the core of personal identity because trauma undermines basic human needs for safety, trust in others, and a sense of control over life, self-worth and intimacy (Saakvitne and Pearlman, 1996). Humanitarians can find themselves questioning

core beliefs about how safe the world really is and how much they can trust in others as a result of their experiences. Difficulty in trusting others may make intimacy with others subsequently difficult or impossible (Bosch and McKay, 2013). Navigating the challenges of retirement may call for a fundamental re-examination of existential philosophies moulded by the exigencies of a humanitarian career. This may only be possible if the accompanying thoughts and feelings are accessible.

Traumatic events can free float in time and appear not to be located in the sufferer´s past. They reappear in present time as if occurring there and then. The part of the brain involved in giving time and space context to an event is the hippocampus and it seems as if this is suppressed during trauma, leaving the part of the brain which processes charged memories, the amygdala, with the contextless impression (Rothschild, 2000). This may explain Levine´s hypothesis that traumatic symptoms stem from a "frozen residue of energy that has not been resolved and discharged" (1997, p.19).

Van der Kolk et al. (1996) develop the idea of unawareness of symptoms referring to *dissociation*. This is a compartmentalization of experience where elements of trauma are not integrated into a unitary whole or an integrated sense of self. Dissociation prevents the victim from becoming aware of what is happening to them and it is the failure to integrate the trauma in the acute stage that creates vulnerability to later PTSD. Traumatised people can contain their dissociated memories in an aspect of self of which they are not aware. These are labelled emotional parts of personality (EPs) in contrast to apparently normal parts of the personality (ANPs) which enable sufferers to go on with their daily life (Van der Hart et al 2006).This aspect of PTSD made it particularly important to provide counselling support to my co-researchers and to be alert to symptoms in my contact with them as it was quite feasible that they had reached the end of their career never having had the opportunity to contextualize their experiences by recounting them in the safety of a healing relationship.

In retirement humanitarians may have significant psychological work to undertake but they also have to undertake the very practical work of deciding where to live and

which of the possessions they may have accumulated over a lifetime of travel they will keep.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE AND THINGS IN RETIREMENT IDENTITY

The humanitarians who participate in my study have moved continuously throughout their careers and have lived in a breathtaking number of countries experiencing a diverse range of culture and language. What has been the impact of this on them and their notions of self now they must choose a place to stay which is not imposed by the demands of a job? How do they make the choice of place?

Savishinsky's (2003) found in his observational study of retirees who all lived in the same town located in North America that it was a 'myth that retirement means migration' (Savishinsky, 2003, p. 17). Among those who moved security and comfort and closeness to family and friends were more important than climate. Savishinsky makes the point that retired people in most traditional societies remain in the same homes and communities they had previously lived in. It is unlikely that a humanitarian would choose to retire in the last community in which he or she worked. For them, migration of some kind is a necessity.

Madison (2006) identifies the phenomenon of 'existential migration' in his study of voluntary migrants – people who leave their homeland by choice rather than for economic reasons. His findings shed light on the paradox evident in the comment: 'a difficult, ultimately rewarding life' made by the humanitarian in the staff magazine cited previously. Madison found that these voluntary migrants of whom humanitarian aid workers are an example, reveal deep existential themes and motivations when asked about their experience. They talk of seeking greater possibilities of self-actualization, exploring foreign cultures in order to assess their own identity and

ultimately grapple with issues of home and belonging in the world generally. They also experienced unexpected consequences and paradoxes as a result of their experiences:

- Some valued having the levels of adaptability needed to live in foreign lands, whilst recognizing that this malleability threatened their sense of self
- Others experienced 'unexpectedly deep feelings of loss and sadness' even though leaving their homeland was inevitable
- As they aged, some began to desire the positive attributes of a settled life…but they also sought to maintain their mobility and respect for personal sensitivities.
- Many reported being in a 'limbo state where no place will ever feel like home again. However, regardless of the emotional pain and losses inherent in leaving home to live in a foreign land, not one would choose differently if they had the choice again'. (Madison, 2006, p.13)

The staff member cited above recognizes he would repeat his life, despite the difficulties he encountered but he does not specify what these were. Perhaps they did involve a renegotiation of belonging or identity with each move he made? Now, as he moves to retire he is faced with the same challenges but without organizational obligations framing his choice. Is it possible that no place will feel like home again? Madison cautions against the profound and mostly ignored psychological consequences of increasing globalization: existential migrants, by repeatedly exposing themselves to a vast range of different people and foreign places can consequently end up living with a feeling of not being at home anywhere. Do retired aid workers end their careers with this feeling and if they do how do they come to terms with it?

Along with the existential questions surrounding choice of place after a career spent in motion, humanitarians have to deal with the very practical aspect of bringing together their material possessions in that place. This may mean assembling and

organizing containers and boxes located in more than one location around the world. How do they deal with the practical and emotional aspects of this and does the process of dealing with these possessions shape identities in any way?

Ekerdt and Baker, (2014) postulate that possessions constitute a dynamic 'material convoy' that accumulates across adulthood to allow role enactments and the development of the self. In their American study they anticipated finding that older people should release the possessions that equipped the daily lives they no longer have. In fact they found in their study that after age 50 people are less likely to divest themselves of their belongings - those over 70 even less so. They found that this result was valid after controlling for the effects of health and size of housing. The study used survey data and so the explanatory voices of co-researchers are not heard and do not shed light on the reasons for this.

Ekerdt and Baker in suggesting areas for further research offer the explanation that most older Americans are home owners and do not intend to move. There is, therefore, little practical reason to address collections of belongings. This is not the case for humanitarians who may never have owned their own home and whose collection is brought together perhaps for the first time. The same authors postulate that retaining possessions may be a story about the self and that considerable meaning is attached to things that symbolize identity and ties to others. In the face of the limitations imposed by age, possessions may be kept as real evidence of an unchanging self. Walcott's poem which opens this review hints at a painful process with some possessions being central to being able to 'feast' on a life. Do humanitarians find a sense of being at home through their possessions?

Bringing together collections of possessions dispersed around the globe is not the only challenge retired humanitarians face; maintaining relationships within possibly diminished social networks as a consequence of moving so frequently during their careers is another. The importance of relationships in retirement will be explored next.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN RETIREMENT

In my own case it's taken me years to cultivate self-control to prevent my emotions from betraying themselves. Only a short time ago I was the conqueror of the world, commanding the largest and finest army of modern times. That's all gone now! To think I kept all my composure, I might even say preserved my unvarying high spirits … You don't think that my heart is less sensitive than those of other men. I'm a very kind man but since my earliest youth I have devoted myself to silencing that chord within me that never yields a sound now. If anyone told me when I was about to begin a battle that my mistress whom I loved to distraction was breathing her last, it would leave me cold. Yet my grief would be just as great as if I had the time. Without this self-control, do you think I could have done all I've done?

Napoleon Bonaparte, (Andrew Roberts, 2015)

The humanitarian workers who are the focus for this study have spent their working lives rotating after short periods of time from one workplace to another often in situations of danger and high risk where their families and partners could not accompany them. It is inevitable that their relationships and social networks have been influenced. They may have the ability to downplay the needs for proximity and assistance from close others and this may be an asset during their working lives of constant rotation in duty stations far from their homes. It may also have been an advantage in coping with the more difficult emergency situations they may have endured. During retirement this style may be less of an asset. Retirees may need to recognize their needs for proximity and assistance from others and then to engage in the necessary relationships.

The impact of loss in later life on mental health and well-being is well documented: the loss of friends, spouse and regular social exercise activities can increase the likelihood of depression, for example (Harkness 1999). The loss of social interaction seems particularly critical. Social engagement is related to psychological and physical well-being and other positive outcomes and inversely related to negative outcomes such as depression and mortality in the elderly (Glass et al 2006). Other researchers have demonstrated the association between longevity and relationship status (Heard and Lake, 1986) and 'lack of vital involvement often seems to be the nostalgic theme hidden in the overt symptoms that bring old people to psychotherapy' (Erikson 1996, p63). By contrast, supportive social networks can help with the practical aspects of retirement associated loss and can also facilitate mental health (Henderson 1977).

The importance of an intimate committed relationship as a contributory factor to well-being and mental health in retirement and later life seems well established. Although researchers indicate that successful negotiation of old age depends on a variety of factors (Holahan and Velasquez 2011), a successful intimate relationship is primary for many. 'Good physical health, economic security, meaningful sublimations, and most important, *a loved and loving marital partner are among other variables that facilitate the passage through this era of life'* (Akhtar and Choi, 2004, p.160). These authors make a point relevant for many aid workers: that the marital relationship becomes more important for immigrants in retirement because they are more isolated than other retirees. They also make the point that this relationship as well as relationships with grandchildren can be a source of disappointment: 'Separated from the lands of their parents and not deeply connected with their culturally alien grandchildren, elderly immigrants experience the approach of death with far greater isolation and despair.' Humanitarian Aid Workers are often separated from the lands of their parents and have been for many years of their career. They may then settle in another unfamiliar culture in retirement. They may also feel like immigrants in their own communities after many years outside. Their marriages may not have survived the pressures of a career marked by frequent separations or they may never have

married at all. Anecdotal evidence suggests that senior women especially are affected in this way. It is less likely that they will find a partner to follow them around the world. Conversations with grandchildren which for Erikson (1998) are one of the delights of old age may not be possible at all.

Social emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al. 1999) postulates that reductions in social activity of older people are based on choices made as a result of an awareness of anticipated endings and diminishing energy. People choose social relationships which will be most satisfying and do not maintain or even embark on others. What are the implications of this for the retired humanitarian aid worker who may already have a reduced social network beyond work? Perhaps he or she cannot afford to make reductions in energy expended on the creation of social networks; rather energy must continue to be expended in creating them. The maintenance of work related friendships as a buffer to the stress of retirement transition is also less likely for a humanitarian whose connections are distributed across a global organization and who are in work related transition themselves regularly throughout their careers.

If social connections are critical in successful adjustment to retirement, the organization which retirees leave may have a role in facilitating good endings which prepare them to approach the social changes accompanying retirement with more confidence. The ways in which an organization may do this are explored next.

ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The kinds of support offered by organizations for people preparing for retirement are often in the form of seminars in which financial planning dominates (Taylor and Doverspike, 2003). This is certainly the case for the organization which the co-researchers in this study have left. A five day seminar is offered to employees due to retire within the last 5 years of their career and covers primarily taxation and

administrative matters. The inclusion of additional information on the social aspects of retirement in these kinds of program may lead to a more positive retirement experience according to Taylor and Doverspike, (2003) but they do not specify in detail how this might happen.

A writer who does is William Ayot. In a passionate article in *Counselling at Work* Magazine (2015) he sees a ritual based approach as most appropriate for providing a sense of connection with others and meaning which goes beyond the information provided in seminars. He defines ritual as a 'symbolic action through which one can give the soul or psyche, an important message. This comes from the simple fact that the soul can't count. It can't manage data' (p.10). He works as a ritualist in organizations and provides contexts in which groups of colleagues help others through major life changes such as assuming a leadership position for the first time. For him, retirement is an area of working life which 'begs for the application of timely ritual'. It allows for a common experience in which the 'walls of our social and business preconceptions are broken down, moving us from internal isolation to a kind of ritual belonging' (ibid p. 11). Ayot's article whilst compelling is speculative in its assessment of the impact of ritual on the experience of retirement for the person concerned and for the colleagues surrounding him or her. But it does, for me, raise the question of the role of colleagues and relationships forged at work in easing or hindering the transition into retirement and how this is perceived by the retiree him or herself.

Savishinsky (2003, p.239) draws some lessons from his study which includes the importance of leaving work on a 'good note'. A meaningful retirement celebration was important to the co-researchers in his study. Formal events featuring polite supervisors, canned speeches and clichéd presents were not sufficient to mark entry into a new phase of life; rather a celebration with 'guests who matter, a thoughtful gift, and an opportunity for the person being honoured to reflect openly on his or her work, its legacy, and hopes for the future' (p. 239) was more meaningful in setting the tone for how retirement would begin.

My experience of John's retirement gathering was that it was a moving and positive experience. Colleagues had taken the time to create a video photo montage chronicling his career. John had prepared a sincere and deeply personal speech to which all present listened attentively. However, I know that not all find themselves surrounded by colleagues with whom they have created meaningful relationships in their last assignment with the organization. I know also that not all have achieved the status and social connectedness which increases the likelihood of such a gathering being organized. I wonder how these humanitarians experience this and how it impacts their relationships in retirement.

3. DEALING WITH EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS

[…] and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburdened crawl toward death. (King Lear 1.1.40-43, William Shakespeare)

In King Lear's announcement of his intention to leave royal duties, he associates freeing himself from 'cares and business' by leaving them to those younger and stronger with a 'crawl toward death'. King Lear appears to have an appreciation of what his proposal symbolizes on an existential level. He also appears to be aware of his own gradual weakening in contrast to the strength of a younger generation. Are humanitarians conscious in the same way that the end of work symbolizes other endings? What associated losses do they feel most keenly, if at all?

Retirement is the ending of working life and all associated with it and endings are inherently difficult to come to terms with for many reasons (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al. 1999.) Issues of loss in retirement can be part of many people´s experience: loss of status, income, structure and routine and loss of work related social connections. People must also come to terms with diminishing physical strength and health related challenges. These losses can bring into sharp focus the idea that retirement can also be seen as a symbolic representation of the end of life itself, as Lear appears to be so aware. Death is an existential given and the anxiety it provokes can give rise to literally 'death defying' behaviour including an obsessive focus on work, fitness and the denial of ageing generally (Yalom, 1980).

Edwards and Milton, (2014) in a study of older people's experience of existential therapy in relation to retirement note that some of the existential givens highlighted by philosophers such as temporality – Death and Non-Being; Freedom, Choice and

Responsibility; Meaning and Meaninglessness are particularly relevant to retirement. They note that retirement contains themes of death or non-being on many levels. There is the death of the identity associated with a previous career and the death of a work place community. The issue of freedom is also felt intensely by some in retirement. A person is faced with taking on again the full responsibility of freedom having given it up to enter into an employment contract which sacrificed freedom in exchange for security and the benefits of employment. Once retired he or she has to face up to the unpredictable illusion of security which had come from the structure and routines of work.

The vocational nature of humanitarian work combined with the surrendering of many freedoms because of the mobile and often insecure context, may mean that retired humanitarians are faced with an even greater challenge than others when free to make choices associated with their new status.

As the focus of the Edwards and Milton study was the impact of existential therapy, the meaning making processes of co-researchers was not examined in any depth. However, they did find that for most of the 6 co-researchers, relational factors such as therapist openness and authenticity played an important role in enabling a beneficial exploration of aspects such as a post retirement career and co-researcher values and thoughts on the limitations of life.

Other research with the 'baby boomer' cohort by the Mental Health Foundation (2012) suggests that some baby boomers are re writing what it means to be in the later years of life. They do not regard themselves as old and they are not planning for their 'old age', rather they regard growing older as another life stage, a continuation of their present. 'Many are barely contemplating retirement from paid work; many are already enjoying quality time with their families, travel hobbies and activities that retirement with a reasonable pension and good health permits.' It may well be that humanitarians who retire in good health and with an adequate pension see themselves as belonging in the 'baby boomer' cohort and not in a group who

indulge   in 'death defying pursuits' or spend time contemplating their own temporality.

Kubler Ross (1970, p.16) in her classic study on death and dying notes that 'though every man will attempt in his own way to postpone such questions and issues until he is forced to face them, he will only be able to change things if he can start to conceive of his own death...This has to be done by every human being alone. Each one of us has the need to avoid this issue, yet each one of us has to face it sooner or later'. Is this a question retiring aid workers choose to avoid or do they, as one psychoanalyst describes (Quindioz, 2009), exercise a different choice by actively constructing the end of their lives?

Quindioz (2009) suggests that one way to do this is to attempt to find coherence, 'it is difficult to give up our place without first having found it, to leave life without feeling that we have actually lived, to close our internal life-history without first having made it into a whole history, one that belongs to us.' Is it possible that the move into retirement for humanitarians sparks an active approach in this way? Or is it more likely, as Erikson (1998, p.127) notes, that they, like others, although encouraged to let go according to the normal, societal model of aging, are not encouraged to seek a new life and role. For Erikson (1998, p.127), 'this promotion of false old age, or denial stifles normal development.' He hopes for transcendence and in his thinking converts this in a word play to transcen*dance*. 'This speaks to soul and body and challenges it to rise above the dystonic clinging aspects of our worldly existence that burden and distract us from true growth and aspiration.'

A longitudinal study carried out in the anthropological tradition through which the voices of retirees are heard as they transition into retirement, is presented in Joel Savishinsky's book, B*reaking the Watch*: *the meanings of retirement in America (2003).* He followed a group of 26 men and women from one small town with a population of 35,000 from a point at which they were expected to retire during the following 12 months and for several years afterwards.

He summarizes three insights which he gleaned over time from his work with the elder residents of Shelby, in the U.S.A. Firstly, they worked hard at having a meaningful, purposeful retirement, just as they had struggled to find comparable meanings at earlier life stages. Second, they had used their sense of creativity and morality – 'much like the figures of Greek drama – to wrestle with the contradictions of their culture'. Specifically, 'they had taken on the conflicts between personal needs and public commitment, passions and duty, prudence and spontaneity, responsibility and self-fulfillment and decorum and desire' (Savishinsky, 2003, p29). The author sees these contradictions as particularly American. He summarizes, 'if retirement is a cultural construction, then retirees are continually deconstructing and reconstructing it.' Thirdly, he found that the everyday lives of older people 'possessed the kind of poignancy we too often relegate to the realms of dramatic fiction or the philosopher's quest for answers to the big questions' (ibid p.29). The retirees of Shelby struggled with these questions as they reached apparently mundane decisions on how to help aging parents, ailing spouses or needy grandchildren. Humanitarians may not have had the opportunity to cultivate the social networks in the same way as those who have spent their lives in one town and it remains to be seen if they struggle with the 'big questions' in the same way.

Humanitarians frequently bear the consequences of their time in the 'deep field' as symptoms of chronic illness or weakened bodily functioning due to infections or bouts of malaria. It may feel more urgent to care for themselves in this regard than to seek a sense of self which expands beyond the bodily to the spiritual or cosmic. They have also often witnessed death at first hand. It is not unusual to have witnessed suicide attempts or violent attempts at self-harm when a desperate refugee has been refused help for any reason. How are these experiences integrated into their stories of transition into retirement and by extension into their views of themselves if at all?

SUMMARY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Much of the literature on finding meaning and identity in retirement and later life is based on research with populations who have had relatively 'static' careers in the sense that obligatory global mobility did not feature. It is also based on groups who are culturally homogeneous. The methodology, with some exceptions, such as Madison, (2006) and Savishinsky (2003) is positivistic and often questionnaire based with a narrow focus on factors affecting well-being in retirement. The retirees' own voice or choice of emphasis is often not evident.

In this research, I ask a small but culturally diverse group of retired humanitarians to write a retirement story with minimal guidance but which allows them to narrate their story as they choose. I do suggest focus on the 3 areas explored above: meaning and identity, relationships and existential questions, as these are the most relevant, in my view, to applying a counselling psychology lens to their retirement experience and are based on a review of the literature summarized here. But they are largely free to indicate events, ideas or thoughts which have been important to them. The following are the areas of inquiry which I explored and they guided my reading of their stories and the subsequent related conversations I had with them.

- How had they integrated the different experiences as a humanitarian worker into their lives as a retiree?
- What kind of relationships did they have in retirement and how were these influenced by the kind of relationships they had had during their career if at all?
- How were they viewing the future and what were they contemplating as they looked ahead?

By exploring the findings in relation to these 3 areas of inquiry, I hope to make a range of contributions to be outlined next.

CONTRIBUTION OF THIS RESEARCH

What will this research add to our understanding of the experience of humanitarians pre-retirement and in retirement and by extension to the field of counselling psychology? Contributions to the following are envisaged:

RETIRED HUMANITARIAN AID WORKERS

These men and women may benefit from understanding others´ experience and this may help them prepare for their lives in retirement more effectively.

THE FIELD OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

The psychological well-being of humanitarian aid workers is a concern for the organizations in which they work but the amount of attention and resources dedicated to the issue are insufficient and care systems are underdeveloped (Antares Foundation, 2006). Thomas, (2008) also suggests that there is a structural dysfunction in the humanitarian enterprise such that as an industry it is premised on the assertion of compassion globally but 'it is staffed by individuals who are inadequately supported emotionally. It falls to individuals rather than institutions to manage this disconnect' (p.327) as organizational provision is inadequate.

The same researcher sees that the pathologizing discourse which characterizes the description of the experiences of beneficiaries is projected as an inability to cope on the part of the humanitarian. This is done in order to ensure continuing financial support and donor approval but it is problematic in her view as it negates individual agency, strength and resilience.

Other researchers have found that the vulnerability associated with seeking support is unacceptable to many of the workers themselves and that existing formal sources

of support are experienced with distrust. Serning's (2011) research into international aid workers' experience of support suggested that there was a sense in which formal support including workshops, managerial support, debriefings and counselling were experienced as forced upon co-researchers although they acknowledged it was comforting to know they were available. Some co-researchers in the same study were concerned that counselling might weaken their defenses and make them more vulnerable to the stress of the field. Supporting Serning's conclusions, Suzic et al. (2016) in a survey study found that workers of one humanitarian agency indicated that they needed to consult health services (48.8%) but that fewer (26.4%) had actually done so.

I hope that this research by shedding light on these issues, will:

- Raise awareness of the issue of support for humanitarians in retirement and during their working lives and broaden this awareness to include different sources of support beyond those provided by organizations themselves.
- Reduce the stigma associated with seeking support, specifically counseling support, by encouraging openness. The co-researchers in this study are no longer financially dependent on the organization and so may feel freer to reflect on their transition and the way their previous career has impacted on this.
- Support counsellors who work with retirees and humanitarians with new knowledge in such a way that their capacity for empathy, understanding and creativity is increased.
- Allow counselling psychologists external to humanitarian organizations to provide more confidently the emotional support needed by humanitarians not currently provided internally.

THE ORGANIZATION

The results of this research may help shape future organizational policy in relation to people approaching retirement age and also in relation to those at an earlier stage

of their career. The results may also complement the design of psycho educational components of training preparing workers for field missions in remote duty stations.

Current preparatory workshops for retirement take a practical focus and provide information and guidance on financial and health care management. This research may support a greater emphasis on the psychological preparation for retirement.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD OF INQUIRY

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative researchers emphasize the need for clarity concerning both philosophical underpinnings as well as the research methodology adopted for any project (Ponterotto, 2005). Clarity concerning epistemology not only guides methodological choices and overall research design but also justifies and enables the evaluation of the knowledge generated (Carter et al., 2007). This point is further emphasized by Morrow (2005), who urges counselling psychologists to consider how their chosen methodology has implications for the standards of trustworthiness that emerge from and are congruent with particular paradigms.

In this chapter I firstly make explicit my beliefs about ontology and epistemology. These beliefs also underpin my approach to counselling psychology which in turn, influences the way in which I have undertaken this research. This is particularly evident in the way I have considered myself in relationship with my co-researchers, the way in which a psychodynamic understanding of human development as well as practice has informed not only this relationship but also my reading of their stories and our conversations.

Secondly, I outline my chosen research paradigm: narrative inquiry, and explain how this is consistent with my ontological and epistemological assumptions. I go on to summarize how narrative researchers see stories as vehicles for self- making and also how they have come to understand changes in self by studying stories of lives in transition. This body of research is relevant as retirement is a significant life transition albeit socially constructed in a particular historical and cultural context.

Understanding how changes, or their absence in co-researcher perspectives on life and themselves, are conveyed in stories is relevant. This is not, however, the only objective of this research as I also seek to identify specific themes which may speak more to the organizational context of this research and how its results may eventually be used in that context.

In third place, I discuss ethical considerations which guided this research in general. Specifically, I discuss the ethical challenges which arose because of the nature of my relationship with co-researchers situated, as we all were, within a single organizational context and how I dealt with these. I then go on to discuss the ethics of the representation of the results as these have a bearing on the adequacy of the interpretation and the validity of the conclusions I draw overall.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS WHICH UNDERPIN THIS RESEARCH

My views on knowledge are aligned with constructivism and social constructionism as postmodern philosophies.

Constructivism is based on the idea that reality is a product of one's own creation; each individual sees and interprets the world and their experiences through their personal belief systems. Reality is constructed in the mind of the individual rather than it being a singular external entity (Ponterotto, 2005).

Social constructionism views knowledge and knower as interdependent and embedded within history, context, culture, language, experience and understandings.

Lock and Strong (2010) note that there is not one school of social constructionism, although they identify tenets which hold it together (p. 6 - 8).

1. It is concerned with meaning and understanding as the central feature of human activities.
2. Meaning and understanding have their origins in social interaction and is, therefore, co constructed. It cannot be observed directly but needs to be interpreted.
3. Ways of meaning making, being embedded in socio-cultural process, are specific to particular times and places. People are self-defining and socially constructed co-researchers in their shared lives.

Clearly, these have implications for the way research is carried out and the way results are understood.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE ASSUMPTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Within these philosophies the notion of absolute truth is dispensed with and multiple, equally valid social realities are proposed which invite critical reflection (Haverkamp and Young, 2007). There are 6 co-researchers in this research and their individual accounts are privileged as I seek to understand them and share my understanding. It was not necessary to seek a representative or large sample in order for findings to be more valid.

My values are assumed to influence the research process and my position in the socio-cultural context of the organization will in every way influence the data that are obtained. However, the researchers need to examine and understand how values, personal beliefs and characteristics have influenced the co construction of meaning (Mintz, 2010). This makes sense to me, especially because the organizational

culture and context has shaped my co-researchers' and my life fundamentally and so not paying attention to the implications of this would undermine the validity of any conclusions drawn. The reflexivity needed to achieve this involves being 'thoughtfully and critically self-aware of subjective/intersubjective elements and how these impact on the research… It needs to occur throughout every stage of research from the initial design through data collection and analysis to writing up' (Finlay, 2016, p.7).

My model of psychotherapy is also relational in that it privileges the intersubjective as does that of many counselling psychologists. However, it is underpinned by a psychodynamic understanding of human development and practice and my approach to research is very much informed by this aspect. In fact, I would have found it difficult to espouse one set of principles for the practice of counselling psychology and another for carrying out research.

My reflexivity in this research, therefore, extended to considering the ways I might have influenced unconsciously as well as consciously the stories written and told to me by my co-researchers and how I have reviewed these. I was aware that reflection on my countertransference reactions when reading their stories and particularly during follow on conversations provided access to unconscious feelings my co-researchers may have experienced in relation to the more difficult existential questions associated with retirement. Although this stance may sit in tension with the social constructionist position outlined above, in fact, for some relational analysts, the psychotherapeutic process itself is not one of archaeological reconstruction but is rather an active construction of a narrative about the patient´s life (Spence, 1982). For Spence, 'narrative truth' and 'historical truth' are not the same. Narrative truth overlaps with historical truth but recreates it repeatedly with every story told.

It also involves a consideration of how the unconscious feelings, anxieties and defenses of my co-researchers impact on me as researcher (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Hollway, (2016, p.21) sees reflection in this psychoanalytic sense as

essential. 'Without reflection, responding to emotional impact can result in the indulgent exercise of one´s preferred view of the world and imposition of one´s own belief system in the service of a wished-for certainty that does not reflect the complexities of what is observed' . I think this is particularly important where I am immersed, as researcher, in the same organizational culture as my co-researchers. The risk of a collusive agreement around meaning is, in my view, increased.

FROM EPISTEMOLOGY TO METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVE INQUIRY

I use a narrative approach to collecting and exploring the stories of retirement that I ask my co-researchers to write and later discuss with me. I chose this methodology because I believed that detailed, personal information about how they have perceived and experienced retirement in their lives would enable me to better understand the phenomenon.

Narrative inquiry is a way of systematically gathering, analyzing, and re-presenting people's stories as told by them, which challenges traditional and modernist views of truth, reality, knowledge and personhood in line with its constructivist and social constructionist underpinnings. (Riessman, 2008)

The use of this methodology seems to respect earlier research trends which see aging as a complex multilayered process built around different life threads (Thompson 1993). Taking a storied approach to the collection of retirement experiences increased the likelihood that relevant threads would be included in co-researcher accounts. Challenges in retirement are the culmination of a whole life and a storied approach to capturing these complexities seems appropriate.

Spector Mersel (2010), in her presentation of narrative inquiry as a research paradigm, recognizes that although there is considerable diversity in narrative studies, considered as a paradigm, it offers a unique ontology and epistemology that give rise to particular methodological principles particularly in how stories are interpreted. These aspects of the narrative paradigm will be considered next.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY - ONTOLOGY

The narrative paradigm draws on the constructivist paradigm and the postmodern, social constructionist world view which conceives of social reality as constructed, fluid and multifaceted. But the narrative paradigm is more specific; in its focus on the storied nature of human conduct. It maintains that social reality is primarily a narrative reality. There is a mutual relationship between life and narrative as stories are not created in a vacuum. Jerome Bruner (1991) dates the 'paradigm shift' in psychology to 1981 when a series of articles appeared in the journal 'critical enquiry' on narrative. Narrative was represented not only as a form of representing reality but also as constituting it.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY - EPISTEMOLOGY

With regard to epistemology, the narrative paradigm shares underlying assumptions with the constructivist paradigm, maintaining that we understand ourselves and our world by way of interpretative processes that are subjective and culturally rooted. The narrative paradigm is more specific in suggesting that we shape and determine reality through stories. By telling stories we impart meaning to ourselves and the world (Polkinghorne, 1988) and we also form our personal identities through them (McAdams, 1993).

The narrative epistemology also pays attention to where stories are composed: They are rooted in the present even though they may cover the past and future. They are the result of conscious and unconscious selection and, Spector Mersel (2010) suggests, they are composed in 3 kinds of context:

1. The intersubjective relationships in which they are produced;
2. The collective social field which forms the backdrop for them and,
3. The cultural narratives which give meaning to any particular story.
I take these contexts into account when exploring my co-researchers' stories.

The co-researchers in my research had a large degree of freedom concerning what to include in their stories but their freedom was limited by the context of the research. I asked them to feel free about what to include in their stories but suggested 3 areas of inquiry for them to consider. They were also influenced by the knowledge that my eventual report on their stories would be read by colleagues in an organization with their own expectations and judgments of what constitutes an acceptable story or story teller. I take these contexts into account when interpreting the stories of my group of retirees.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY: INTERPRETATION

Spector Mersel (2010) builds on the work of Riessman, (2008) in identifying two basic principles which characterize narrative methodology. I have followed these in my review of co-researchers' stories:
   1. 'Treating the story as an object for examination, not as a neutral pipeline for conducting knowledge that is `out there´.'
   2. 'Following the narrative ontology that emphasizes the story´s holistic nature'. This holistic approach is reflected in four ways:
      a) Studies adopt a multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary lens. I explain how I have done this in the next Chapter, Interpretation of stories and Presentation of Findings.

b) Studies treat the story as a whole unit. In this study I avoid relying exclusively on a categorical analysis which would have the effect of fragmenting a retiree´s story. I would have run the risk of losing meanings available to me in the whole.

c) Studies take into account form and content as this combination allows a deeper understanding of the story.

d) Studies pay attention to contexts. In my study I consider the way context has influenced the stories told to me by co-researchers from content and from a form perspective.

I saw the following advantages of using this methodology in my research on the retirement experience:

Co-researchers were asked to write stories and it was likely that they would conform to conventions around story telling in general and the structure and form narrative is given in particular. It seemed coherent to use a method of analysis which respects these structures and does not simply understand stories as a neutral pipeline for the transmission of data.

Etherington (2004) makes the point that in narrative analysis stories are re-presented in ways which preserve their integrity and convey a sense of the humanity of the person. This approach to research fits with my value of wanting to honour and respect the work and lives of humanitarians.

The stories co-researchers tell in this research do not represent 'life as lived' but are re-presentations of the lived experience of retirement as told to me and others. The way their stories are crafted conveys how they see themselves and how they create their identities as retirees. This self-making aspect of stories will be considered next.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF IN STORIES

A variety of researchers have taken a view of stories as vehicles for self-making McAdams 1993, Linde, 1993, McAdams, 1993). I draw on their observations when interpreting the stories of my co-researchers.

Linde (1993), draws on literary analysis to identify 2 ways in which narrators differentiate themselves from others and at the same time relate to them. The first is where the protagonist is cast as a heroic individual against the world. The hero being the ideal of a great personality that embodies the values of a given culture. The second can be appreciated, according to Linde, in more modern autobiography. The value of differences between individuals is emphasized and self-making is seen in the way protagonists actualize the only authentic way of being possible for them given their value set.

Joseph Campbell (2008) recognized that the hero's journey is one which not only embodies the values of just one culture but of many cultures and throughout history. The 'monomyth' is described in his classic text, 'The hero with a thousand faces' and provides an anthropological perspective on the pervasiveness of hero stories as a vehicle for mankind's struggle for identity. Campbell identifies the path of the mythological adventure of the hero as a magnification of the rites of passage formula: separation-initiation-return. He describes a universal pattern which may contain a combination of the following stages: a call to adventure, the refusal of the call, meeting the mentor, crossing the threshold, tests, allies and enemies, the ordeal, the road back, the treasure, crossing the threshold, returning with the treasure and finally celebration.

Stories with this form are told in Ancient Greek, Scandinavian, Asian and African cultures. The hero myth emerges from centuries of human wisdom and as such is available to contemporary mankind as a sustaining guide which can be accessed

through personal experience as well as stories and rites of passage and initiation which echo the hero's journey:

'We have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us…we have only to follow the thread of the hero path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.' (Campbell, 2008, p.18.) The successful hero in Campbell's view is one who achieves a sense of oneness with the world and the separateness and withdrawal necessary at the outset of the journey is no longer necessary at the end. Heroic qualities are often projected onto humanitarians and in reading their stories I explore if and in what ways these qualities are present in their stories and if they see themselves returning with treasure and able to celebrate or unable to achieve a sense of integration and completion at the end of their working lives.

McAdams (1993) further identifies characters or imagoes who are common in personal myth making. These provide insight into the aspirations that protagonists have in the way they want to be seen and also allow a relationship with the reader which extends beyond the personal to the domain of shared cultural and historical knowledge and understanding.

In the literature on narrative and career that has been developed by Savickas (1995) and Cochran (1997), the ways in which people achieve a sense of continuity and coherence in their sense of self is explored. Both these writers see the idea of plot or theme as central to the sense making activity of people. For Savickas, (1995) plot is the narrative form which creates identity. It explains how a person is agentic and to whom he or she feels connected and makes sense of a whole of an individual's life.

Narrative forms, some of which are culturally derived, serve to achieve a sense of meaning, coherence and continuity to people's sense of themselves. Other researchers have focused on how transition and change in identity is framed in their

stories. The next section reviews the literature in this area to explore the impact of life transitions on narrated identity and the factors which mediate the relationship.

CHANGES IN SELF-PERCEPTION AS FRAMED IN LIFE STORIES

The narrative literature on transition tends to concentrate on exploring the effects of often traumatic events on identity (Schultz, 2001). Aspects of the transition into retirement can be experienced as harrowing for some and so an exploration of this literature is relevant to understanding the possible changes in self-perception which can result. The exploration looks at two aspects: how transition is defined in life narrative research and the individual differences which have been found to mediate identity change.

IDENTITY REFORMULATION

Schultz (2001) concludes that a new identity is open to be understood only after the transition has been experienced and then narrated. He studies the transition of Oscar Wilde as related in 'de Profundis' a letter written in prison whilst the playwright was serving a sentence for gross indecency. He lost everything – his wife and children, his wealth, health and reputation but claimed to have undergone a profound conversion experience and to have become a better person spiritually and ethically as a result of his experience.

Wilde's transition is triggered by loss and changes in important relationships are frequently triggers for self – reflective awareness and interpretations of change. In Schultz's view, the possible results are shifts in the meaning, purpose or direction of

a life and can only arise as a consequence of understanding how the self needs to change to accommodate new circumstances.

Schultz cites Clausen (1993) who regards transitions as 'perceptual reinterpretations or reorientations directed at the self' (p. 74) and which require changes in perceived identity. He mentions four types: reformulations of life role, of life perspective, of life goals, or of self. The obvious question for Schultz is 'Why does loss lead to a turning point in some but not in others?' (p.74). He along with other authors suggests a variety of answers.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN IDENTITY REFORMULATION

Schultz (2001) notes that most people justify the course of their life or make up excuses even in the face of difficult or hazardous situations. Some people reject these options and author new identities instead. Three possible reasons are put forward to explain these individual differences in change. People may have too little time for the meta-cognitive activity needed to reinterpret their experience in a profound way which changes their identity. They may have low needs for cognition or sense making activity. Certain contexts may have the effect of heightening the agentic role such that they experience a revival of self-agency in talk and behavior and therefore there is no felt need to author a new identity.

Schultz adds that existing connections and psychosocial support can buffer, soften or even be barriers to experimentation in identity formation. He also speculates that if a person implicates himself or herself as being responsible in some way for a difficult situation, a life lesson may be learned; 'and in those who by dint of intelligence, temperament, imagination, or whatever appear more driven to integrate selfhood in jeopardy, the end result of the 'lesson' might assume the form of a turning point' (Schultz, 2001, p. 75)

Other authors who have found that individual differences impact on narrative identity are De St. Aubin et al. (2006). They examined the role of personal ideologies in narrative identity as defined in the life stories of 8 adults, four of whom were found to share an ideological system described as 'humanist' and four of whom were found to have an ideological system described as 'normative'. Those in the humanist group were found to be active 'selfers'. They had 'introspective tendencies and a dynamic conceptualization of self and the impact of developmental vicissitudes on identity' (De St Aubin et al, 2006, p. 236). The normative group was found not to have put much effort into thinking about or constructing a self. For them their life narrative moved on because time moved on and their contexts changed but not because they perceived things differently or had evolved.

Building on the work of Bowman and Adams (2001) on the redemptive narrative plot mentioned previously, Pals (2006) focuses on the causal connections that people make between the negative experience and a positive impact on self. In her research on narratives of adults' most difficult life events she finds that the healthiest patterns of self-narration allowed a transformed self. 'In the transformed self, when a person first openly acknowledged the negative impact of the difficult life event on the self, this acknowledgement triggered the active analysis of the event that led to resolving it through seeing the self as positively transformed' (page 192). These three steps construct a 'spring board effect'.

Life does not get redeemed in some way, rather the person redeems it him or herself through the narrative interpretation of experience. There are problems with this interpretation of the experience and two of them are commented on by Pals herself. The first is that the effect may be a reflection of growth as a result of narrative and the second is based on the cited work of Carney (2004) who argues that the concept of triumphing over adversity is so prevalent in Western conceptions of mental health that it has become a dominant discourse which prevents a full understanding of how the narration of difficult events could promote mental health. The author herself

concludes, 'The 'spring board effect' is perhaps best thought of as one narrative strategy for creating growth within the life story rather than the only healthy or acceptable way to make sense of negative life experiences'(p.197).

Narrative inquiry is a methodology underpinned by constructionist and social constructionist philosophies. Stories are seen as vehicles for meaning making, in particular, meaning making concerning personal identity. They are influenced by and also influence the contexts in which they are told. Life story analysis which takes into account these contexts including the cultural and interpersonal reveals patterns of change in the way people view themselves.

It remains to be seen whether retirees who participate in this research see fundamental changes in themselves as a result of their retirement and indeed, whether they see retirement as a difficult transition at all. The design of this project will be considered next.

DESIGN

This is an exploratory study of the retirement experience of humanitarian aid workers in a global organization who may have spent a considerable part of their working life in field locations remote from their country of origin, supportive social networks and family. The research was carried out in two parts. Firstly, co-researchers were invited to provide biographical information and to write a story of their retirement transition. I made the decision to work with written stories as retirees are dispersed around the world in different time zones. Asking for a written account and then following up with a telephone conversation arranged at their convenience seemed the best way to compensate for the fact that I would not be able to meet them personally during the research.   I also asked them if they would be prepared for me to contact them once they had sent me their stories so that we could talk about them in more detail.

I included this step in order to be able to follow up on aspects of co-researchers' written stories which had generated queries in my mind as I was reading them. It also gave an opportunity for obtaining a deeper account of the aspects of the stories which the co-researchers considered important. It also felt respectful of my co-researchers who were in some cases able to indicate that my musings in relation to them were not always accurate in their view.

CO-RESEARCHERS

When I began this research, I wanted to include a sample of more than 6 retirees and my aim was to work with 20 or so co-researchers. For reasons which I have come to see as part of the nonlinear, convoluted and sometimes challenging qualitative research process, I was unable to implement my original plan. I knew because of my role in the organization that approximately 20 or so men and women retired from the professional, mobile group in which I was interested each year. When I reviewed data on these people, I saw that approximately half the group had spent substantial (more than half their career) in hardship duty stations. I reasoned that I could expect about half of this group would reply to my invitation to participate in the research based on the response rate of working staff to other surveys. If I could contact 5 men and women who had retired in the last 4 years who were interested in participating, I would have achieved my aim of working with 20 people.

I eventually obtained a list of contact details of retirees but this was more challenging than I had initially imagined as a comprehensive list of them with contact details is not kept in the organization. Discovering this gave me reason to wonder about the approach to retirees and the phenomenon of dealing with endings at an organizational level. The list I eventually received had been compiled for the 60th anniversary celebrations of the organization the previous year and to which retirees had been invited. I wrote to an initial group of 20 retirees planning to deal thoroughly with their replies before writing to the next 20. I did not receive one reply. At this stage I had to re think my research design and approach to co-researchers.

I contacted the 6 co-researchers with whom I initially worked through suggestions from colleagues, other co-researchers or by contacting people I had met, however briefly during my work and whom I knew had retired or were due to. Lars and Ian were referred to me by Dave. I sent them an invitation by e-mail to participate in the research and they all agreed. It felt important to start a relationship with this message so that the rather formal informed consent and provision of information stages of this research were not experienced as contextless, cold or impersonal. A sample of a typical communication is included as Appendix 3. It was therefore by chance that the co-researchers had all retired within the previous 2 years, in spite of my original criterion of 4 years.

An Anonymized table of co-researcher details appears below:

Pseudonym	Age at Retirement	Length of Humanitarian Career	Length of retirement
Dave	60	25	19 months
Ian	60	25	2 years
Flora	62	21	1 year
Luigi	62	23	3 weeks
Charlotte	62	23	2 years
Lars	60	25	18 months

PROCEDURE

If potential co-researchers were happy to learn more about the research, I sent them an information sheet and a link to a biographical questionnaire (to be completed on line) in which they agreed to participate in the research and to participate in a follow up interview with me. The co-researcher information sheet and a copy of the consent form biographical questionnaire appear as Appendix 1 and 2 respectively. This formal invitation was sent by e-mail because most retirees live in dispersed geographical locations around the world. In this communication they received guidance on writing their story which appears below:

Guidance for writing stories

Your story would have the following title: <u>My story of retirement</u>. I will be particularly interested in how you have integrated the different experiences you have had as a humanitarian worker into your life as a retiree and how you view the future and what you are contemplating as you look ahead. In addition, I would like to hear about your relationships in retirement and how these may have been influenced by the kind of relationships you have had during your career.

You are free to write your story exactly as you wish. Start and end your story where you feel it makes most sense to do so, however, it is better to explain a little about your work experiences and how these have helped or hindered your transition into retirement.

Stories are not reports; they will have many elements which make them different from these. They may have a plot, a cast of supporting characters, a context where the story unfolds, what you learned about yourself and others and what your thoughts and feelings were at each stage.

These instructions support the production of a story as the focus in a narrative inquiry (Spector Mersel, 2010) but intend to balance the need for structure with freedom concerning content and are based on the work of McAdams (1993).

Once co-researchers had returned their stories to me by e-mail I printed them out and began my exploration of them. I contacted them, again, by e-mail to arrange a mutually convenient time for the follow on conversation carried out by telephone except with Dave who I was able to meet in person as he was visiting the office where I was located at the time. I arranged this conversation for half of the co-researchers during the month following my review of their stories and in three cases approximately a year after receiving their stories.

In fact the time between receiving the story and carrying out the follow up conversation, was extended in three cases because of a move in my life which brought some of the same transience and uncertainty into it as the co-researchers had experienced in their careers many times. The organization moved the office where I was working to another country and the upheaval involved meant that my research had to be suspended for much of 2015.

In retrospect, I think I developed more empathy with my co-researchers as a result. I was also able to understand the evolution through time of Flora, Charlotte and Dave´s experience. They had achieved things in their lives which spoke of their energy and drive to complete new projects. Flora had begun a business, Charlotte had extended her house and Dave had travelled the world with his wife. He included me as a recipient of his travel blog during this time and I think that this made our eventual follow on conversation more meaningful than it otherwise might have been. This aspect of my research journey provided a balance to any bias I may have been subject to after immersing myself in the literature on retirement which can emphasize retirement as a life stage characterized by loss and decline.

I did, however, contact my co-researchers immediately after receiving their stories by e-mail to thank them and let them know that I would be in touch in order to arrange a follow on conversation. This contact felt like an important link with them which allowed me to hold them in mind whilst reviewing and thinking about their stories and whilst navigating the transition in my own life.

The follow on interviews lasted for between forty minutes to an hour depending on the length of the stories and the willingness of the co-researchers to enter into dialogue with me. Whilst I carried out the interviews, I had my notes on his or her story of retirement in front of me in printed form and was guided in my questioning by them and the questions and queries which had arisen for me during my reading of the story.

STORIES OF RETIREMENT

I received their stories and they varied greatly in terms of length, structure and reflexivity. They were all written using word processing software and attached to a separate accompanying e-mail message via which they were sent to me. It is interesting to note that I did not specify this method of writing or returning the stories to me. The fact that they had all decided to create a separate document in a word processed format indicated to me that they had spent some time reflecting on and crafting their response and also, perhaps years of practice in a professional context. It also indicated that I was located in their minds in the same context.

During my relationship with their authors I came to understand that all of these factors indicated important aspects of their experience and personal style. They varied in length from 8 pages of A4 to under one. Some were immediately recognizable as stories and others less so. Some were deeply personal reflections on a life's work and others were simple descriptions or brief answers to the 3 areas of inquiry of the research.

When seeing such a narrative for the first time, I held in mind the advice of Gubrium and Holstein (2009 p.38) 'In everyday life, most narratives are shorter and far from the sole authored entities that the texts of individual stories would suggest. It is helpful to be prepared to engage with surprisingly abbreviated accounts, convoluted storying, remarkably repetitious narratives and the less than unified commentaries that commonly inhabit this terrain, all of which have good, practical reasons for taking the forms they do'.

SUMMARIES OF FOLLOW ON CONVERSATIONS

I carried out 5 follow on conversations in total as I was unable to contact Ian, although his written story is included as he provided his consent. I wondered if writing his story, the briefest and perhaps most unhappy account, had raised issues such that he did not wish to continue. He was one of two co-researchers whom I never met in person as he had been introduced to me via e-mail by Dave. I followed up with Dave and learned that Ian had continued with his activities much as he described them in his story and that he was basically content. I found this reassuring.

Immediately after the conversations during which I could make detailed notes as they were carried out by telephone, I made a summary of the dialogue in the same way I would prepare a transcript of a therapeutic session before reviewing it with my supervisor. At this moment I felt my training as a counselling psychologist and psychotherapist was most present in the research process. This was true for the way I summarized my co-researchers´ stories, the way in which I listened to them and questioned them and also in the way I subsequently analyzed the summaries. This reflected an attempt at 'connected knowing' where 'emotion is seen as an integral part of the human relationship between knower and known, and being with the co-researcher replaces mere observation' Morrow (2005) I made interpretive notes after completing these summaries to include ideas which emerged during this reflective process.

ETHICAL RESEARCH IN RELATIONSHIP

More than one narrative researcher emphasizes that working ethically requires not just an adherence to ethical codes but a thoughtful consideration of what taking part in research and the presentation of results will mean for co-researchers at every stage of the process (Josselson, 1996, Etherington, 2007). This implies more than 'dutiful ethics', (Adams, 2008) but implies ensuring that ethical codes are followed at the design stage of the research. This section is a summary of my approach to ensuring this research was carried out ethically and the way I negotiated the ethical dilemmas which arose particularly in relation to my position as an inside researcher in the organization with which the retirees were still very much connected on many levels.

I have respected the five principles underlying ethical codes governing research (McLeod, 2010) in the design and implementation of this study. Mcleod, (2010, p.55) identifies 5 principles 'fundamental to social life in modern democracies'. The first is autonomy and refers to the right of every individual to freedom of action and freedom of choice. The second is non-maleficence and refers to the aim of helpers, above all, to do no harm. The third is beneficence, and is concerned with actively promoting human welfare. The fourth is justice which results in a fair distribution of resources and services and the fifth is fidelity, relating to the existence of loyalty, reliability, dependability and action in good faith.

I have also respected the codes of both the Metanoia Institute specifically and those of the organization in which I work and in which co-researchers worked before their retirement. The Research Ethics Guidelines including the statement of ethical approval received from the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee to which I successfully presented my proposal for research is included as Annex 1.
 I obtained informed participation from my co-researchers, and also informed them of the possibility of withdrawing from research at any time before submission. Safeguarding confidentiality during the collection, interpretation and publication was

a priority for me as was ensuring adequate support for co-researchers for whom participation touched upon areas of yet to be worked through thoughts and feelings concerning their retirement. I provided this in conjunction with the staff welfare division of the researched organization. The name and contact details of the organization's welfare counsellors distributed throughout the world were made available to co-researchers so they would be able to receive support in their vicinity from a qualified practitioner in the case of need. These principles were instrumentalized through the information provided to potential co-researchers which is included as Appendix 2.

These measures were important because of the traumatic experiences my co-researchers may have lived through. There was a real risk that my co-co-researchers could be suffering at some level PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and that reflecting on and writing about their experiences might cause re traumatization.

Issues emerged beyond the design stage that had to be negotiated with co-researchers principally during my follow on conversations with them. I always finished each conversation with feelings of relief and gratitude as I had been able to clarify important ethical points in conversation and I felt more connected with them than if I had worked with their written stories alone. I imagine also, that these feelings emerged as it was a way of dealing with some of my own anxiety and guilt concerning potential harm to co-researchers, who although retired, are generally remembered well in a political organization in which they may return to work on specific projects. I am encouraged by Josselson´s words in this regard, 'It is with our anxiety, dread, guilt, and shame that we honour our co-researchers. To do this work we must contain these feelings rather than deny, suppress, or rationalize them. We must at least try to be fully aware of what we are doing'. (1996, p. 70)

During our conversation one of the co-researchers explained a touching and intimate story of how he had managed important aspects of himself during his working life and retirement. He had not felt able to reveal a key aspect of his identity for many years during his working life. (My co-researcher had not included this in his written

account and I did not include it in my transcript of our conversation.) When he had finally done so, the reaction of others had been disappointing. In retrospect, I see that in choosing not to include this aspect of my co-researcher's conversation with me, I was attempting to follow the principle of non-maleficence. On another level, I may have colluded with an organizational culture which had effectively silenced him for most of his career or at least had not provided him with a safe enough context in which to share all aspects of himself.

The commitment to anonymity of the co-researchers is demonstrated by the way in which I have safeguarded by providing them with pseudonyms, deleting references to countries or roles which would allow their identification in the written review of the stories, the transcripts of our conversation and any notes I may have made in my reflective journal, felt important to me. The only place in which co-researchers names are stored is on the consent forms which, although completed on line, have now been downloaded, printed and stored, for one year only, in a locked cabinet. At the end of each follow on conversation, I reminded them of the way in which their stories would be treated, of the possibility of withdrawing from the research, if on reflection they felt compromised in any way and that their identities would be safeguarded.

However, I sensed for the co-researchers themselves, it was perhaps less important. It was evident that they had really crafted their stories some of which extended to over 8 pages of writing. They had signed and dated the documents with the place in which they were at the time of writing. This transmitted a sense of authorship and pride to me and made me feel particularly respectful towards them as people who had dedicated their lives to humanitarian work and who had chosen to share their story with me. I felt particularly protective of them. It was at these times that I had to remember that my research seeks to explore the phenomena of retirement and does not seek to explain the life of a co-researcher.

My aim was to show the respect I felt in the treatment I gave to stories in the analytical and re-presentation stages of this research.   This is explained in more

detail in the following chapter. I also asked a trusted colleague with many years of experience in the organization to review a draft copy of the research report with a view to making sure that co-researcher anonymity had been safe guarded. I also asked her to review the validity of my conclusions based on the findings presented in this report.

I described in the introduction of this report that I was working as a counsellor in the career management section of the organization from which the co-researchers in my research have retired. This means I am associated by co-researchers with an HR (Human Resource) function which, although not involved in the administration of retirement, is involved in the posting decisions in relating to individual staff. I felt that aspects of all stories reflected this dimension of our relationship in some way. They contained suggestions for improvements in HR practices. I often had to bracket my feelings in order not to become defensive and fail to see or hear important aspects of their experience. I often felt that I needed to clarify or justify HR practices, for example. At the same time, I found these parts of their narratives touching in the sense that often they were framed as advice for the retirees of the future and showed a sense of concern and care for others which I know had typified them in their careers as humanitarians. My reflective journal kept from March 2013 until now has helped me be aware of and work through some of these thoughts and feelings so that they do not influence unduly my interpretations and conclusions.

Over time I have come to see the benefits of being an inside researcher which have balanced some of the more challenging aspects. Reviewing my journal now, I can see an entry from August, 2014 which indicates moments of struggle in untangling the role of researcher from my knowledge of co-researchers as an HR specialist.

'As I analyze stories today, it has struck me how hard it is to manage an HR role in parallel with the role of researcher. I have to remember to focus on experience of co-researchers and not on performance evaluations and related reflections.'

I have been obliged to be clear about my assumptions and biases and this has helped me deal with them early on, I believe. I was also able to approach the co-researchers in a way which may have been impossible otherwise. Although 2015 was a year of waiting in research terms, I did have countless conversations with interested colleagues including those who were approaching retirement themselves. Not only have these been rewarding personally, they have also enabled me to develop a wider and more nuanced understanding of how retirement is experienced by others who are not direct co-researchers in this project.

THE ETHICAL REPRESENTATION OF RESULTS

There are two kinds of story in research (Riessman, 2008).One is the co-researcher´s and 'the other is the validity of the analysis or story told by researcher' (p.184). This observation whilst reflecting the epistemology of narrative inquiry and recognizing that research reports reflect, to a great extent, a researcher´s meaning making, also highlights an area of potential ethical tension.

The meaning making process is complex. As mentioned above, the act of narrating creates the occasion for self-regard and editing (Linde 1993). At times, I felt very aware   of the paradoxical operation of my reflexivity on my co-researchers´ stories and that these were, in turn a representation of their reflexive processes. I was aware of the potential for misrepresentation of co-researchers´ beliefs about themselves at all times. The inclusion of a conversation with co-researchers as part of research design reduced this to a certain extent, but could not reduce it completely.

During the interpretive process, I drew conclusions based on my reflection on transference and countertransference reactions to my co-researchers´ stories and conversations. One of my areas of inquiry concerns difficult existential questions

concerning the finality of human life and it was whilst working on this that I most experienced the tension between the informed consent of my co-researchers, my commitment to do no harm and the fact that the conclusions I drew may be unrecognizable to them. I have relied on my supervisor particularly in this regard. I also aimed to maintain the boundaries between therapeutic work and research by holding in mind the aims of the research.

The fact that publication or earlier submission to the academic institution evaluating this research marks a point beyond which co-researchers cannot effectively withdraw consent was also an area of ethical tension for me. Gready (2008) points out that control beyond publication is more difficult to determine for both researcher and researched. Josselson (2016) makes the related point that co-researchers cannot know at the outset what they are giving their consent to. This is a tension which for me remains unresolved. I have committed to provide a summary of this research for distribution within the organization and this will provide another opportunity for considered editing and focus on research aims. But in the case that co-researchers should feel concerned, I take the ethical stance recommended by Josselson, (2016) to remain in relationship with my co-researchers, to make transparent any choices in as sensitive a way as possible and to be prepared to contain whatever responses they may have.

The next chapter explains my treatment and interpretation of co-researchers' stories and presents my findings.

CHAPTER 4: INTERPRETATION OF STORIES AND REPRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter I describe the stages I followed in order to analyze the stories of retirement shared with me by co-researchers and I present the findings distributed by themes relevant to the three areas of inquiry explored in this research on the transition into retirement: finding meaning and identity, relationships with others and existential challenges. The linear description of stages belies my experience that interpretation was an ongoing process which continued throughout my research activities in line with Morrow´s assertion that 'data analysis, interpretation and writing are a continuous and interactive process', (2005). I revisited the stories, conversation transcripts and theme descriptions many times with each rereading informing changes or additional observations at each stage. The stages and their explanation are included here as a framework which seeks to elucidate the source of findings and explain the fit between co-researchers stories, conversations and the interpretive process I carried out.

Narrative Interpretation of Retirement Stories

Figure 1: the stages in the treatment of co-researcher stories

Stage 1: Story analysis for structure, form, content and meanings

Stage 2: Conversation with participants to deepen and check my understanding

Stage 3: Identification of themes in each participant´s story and conversation transcript

Stage 4: Summary of themes by area of enquiry across all participants
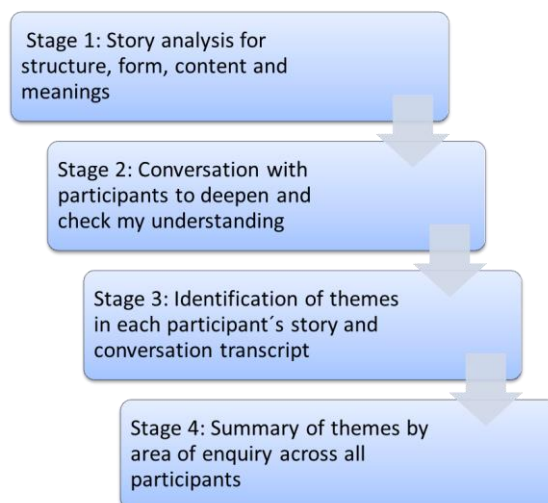
Stage 1

I read each story several times to engage with the writing in general terms and to understand the shape, form, length and writing style of the co-researcher.

I then arranged each narrative into a table an example of which appears below *(table, 1)*. I made initial descriptive comments in the column on the right of the story. Through many re readings, I gradually became familiar with each text and added more interpretative notes and any questions or doubts which emerged during my reading in the far right hand column. I did this to inform the observations I would share with the co-researcher during the next stage of the process.

The process I followed in order to carry out the interpretation reflected the social constructionist and constructivist underpinnings of my research in that I was aware of moving from the internal world of my co-researchers and to the external world across time within their contexts as humanitarian workers. The interpretation of narrative pays attention to both form and content and applies a multidimensional and interdisciplinary lens to analysis (Spector-Mersel 2010). My understanding of narrative analysis informed my use of a variety of lenses. I was aware of themes, structural elements and the evidence of dialogic qualities (Riessman, 2008) in my co-researchers´ stories at any one moment during multiple re readings. My subjective appreciation of this process resembled that of looking through a kaleidoscope and watching a variety of shapes and patterns come into focus in no specific order.

I also held in mind the context of my co-researchers 'stories. They were written at my request in an organizational setting. In doing so, I followed Gubrium and Holstein´s (2009, p.165) recommendation to 'Observe job circumstances surrounding narrative production to identify the work related resources and orientations that shape accounts. ....note how formalized categories are used to certify or authorize descriptions and accounts within and beyond the work setting'. It

became clear when doing this that some co-researchers had assumed a purpose for the sharing of their stories which went beyond my communicated aim of understanding their experience.

As I re-read their stories, I would also pay attention to the experience of my co-researchers as a whole and I did not try to isolate or categorize segments of their stories. (I do, however, number the paragraphs respecting their original choice as writers). As I did this I drew on the universal, tragic heroic and romantic themes which I felt illuminated distinctive features of my co-researchers´ experience in line with the work of McAdams and Bowman, (2001) and Pals, (2006). I also looked at the way co-researchers had conveyed their sense of self through the ways they had chosen to structure their stories as well as what they included in them (Linde, 1993). My subjective appreciation of this process resembled that of moving between the perspectives afforded by a wide angle lens in contrast to that offered by a zoom lens.

It was also at this stage that I began highlighting the text which I thought illustrated specific observations or which had simply stood out in a reading.

Table 1: anonymized extract from a story after interpretive review

Themes	Story	Descriptive summary	Possible Interpretation	Queries
Home country does not feel like home	7. However, ==I was not ready for the massive culture shock I went through upon return==. I started realizing that during my short holidays and even longer-term home leaves, I had	He had stayed with close friends and family during his short stays at home but had never had to deal with people in authority, health service providers…	The use of words likes 'secretly' and 'betrayal' indicates the depth of feeling and the enormous sense of deception and disappointment he feels.	I find it striking that an entire country should feel like an entity with the capacity to

always remained safely in the bubble of my family and close friends. I never had to deal with authorities, health service providers, or public transport outside of the very familiar areas. <mark>When I returned permanently as a retiree, I soon discovered the massive change in public mentality and atmosphere the country had gone through</mark>. I had never before realized these changes were so profound. It felt as if the country had secretly and fundamentally changed while I was away. To be honest, to me it felt like a betrayal.	Until he retired, he had not appreciated the depth of these changes or the 'change in mentality' of those around him. The country had secretly and fundamentally changed whilst he was away. He felt betrayed	They also indicate an implicit agreement with a country that it would stay the same in his absence – an agreement which has been disregarded on one side	betray. What are his feelings now? Does he still feel betrayed? How does he come to terms with this? Does he feel differently about himself as a result?

Stage 2

Once I had completed the initial activities in relation to stage 1, I arranged a follow on conversation with each co-researcher. I was able to do this with all co-researchers except one, Ian. In spite of multiple attempts to contact him, I was unable to do so. I have included his story in my review as he gave his consent for this to happen. Our conversations were informed by the queries and observations I had made on their stories but also by any new themes or ideas which emerged in the moment and

which I thought were relevant to this research. These conversations happened via telephone as most co-researchers were located in different countries and this facilitated the note taking which then supported the drafting of a transcript of our conversation. My background as a counselling psychologist used to producing session transcripts to work on with my supervisor facilitated this. I was alert to the possibility of converting the conversation into a counselling session and instead, focused the conversation on its aim of elucidating what the co-researcher had already shared about their experience in writing.

I arranged the summary transcripts into a table, an example of which appears below (table 2) containing the transcript made from my memory and using my notes of the conversation and a column to make interpretative commentary and other observations on the right hand side. I continued to highlight co-researchers´ words if they struck me as illustrative or meaningful.

This process of reflection of our conversation and my reading of it deepened my understanding of each co-researcher´s story, allowed me to confirm or disconfirm any tentative interpretations made during stage 1 and to make additional interpretations based on my experience of the co-researcher in conversation with him or her. This stage was informed to a greater extent than the others, but not exclusively, by psychoanalytical concepts which I hoped would help me attend to both the co-researcher´s and my own emotional and possibly unconscious subtexts (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

Table 2: anonymized extract of transcript of conversation and notes

P: co-researcher R: researcher	Transcript	Commentary
R18	You also mentioned culture shock. (I quote this section of his story). You were dealing with the uncertainty of not knowing the shape of your financial future, but you were also dealing with the fact that your country did not feel like your own.	
P18	There were a number of issues there. When I was trying to register with authorities, I found people very closed and inflexible. <mark>In XXXX, there was always an admin officer to help. When you retire there is nobody.</mark> Before in X people would have said, we can find a solution. Now that does not happen. <mark>They reacted as if I was someone who had cheated the system</mark>. They also thought this guy was crazy. I could only conclude my country had changed	Strangers appeared closed and inflexible. He remembers government employees as solution oriented but when he retires he is disappointed to find that this is not so. He felt judged by them and this perhaps explains some of the anger and sense of betrayal described in his story.
R19	I sense this was a very difficult part of your retirement transition. I quote 'it had done this transformation behind your back'	
P19	That is how it felt. It was not apparent immediately. <mark>I discovered it and I was taken aback</mark>	This is confirmation of the surprising nature of some of his experience
R20	One of the strategies for surviving a career in constant motion was imagining that there was a permanent and unchanging secure base that	I make this suggestion here but in fact he does not pick it up and rather refers to the organization as a source of

	was always there and could be returned to if needed?	comfort and permanence to support a life in motion
P20	There is a great sense of comfort and this applies to others not just me when moving about a lot that you come to an organization which is familiar. You always meet people you know. This continues into retirement. I´ll give you an example. I was in X and a colleague called to say they were in a workshop and I had dinner with all 21 of them. <mark>Then you realize you were in a society where geography stops existing</mark>	He has a sense of belonging to something greater than a single country. This transcends the boundary between active and retired. Perhaps this is a fundamental shift in identity resulting from his realization concerning his homeland?

Stage 3

The following stage in my work on co-researcher stories consisted in the identification of themes in the narrative for each co-researcher which I initially described in the first column of the story review sheet. (Table 2, above). I then created a theme summary table for each co-researcher, an anonymized extract of which appears below (Table 3). This presents a description of the theme along with the paragraph number from the co-researcher´s narrative in which I see this theme emerging in the left hand column. In the right hand column, I included additional notes on each theme along with the reference point in the conversation transcript or the paragraph number in the story in which I see the theme emerging along with supportive quotes from the transcript if relevant.

I then continued to reflect on themes, refer back to the co-researcher´s story and my review of it as well as to the conversation transcript and commentary and I colour coded the themes according to the 3 areas of inquiry in this research using the key below. This step helped me appreciate the relative importance of each area for each co-researcher and to return to an appreciation of the integrity of their stories and their personhood before moving to the next stage and presentation of results.

Area of inquiry	Colour
Meaning and Identity	
Relationships	
Existential Challenges	

Table 3: anonymized extract from theme summary based on 'Lar´s' story

Theme identified in the story and additional themes emerging in the follow on conversation	Additional observations on themes
'Shock' of returning home In spite of mediating measures being taken 7. 6.	He is glad he returned home but does not feel identified there anymore. He feels that if he has a nationality it is that of a citizen of the world. P11 There was a realization that his country had changed but that he had too. P38
Home country does not feel like home 6, 7. 8.	Part of the feeling of betrayal is explained by a sense of exposure and being at the mercy of others who had power over his life. P19 P38 P39 'I was not ready to accept these massive changes and to come to terms with the huge chasm that has opened between my country and myself' 8. During our conversation I get the sense that he has come to terms with this now. He is glad to have returned to X

The reasons for the shock have not been obvious or directly visible 8.	P. does not like pondering and this may explain the unexpected and surprising nature of much of his inner experience of retirement
Sense of loss of social connections at work 9. This was unexpected 'I have missed the social aspect of working. Even more than I had expected'	The challenges of moving were ameliorated by constantly coming to an organization which was familiar. 'You always meet people you know and this is comforting' There is also a recognition that these relationships are somehow not real they are artificial, built upon the need to suppress anything conflictive in the interest of the organization´s work. P27 Friends at home do not understand the nature of the work and this increases the sense of distance.
Brusqueness of organization´s ending of the relationship with the retiree. 10.	In our conversation he confirms that he felt this was harsh P27

The number of themes emerging from the retirement story and follow on conversation for each co-researcher varied in line with the length of their story. The lowest number of identified themes per co-researcher was 7 and the highest number was 34. The average number of themes identified per co-researcher was 17. It was a conscious decision not to identify further levels of commonality in co-researcher themes, as I felt I would have lost the overall view of each co-researcher's story. By maintaining the level of description illustrated in table 3 and respecting the narrative order of the story, I was able to appreciate the overall form, structure and length of each co-researcher´s story and this facilitated the movement between the wide lens and the zoom lens review described above.

Stage 4

The final stage in my treatment of co-researcher stories was to extract the themes for each area of inquiry from the summary tables and create a single list of themes under the 3 areas of inquiry headings. This enabled me to structure more effectively the representation and description of findings which follows.

DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS

In spite of the emphasis on the identification of themes which appeared in more than one co-researcher´s story in the latter stages of the review process, it is important to note that each co-researcher had unique and personal ways of experiencing them and also of structuring their stories in order to convey to me and to a wider audience what was important for them. I am deeply grateful to each one of them and my intention in this section to do justice to their accounts in my treatment of their stories.

To do this, I take advantage of the flexibility which narrative analysis permits by firstly presenting the findings which emerged from considering the overall structure, tone and style of co-researchers´ stories in order to understand important messages conveyed concerning their experience. I then describe the findings resulting from paying attention to the themes emerging from a closer focus on narrated content.

This pattern is followed for each area of inquiry:

- Meaning and identity in retirement
- Relationships in retirement
- Dealing with existential questions,

and parallels the approach taken to the writing of stories by 4 out of the 6 co-researchers. They take time to share aspects of their entire career journey before beginning to look at specific aspects of their transition into retirement. I refer to the

number of the paragraph in a co-researcher´s story as assigned in the story review table. I also refer to my or the co-researcher´s contribution to the follow on conversation using the role and number assigned in the conversation transcript.

I re-present many extracts of co-researcher´s narrative or their conversations with me in the form of poetic stanzas. This is part of my commitment to taking a caring and relational approach to their stories. I choose text which resonates deeply with me and hope that by doing so I focus on the 'essence of experiences' (Ward, 2011). In making this choice, I am influenced by Wertz (2005) who sees value in the application of a researcher´s uniquely personal thinking to faithfully reflect the psychology of the experiences under investigation. I found that many of the co-researchers' words had poetic and rhythmic qualities which emphasised their message. I am aware that in making the co-researchers' text into poetry in this way, I am shaping their narratives in a way which has meaning for me and which may not reflect what they intended. Another reader may have been impacted differently by their lines.

1. MEANING AND IDENTITY

This section firstly describes my interpretation of the way co-researchers' stories indicated changes in how they saw themselves during the transition into retirement.

Secondly, I explore three themes which emerged as important in how retirees found meaning in transition. They were: the shock of retirement, the role of material possessions and the importance of establishing a place as home.

THE REPRESENTATION OF RETIREES´ CHANGING SENSE OF SELF

The ways in which co-researchers chose to structure and form their stories of retirement overall gave important clues to the way they see themselves as retirees. Often, this was linked in some way to their identities when working full time or reflected their strategies for seeing and managing retirement as part of their overall life journey.

Flora dedicates a large proportion of her story to reviewing each of her career stages describing one assignment after the other. She records her personal perspective on the retirement transitions of others witnessed along the way. She then provides a moving summary of aspects of her own retirement transition where she gives a nuanced account of the strong and often conflicting emotions she experienced. Finally, she returns to the present and describes her current enterprise outside the humanitarian domain. Although Flora finds this exciting she is by no means certain of its success or her future in general. This is an enterprise run in partnership with a close family member and the seeds of its germination had been sown in conversations 'many years ago'. Flora´s relationship to her children, her own mother, as well as colleagues have been key in supporting her during her working life and it is her family who receives her when she returns home and offers her the possibility of involvement in something that 'has helped me a lot because it has kept me busy'.

During our conversation which took place one year after I received her story she recounts that she has re-read her story in preparation in order to reflect and 'see how far she had come'. I am struck by the joy in Flora´s voice as she relates that in spite of the difficulties hers is a career worth repeating. "Even tomorrow, I would do everything the same way…even for free of charge!", she exclaims.

Dave takes a similar approach to the writing of his story. He introduces a phrase after describing each career stage which becomes an almost musical 'leitmotif'

which runs through it and into his experience of retirement. In spite of the different hardships and challenges faced by himself and his family at each stage, he describes each one of his postings and his retirement as 'one of the best assignments I have ever had'. He then asks, "So what are the lessons?" before sharing three which define the approach he has taken to his career, life and retirement:

'First hardship is not measured by whether there is a supermarket, a modern infrastructure, running water or electricity…

Hardship is less tangible…

Hardship is an attitude.'

'Second, luck does not just happen; we all create the conditions for allowing it to happen…

'Third, the world is a different place since I was born…

My generation needed to adapt to the new reality'

Luigi, although his story is significantly shorter than either Flora or Dave´s, also makes the choice of reviewing his career to elaborate on a central life lesson. During his challenging career of constant mobility in deep field duty stations, he notices how cultural prejudices faded away and that this made him feel more effective as a person. The skills he has acquired equip him for retirement. He has acquired a feeling of being a citizen of the world and this balances, perhaps, the contrary feeling of not being at home anywhere.

'As a citizen of the world, it is wonderful to be able to make use of my human experience to feel at ease and accepted'

The future is still unclear for all these retirees but their stories illustrate different ways of achieving the same aim: a degree of continuity in their sense of themselves which spans their working life and supports them as they negotiate the transition into retirement. For Flora this is achieved by counting on her family for support and recognition over time, for Luigi and Dave coherence is achieved by seeing the vicissitudes of a humanitarian life as an opportunity to learn about themselves in ways that facilitate the transition into retirement and these reflect, I think, a change in life perspective.

More than a change in life perspective, a fundamental shift in identity was evident in Lar´s story. He does not relate the trajectory of his career but focuses on key, challenging events during the transition which result in a fundamental shift in relationship to his home country and, eventually, in the way which he views himself.

When he returned home he experienced a 'massive culture shock' for which he felt completely unprepared.

'It felt as if the country had secretly and fundamentally changed while I was away.

To be honest,

to me it felt like a betrayal.

Simply put:

the country did not feel like my country anymore.

Often,

it feels as if it still doesn't.'

He was not ready to accept these massive changes and to come to terms with the 'huge chasm' that had opened up between his country and himself. Lars sent me his story 18 months after retiring and during our follow on conversation a few weeks later he confirmed that he didn´t feel identified with his country anymore. He mentioned that he spent his year in one of 2 countries one of which was his home

country, mirroring perhaps the mobility of his working life. He then related a practice he had at work before describing a fundamental shift in the way he saw himself:

I used to count the number of nationalities in a meeting and I would marvel at the number.

For 25 years I have really enjoyed this.

If I have a nationality it is the XX.

That is what it feels like.

I don´t want it to sound full of pathos or anything…

'Then you realize you were in a society where geography stops existing'.

<mark>He had a sense of belonging to something greater than a single country</mark> and this transcended the boundary between his working and retired self. It was also as if the chasm he encountered between himself and his country had been spanned by a fundamental shift in the way he thought of himself.

One co-researcher, Ian, wrote a curtailed and structured account of retirement which focused on briefly answering the 3 topics suggested in my 'guidance for writing stories'. He appeared to be still formulating his role in retirement and a sense of ambivalence about the past and the future pervades his narrative. He does not want to return to the past but the present and the future do not appear that attractive either.

'I am fairly content in the day to day of life now

Though,

I would prefer some sort of appropriate challenge other than those I find on the golf course.

I play with the idea of writing,

But,

Have been unable until now to muster the necessary focus and energy…

Currently, I am considering an offer (of a consultancy) in East Africa,

But,

Am not really enthusiastic about returning to that part of the world.'

I got a real sense of an inability to mobilize personal energy to enable him to realize some of the ideas for himself which he was toying with. I was unable to have a follow up conversation with him in spite of several attempts at making contact and so I was not able to verify my reflections on his story.

His short, report like account reflected the style of writing demanded in his professional life but this was the only link between his past and present detectable in his story. He did not see any connection between his current life and his previous work experience. 'My work experience has had little direct impact on my post- XXX life, after my retirement, other than leaving me with skills that are not easily translatable to the interesting work opportunities of where I live.'

In spite of seeing little relevance in his skill set in retirement, he goes on to mention that he enjoyed field operations and emergencies and that he thought he was good at them because of his ability to adapt and attune to different situations. In retirement the demands of an emergency scenario are absent and I think at some level he misses them deeply. It is as if real life experience pales in comparison, especially the real life experience of retirement.

Charlotte was happy to be free of some of the burdens of working life and she did not miss them. When I contacted her a year after reading her story, she declared that 'retirement gets better and better'. The thread of social activism is visible in her story of retirement and in her working life. It is visible in her appreciation of the values that led her to return to her home country where she sees these as still prevalent, although under threat:

'For me it was always clear though – XXX is home

(although the current budget is making me question some of the values I had thought we all hold so dear;

all our commitment to social justice, equity and universal access to quality healthcare and education).'

It is also visible in her description of her career as a 'social worker with refugees'.

In our follow on conversation, she mentions that in spite of struggling with how to have an impact without an official capacity to represent refugees, she does what she can and works through a professional association. I sense she is strongly identified with her working identity and still sees herself as responsible for taking action on behalf of refugees.

For Charlotte retirement has been an opportunity to continue with a cherished activity as well as take on other, newer ones. I feel she is facing the challenges of retirement with the same stoicism she used to endure the challenges of her career. These are glimpsed in her description of the traumatic events she has witnessed in refugee lives. She does not, however, discuss their impact on her.

These stories of retirement when viewed in their entirety allow a glimpse into the degree of personal transformation experienced during the transition, as well as its direction.

The next section in this chapter describes how specific aspects of the retirees´ experience illustrated their attempts at meaning making as well as some of the aspects which facilitated, hindered or appeared to block the process.

HOW RETIREES FIND MEANING IN TRANSITION

The Shock of Retirement

For two co-researchers retirement was experienced as a shock or as a surprising event and in both cases this was in spite of conscious awareness of its approach and in one case a determined resolve to be prepared and not to make the errors witnessed in a colleague´s management of their own transitions. The irony of this aspect of both of their stories was notable.

Lars had an intellectual understanding of retirement; nevertheless, it appeared to remain outside of his full awareness, crowded out perhaps by the exigencies of daily work:

'Of course, theoretically I knew I would also retire someday,

But

Retirement had remained a vague mirage in the far distance,

Too far away and undefined,

To waste much reflection on'

During his working years, it had seemed to Lars that retirement was something that happened to other people. The jarring reality check came with his attendance at the 5 day pre-retirement seminar offered to all employees during the last 5 years of employment. This workshop 'broke the spell' for Lars and it focused his attention on the need to prepare. With the perspective that 18 months of retirement offers, he sees that the range of issues the seminar covered was limited and that there were issues with which he had to deal of far greater importance that the ones dealt with by the seminar. It did not save him struggles with the tax regime in his home country or the issue of culture shock described in the previous section, for example.

Flora relates memorable and sad stories of colleagues´ retirements. She explains the case of a senior colleague asking for an extra 6 months of employment because she had not had time to prepare and had lost contact with family and friends in her country of origin. Flora wondered about this as a justification and whether the same privilege would have been extended to all colleagues regardless of rank. The 6 months passed very quickly and did not seem to have served any real purpose in preparing the colleague for her retirement. She describes a personal another poignant experience:

'When a retiring representative

refused to leave office,

refused to surrender the office vehicle and

refused to vacate the organization's residence'

Flora was deeply affected by witnessing at close hand the eventual, undignified departure into retirement of this colleague. She resolves to make sure that this experience did not become her own. In her story the strength of this resolve is marked by her use of bold letters and underlining:

'Although I still had a few years to my retirement,

I told myself

I would be ready both emotionally and psychologically

when my time came.'

A good friend who has already retired gives her some advice and she, too, attends the retirement workshop. At this time she notes that she feels energetic and is

surprised by this. For some reason she had assumed over the years that by the time she retired she would feel old and tired and ready to leave. She also observes that:

'Working directly with refugees had been my dream

And I felt so fulfilled that deep in my conscious,

I didn´t even imagine

That I was nearing retirement'

So like Lars, she is aware and unaware at the same time of the approach of her own separation from the organization. For Lars the event shimmered like a distant mirage, for Flora it remained deep in her unconscious. The full realization surfaced disconcertingly on the day she received the formal communication from the organization.

'When I received my retirement administrative instructions, I almost went into shock!

I could not explain or understand why I felt this way because I had been ready…

I could not understand the feeling of overwhelming emotion.

At the same time I was elated.

(difficult to connect the two feelings)'

The stories of Flora and Lars highlight the paradoxical tensions they both negotiated as their retirements approached; the paradox of knowing that the event is imminent and being taken by surprise by the feelings which eventually surface and particularly in Flora´s story, the paradox of feeling elation and, possibly, deep sorrow at the same time.

The Role of the 'Material Convoy'

The role of material possessions was appreciable in all the co-researcher´s stories with the exceptions of Luigi and Ian. They all engaged with the belongings accumulated during a career of global mobility in one way or another.

Flora rearranges her room one more time whilst dealing with the pain of realizing that many friends have moved on without her.

Dave, who in spite of hearing in the pre-retirement workshop that the sorting of photos would be not enough to fill time, had found it satisfying:

'I remember at the retirement seminar, one of the speakers saying that you cannot fill your time sorting out all of your photographs.

Ironically, that is what I have enjoyed doing and still have a number of major projects in that regard.'

Lars explains during our conversation that he finds joy in sorting out affairs and lives it as a liberating activity which helps in getting ready for the next phase of life.

'With our organization you end up with unfinished business in many places.

It´s enjoyable tying up loose ends.

It´s sort of editing your life.

You sell things.

You have to and it frees you up for other things.

I do it with great joy.'

Charlotte describes the sorting of the accumulation of 23 years of postings held in three storage units from around the world.

'For now, its opening box after box and discovering forgotten items that bring back a host of memories.

All of us who have worked in this organization have worked on the 'big issues' and the often intractable problems of the marginalized poor…

Yet each of us has experienced the joys of different postings – the food, the culture, the music, the colleagues, the successes

and it is the forgotten items that bring these memories flooding back.'

As I read Charlotte´s words, I picture her slowly going through her boxes of possessions handling each one in turn and imagining the story it has to tell of her life and work. She, like Lars and Dave, finds the experience pleasurable. It is as if she comes to appreciate the richness and complexity in herself as she holds and re lives the associations she has with her exotic and varied possessions. Charlotte ends the description quoted above with the reflection:

'Yes, working with 'this organization' has been rewarding'

The sorting of material possessions by retirees was just one activity where the accompanying thoughts and reflections might be seen to shape and populate their final perspective on their careers and by extension, themselves.

Another was making the decision of where to live in retirement. This process will be considered next as it was reflected in retirees´ stories and our subsequent conversations.

'There´s no place like home' – but where is it?

In the narrative of all co-researchers with the exception of Ian, their decision making concerning where to live in retirement was visible in one form or another. For Charlotte the decision had always been clear she returned home to a country where she saw her values expressed in political and social structures and also because it was where she was born and it was where her friends and children lived. It was Flora´s family who welcomed her home and involved her in a business project almost immediately.

If retirees chose to make their decision making part of their narrative, it could be appreciated that as they were evaluating what was important for them in the location of their homes, they were also to a certain extent reformulating who they would be in retirement.

For both Dave and Lars, a life time of mobility was not so easily forgotten. Dave notes that wondering where to call home is part of the demanding and stressful nature of a humanitarian career:

'Constantly buying and selling possessions,

wondering where one should call home,

bringing up third culture kids who certainly don't know where home is,

all have an impact on one's life and that of one's family.'

It is also for him a part of retirement. At the time of writing his story he is planning a 10 month trip around the world to discover new places and in part to make a decision on where to live.

' we still don´t know where we will settle in the long term and whilst this could be unsettling, I realise that as long as I can travel to see new places and see my children any of the options would be fine'

During our conversation which took place after his trip, he mentions that he is aiming to stay in one country for 6 months and then to travel again. He notes that travel is

high on the agenda for him and his wife in retirement and that they are still deciding where to settle more permanently. That decision would be influenced in part in which place they would both be able to make friends more easily.

Lars was also spending half his year in the northern hemisphere and half in the southern hemisphere, and when we spoke, was visiting a third country. The original decision to return to his home country had been influenced by the need to take a share in the care of an elderly relative, a role siblings had undertaken until then.

Mobile lives were the norm for this small group of retirees for different reasons but for Luigi making a final decision on the shape of his retirement was more complex. He had taken up a new assignment directly upon retiring with another humanitarian agency.

When I asked Luigi where he thought his home was after reading that he had worked in over 20 different places, he replied:

'I am still asking myself this question.

Once a friend of mine said, 'my home is where I would like to die'.

I´ve not decided yet where to die'

He laughed as he answered. But I wondered if it was possible that on some level he equated the immobility of staying in one place with a more final immobility. He went on to say that he would like to consider multiple places as home, the island where he was born, the place where his children were living and the third place in which his partner was living (all different countries). He had not been ready to make a plan for retirement as suggested in the retirement seminar and he had chosen instead to add a fourth country to his current construction of home, again in a deep field duty station on the African continent.

'I was scared of losing a lot by giving up my job and

That is why

I decided to carry on'

Luigi was still in the process of deciding the trajectory of his own retirement mobility and this is possibly explained by the fact that, firstly, he had not taken a break from working upon his retirement and secondly, by the fact that out of the 6 retirees, he was the one to have retired most recently; just a month before our conversation. When I asked him if he agreed with his friend´s definition of home cited earlier, he replied,

'Well, you would like to die

where you have around people

who can provide some comfort to you'

So, for him relationships with others were central to his reflections on the way he would live out the rest of his retirement years. The importance of relationships in retirement will be considered next.

This section will follow the structure of the previous one in that the findings on the retirement experience which emerge from the relational aspects detected in the overall shape and form of stories will be considered first. I then describe the findings resulting from paying attention to the relationship themes emerging from a closer focus on narrated content.

2. RELATIONSHIPS IN RETIREMENT

This section reviews my findings firstly on the relationship of retirees to others and themselves through assumed, shared cultural forms of narrative. I then describe my findings concerning the ways in which relationships change during the transition:

- How social networks erode over time
- The challenges of establishing new relationships
- The loss of relationships with working colleagues

Thirdly, my findings concerning co-researchers' relationship with the organization as a whole are described. Three themes emerged as important:

- The expectation of recognition
- The process of leaving and its challenges
- The relationship with the organization after retirement

I also describe a fourth theme at the end of the section and that is the place of retirement seminars provided by the organization in the co-researchers' experience.

RETIREES' RELATIONSHIP TO THE CULTURAL 'OTHER'

Narrative methodology discussed in the previous chapter, implies paying attention to the context of stories, 'stories don´t fall from the sky…they are composed and received in contexts' (Riessman, 2008, p.105). Stories position the teller in relationship with the groups in which they find themselves. 'Our culture´s grand stories teach us what a worthy life is, what we should aspire to and what we should avoid, what is good and what is evil, what is forbidden and what is permitted' (Spector Mersel, 2010). The contribution of the cultural other cannot be seen directly but it can be identified in the way narrative is directed toward it.

This section reviews the findings emerging when this lens is applied to the co-researchers' stories. An understanding of co-researchers' relationships in retirement with the organization and with wider cultural expectations becomes possible.

Complexity, ambivalence and uncertainty are discernible in all my co-researchers' stories but so are culturally defined ways of seeing the self.

In modern autobiography identity is crafted by realizing the only authentic mode of being possible for a person. However earlier work focused on the heroic individual

embodying the values of a given culture, against the world (Linde, 1993 p.102). In this section I explore the personal myths of this group of humanitarians.

The hero´s journey

In Dave, Charlotte´s and Flora´s stories there is evidence of a hero´s journey (Campbell, 2008) being undertaken, each author has his or her own characteristics, aim and pathway in undertaking this journey and each has an organizationally situated reader (me) in mind during writing.

Dave´s relatively brief mention of the hardships of a humanitarian career, and his clarity concerning personal agency and independence in work and retirement are indications of the shape of the personal myth adopted and also crafted in his story.

I also feel that he is offering wise counsel to me as a younger professional from the same functional area in the organization. I find this a touching testimony to the generosity and willingness to help others which typify humanitarians as well as a practical demonstration of Erikson´s (1998) achievement of generativity as a successful outcome for life stage development as discussed in Chapter 1 in this report.

Charlotte´s story was a piece of writing which she shared with me for inclusion in this research which was actually not written exclusively for it. She wrote of her experiences for inclusion in a magazine for retired humanitarian professionals and there are many indications that she is finding her place within that organization, just as she is finding her place in retirement and her new community more generally. She discusses reaching out to a new neighbour to thank her for helping her when she found herself in difficulty. She does this by explaining that she is arrived from a country where suspicion of neighbours is still the norm.

Charlotte gives a moving account of moving into her new home, and mentions almost in passing some of the challenging refugee circumstances she has witnessed before

finishing her account with the resounding, 'Yes, working with 'the organization' has been rewarding'. So, although the theme of Charlotte´s story is of communion both with the people around her now and the colleagues and beneficiaries of her work as a humanitarian, the personal myth can still be described as an individual who embodies humanitarian values vanquishing the undeniable challenges encountered along the way.

Flora´s story also establishes communion with others as a central theme. She is very much focused on the experience of retirement throughout her career and is open and generous in her description of her feelings at each stage of her own retirement from the organization. Often, in her account I feel her concern for others who may have to face some of the same retirement and work related challenges she has encountered. I am aware of the expectation of me to bear witness as a fellow professional in these accounts. I am also deeply touched by the account of her feelings of embarrassment on her final plane journey home at having wanted to receive recognition of her work and retirement from a senior figure in the organization.

 I wonder if these feelings are part of the humanitarian altruistic frame where it seems that feelings of guilt and shame accompany the recognition of a desire for something for one´s self. So although Flora´s story emphasises communion with others and family, there are still elements in her story where she is a heroine rising above and eventually overcoming the challenges she faces. In her account she is clear on the value she sees in her journey but also with the humility which is, again, perhaps part of society´s expectation for humanitarians:

> *'Serving XXXX from deep locations goes beyond the call of duty*
>
> *and it is a rewarding experience,*
>
> *and I could do it all over again even without accolades and recognition'.*

For all three the adoption of this mythic pattern may deny the possibility of including personal vulnerability in their narratives and may also fit with a cultural expectation of self-sacrifice and denial which may typify the way humanitarians are seen and see

each other. It may also be the case that in adopting this pattern they are aligning themselves with a mythical form which has provided a vehicle for humanity's meaning making across centuries (Campbell, 2008). By doing so, Dave, Charlotte and Flora are rejecting the pathologizing discourse (Thomas, 2008) associated with humanitarians and mentioned in Chapter 2.

They may also be authoring contemporary mythical patterns which reflect and at the same time create modern inclusive, cultural norms. It is interesting to note that Charlotte and Flora are both women. Campbell (1990) was once questioned by a fellow female researcher about women's role in the hero monomyth. Campbell replied, "The woman's the mother of the hero; she's the goal of the hero's achieving; she's the protectress of the hero" (Campbell, 1990, p.109) He was evasive when the female colleague declared that she would like to embark on a hero's journey herself. In 2017 women are embarking on heroes' journeys of their own, perhaps crafting a more inclusive monomyth appropriate for the 21st century characterized by the increasing pace of globalization. As Campbell himself observes, 'It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse', (2008, pp337). Charlotte's and Flora's stories could be understood to be part of an evolving, contemporary mythology guiding humanity in a way which Campbell would have appreciated fully.

The realization of a life lesson

Both Lars and Luigi´s stories are structured around the acquisition of life learning. In Lar´s case this occurs after a profound realization of a 'chasm' between himself and the others around him in his country of birth and indicates personal transformation. For Luigi, his career has been the opportunity to acquire learning which has enabled him to grow as a human being.

'What I learned in professional terms was impressive

but certainly less enriching than the way I grew as a human being.

My initial cultural prejudices vis-à-vis people from different cultural backgrounds

gradually faded away.

It was a long process but eventually successful.'

In our conversation Luigi is not certain that he would have taken the humanitarian career path if he could repeat his working life again. Lars reflects that he would undertake the same career again but he would have managed things differently by starting with the end in mind. He also adds in our conversation that 'I would have liked to have had a partner who would have pulled me back and obliged me to think of these things.'

Personal agency is a theme in both of their stories and their self-actualization as a personal achievement is also evident in both their accounts but reached in very different ways. I find myself wondering again about this story form and the way in which both Luigi and Lars may have suppressed accounts of concern with relationships and connection with others as it may not be equated with personal development and maturity. Is it possible that although the cultural expectations for humanitarians are less evident in their accounts, the expectations for agentic adults are?

Relationship themes were evident in all 6 stories of retirement and these will be outlined next:

THE CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS DURING RETIREMENT

In this section three themes are explained. The first related to the way social networks become smaller over the span of a humanitarian career, the second related to the challenge in building relationships in retirement and the third explores the loss of connection with colleagues as a result of retirement.

The erosion of social networks over time

The mobility of a humanitarian career and its effects on social networks was acknowledged in all stories. The [3]'home leave entitlement' had not been able to prevent this. Five out of 6 retirees noted that over the years, their social networks were reduced or had disappeared completely. Lars describes the poignancy of being seen off at the airport by an ever decreasing number of friends:

'When I went on my first assignment 20 friends waved me off.

Over 20 years this group becomes smaller and smaller.

I have got back in touch

but the contact is dinner once a year

and you quickly go through the children, parents and health issues.

It becomes formulaic'

Four other retirees describe a pivotal moment when they make a similar discovery:

'When you stay abroad so long you lose your social network.

Your network is gone

when you go home

there is a void in terms of human life.'

Luigi

---

[3] An extended holiday period every 2 years where the organization pays a trip for an employee and their family to their home country

******

'I would write a family letter to an ever decreasing number of friends'

Dave

*****

'It was disheartening to realize that with the long journey of my career with XXX away from home,

I had literally lost all my friends…

In most cases and despite my efforts, I realized that most of them had moved on.

I was overwhelmed with sadness and loneliness for a while'

Flora

*****

'It can be difficult

I also have to spend the time reconnecting with people I have not seen for 40 years

and no one knows what has happened to them'

Charlotte

Intimate relationships and family relationships are also shaped by the years of separation. In our conversation, Lars agreed that a life of constant mobility underpinned the fact that he was single for most of his career. Both Flora and Luigi were separated from their spouses but neither held their career or lifestyle responsible for this.

During our conversation Luigi remembered ruefully a letter written by his son who was living with his mother at the time explaining that he thought his father had left him because of work.

'that was a psychological blow to me and

I did not want to think that was happening to my children.

I still have that letter from my son.'

Dave had lived with his family and children for most of his career but he notes that the most difficult moments were when his family were unhappy. He and his wife, also working in a humanitarian organization have endured in 32 years, 7 years of living separate lives in separate households. They also both went on long missions on many occasions, the children sometimes staying with him and sometimes with her. He recalls:

'I know that she resented this (both the separation and being a 'follower')

although our marriage has been able to endure,

which is more than is the case with many colleagues'

When the retirees leave the organization, they need to build networks of friends again. This can be a testing task for a variety of reasons. This aspect of relationships in retirement will be described next.

The challenges of establishing new relationships

Independently of whether retirees chose to return home in their retirement (Charlotte, Flora, Lars, Ian) or to a different country (Dave, Luigi), they all described the difficulties of making friends in retirement.

For Luigi, the levels of energy he felt were needed did not feel so available to him:

'When you are 64, 65 you don't have the same energy for human relations as when you are younger.

It's scary'.

Dave was facing the challenges of living in a country for large amounts of the year between voyages where he did not speak the local language with any degree of fluency unlike his wife. He felt this keenly and longed to be able to strike up

spontaneous conversations with shop keepers, for example. In general, although visiting friends from the working context distributed around the world was rewarding, making new friends in a new location was a different matter.

'As for friends, one has to really work hard at that.

Given our transitory nature,

one does not easily make friends in new locations.' (Dave)

When making new friends 3 retirees recognized that finding others with a similar background and working experience increases the likelihood of success. It is another way in which aspects of a mobile, global career seem to permeate the retirement experience.

*'Looking back over the last 2 years I would say that I have started to focus on people with similar international experience. This creates a bond because connecting with someone who has never moved is hard'. (*Lars)

****

'*I am in a neighbourhood where there is a high proportion of retirees who are former diplomats and who have international experience and so I feel I have a lot in common with them. I also find it easier to integrate because we have a language in common'.* (Charlotte)

****

 '*The people you can connect with are either people your age or people who are at your level socially… it is (often) people who have worked with the 'same organization' and so we have a common understanding.'* (Flora)

****

It appears that for this small group of retirees, embarking on a humanitarian career not only conditions relationships whilst working but on into retirement. This suggests, perhaps, that the relationships forged during a humanitarian career are not easily replaced. The impact of the loss of these relationships will be considered next.

The loss of relationships with working colleagues

A touching sense of loss is evident in the accounts of some retirees as they wrote or talked about their relationships with colleagues forged, as they often had been during the trials of working in tough field locations.

In Luigi´s words, the strength of these ties is evident even if its elements are hard to articulate:

'They went through the same experiences I did.

I have with them a solid affinity

which is difficult to define'.

For Luigi also, it was these relationships which had helped him see his work more positively and pay less attention to the negative aspects of it.

Dave, during our conversation, recognizes closeness with the people he and his wife met in 'those difficult duty stations'

Having read these accounts it is easier to understand the sense of loss experienced by both Ian and Lars.

'While I have many friends from working at XXXX and prior,

they are spread out all around the world.

We keep in touch via email,

but it is less satisfying than direct, regular contact'. (Ian)

*****

'I have missed the social aspect of working.

Even more than I had expected.

It does not detract from our serious mandate

if I say that the office (certainly in the field) also functions

as a social club.' (Lars)

During our conversation, Lars elaborated on his understanding of these relationships and in doing so makes a fascinating observation on the nature of the social glue which holds a diverse, global organization together in the service of its mandate or primary task. At the same time, he makes an observation on what close friendships mean to him.

'I need to qualify friendships.

There is a world wide web.

You have shared experiences and strong experiences

and these create a bond.

This does not mean you are close friends.'

He explains why he does not see the friendships as close. For him, this would mean a relationship which is characterized by a degree of sharing or authenticity not possible in the organizational context.

'Many divisive issues are simply not discussed,

it is simply not done.

It is thanks to this

that the family concept can exist and

it is totally artificial at the same time.'

Charlotte had perhaps reached a nuanced understanding of her relationships with colleagues which balanced the positive with the more difficult. She had found a retirement context in which she felt comfortable and had begun to make new friends

with similar interests and backgrounds and it is possible that she was not feeling the loss of working relationship so keenly. Her perspective is therefore, like Lars´s, less nostalgic.

'I am so happy

that I no longer have to deal with people that

I don't like

or whose views I just do not share.

This is one of the luxuries of retirement which

I am just coming to appreciate fully'

THE ORGANIZATION AS A RELATIONAL ENTITY

The organization was prevalent in the stories of retirees mainly as a provider of qualities in the form of expectations which had or had not been met. These were described in their stories as emerging at two junctures, before leaving the organization when their retirement was imminent and after retirement.

The expectation of recognition

Two co-researchers addressed the issue of recognition in their retirement stories. The first shared a moving story of recognition by colleagues in the field at the office from which she retired.

'They made me feel important and useful,

and organized a farewell party

that I will cherish and remember for years to come.'

She did not experience the same feeling of importance or the satisfaction of being recognized at the end of her career from Headquarters or a senior figure in the organization. This was clearly distressing:

'There is no greater sense of pride than to be equally acknowledged upon retirement,

whether one is a Driver or senior manager.

It was therefore much more painful to realize

that even the representation office …

was equally unconcerned'

The person for whom a more general set of expectations had been met completely was Dave. It is worth quoting him at length as he is so clear as why he feels this is the case.

'Many staff at the end of their career has been heard to say that the 'organization' has treated them badly and owes them recognition for what they have contributed. This is aggravated if they have had periods as a [4]SIBA, particularly at the end of their career.

This attitude is nonsense.

XXX gives us interesting work, pays us well, flies us, often with our families, at their expense to exotic locations, educates our children, pays us to go home every few years, gives us more vacation days most people get, introduces us to very interesting people and situations and ensures we get a lot of frequent flier miles.

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[4] SIBA is an acronym for staff in between assignment and refers to staff who are unassigned and therefore inactive

The XXX and XXX owes us nothing'

A relationship with the organization potentially bestows status which is, therefore, lost at retirement, but only two co-researchers mentioned this and both did so indirectly. In our conversation Charlotte observed that she knew of colleagues who had retired and were missing the trappings that a high rank in the organization had conferred   Lars mentioned in passing that in the field there were administrative specialists to help with the practicalities of settling into a country. At home, there was no one to help with these formalities.

'In XXX, there was always an admin officer to help.

When you retire there is nobody.'

The process of leaving

Three retirees (Luigi, Lars, Flora) related that they had continued to work until their last day with the same intensity and at the same pace as throughout their career. The reasons for this as they appear in one of their accounts appear multi-layered and complex. The interplay of personal, organizational and collegial expectations is evident.

Lars uses a graphic metaphor to describe the sensation invoked by the move into retirement.

'I continued with full working days until the end of my final day.

In retrospect, that was not healthy.

It felt like running a car in fifth gear and then suddenly reverting to first.'

The intimate and detailed account which Flora provides of her last days in her office provide some explanation of why taking a gradual approach is so difficult.

'As I progressively approached my departure, I had to make concerted effort to start disengaging from XXX.

This was easier said than done because on the contrary, people wanted me to complete this or that,

pick my brain on this and that and

my days were getting shorter and shorter

and it took a lot of self-control not to go into depression.'

It was as if colleagues and herself were becoming more aware of an ending and a mutual act of denial obliged an intensifying of activity to reduce the associated anxiety. As Flora herself notices:

'Maybe the opposite of this was that it kept me so busy I had no time for emotions'.

Emotions did surface, however but alone in private, once the business of the day had ceased to impinge.

'I kept reminding myself that nobody was indispensable,

that I would be replaced and life would go on.

It was in the privacy of my room when I got home that I allowed my emotions to overwhelm me'.

I wonder what it would have been like for Flora to have felt like she could have shared some of these feelings with colleagues and more importantly what it would have been like to have them acknowledged in a way which did not invoke shame or embarrassment.

Further clues as to the way in which those not retiring can recognize in a constructive way some of the vulnerabilities inherent in a person approaching retirement is provided by Luigi:

'People do not mind working.

We just need to pay attention to the vulnerability at this age.

I was 60 when I was sent to X.(deep field)

Try to give them positions which might suit them better.'

After retirement

Even after retirement the way the relationship with the organization is managed can have an important impact on retiree experience. Two related events occurring immediately following retirement illustrated this.

'It was a complete shock when,

two weeks into my retirement, when there were still tons of things to organize and to arrange,

I found myself unceremoniously thrown out of 'the e-mail system'.

That was mean and it has complicated things unnecessarily' (Lars)

For two or three days after her retirement Flora still received e-mails from staff following up on issues "as a last favour". The impact on Flora of this was clear:

'This gave me false feeling of still being a XXX staff, and it took a while

and only when the emails and other requests started to dwindle

and finally stopped,

including the Refugee Newsletter to which I had subscribed to as a Former Staff Member

did the change sink in'

Both Flora and Lars would like to stay informed of organizational news more than they were able to. Flora finds it cruel that the only news that she does receive are the obituary notes, and Lars would like to receive updates of reassignments. He points out that many former employees remain active in the field of humanitarian work and he often has to bother friends in the office to tell him where a particular person is or who is the representative in a certain country.

The retirement seminars

All co-researchers with the exception of Ian mentioned the retirement seminars provided by the organization if only in passing. They appear to have become a well-established feature of the retirement experience in XXX and, on the whole, I think they were appreciated by co-researchers.

They featured more prominently in the retirement stories of Lars and Flora. For Lars they were time well spent but with the hindsight of 18 months of retirement he can see that they were not sufficient.

'The days I attended the Retirement Seminar were days well spent but, in retrospect, I can now see how limited the range of issues were that it covered.'

Flora found that;

'It was a good opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas, our fears and expectations among staff that were going through the same situation'

Although later she notes that even with the preparation of the workshop, she was getting progressively anxious about what the future held.

Charlotte recounts that at the retirement seminar she attended,

'Many of my colleagues in XXX discussed their retirement plans, which they had thought out thoroughly.

They knew the tax-free or minimum tax benefits of residence in certain countries and the comforts of staying on in A or B.'

Her words too hint at the possibility that the content of the workshops might be expanded to generate other outcomes for co-researchers other than expertise in comparative tax regimes.

Taxes are one of the things that Benjamin Franklin is said to have claimed as a certainty in life along with death. In the next section the question of how existential questions are considered by humanitarians in their stories of retirement will be considered. Following the pattern in the previous sections, firstly overall shape and form of stories will be considered. I then describe the findings emerging from a closer focus on narrated content.

3. DEALING WITH EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS

Co-researchers in this research were asked to say how they were viewing the future and what they were contemplating as they looked ahead. It is not, therefore, surprising that no one equated, like King Lear quoted in Chapter 2, an ending of their professional activities with the onset of decline culminating in death! In fact the opposite was true for this group of men and women.

Shakespeare is not the only playwright or author to have painted this picture of later life as a variety of narrative scholars point out. The negative meanings of old age in Western key-plots can be seen to 'limit the possibilities open to the elderly and cast a shadow over their self- images' (Spector Mersel, 2010). Levinson´s (1979) influential *Seasons of a Man´s Life* is summarized by Goodson and Sikes (2001) as a study of how men seek to articulate a central dream until mid-life which 'is the beginning of a period of decline and deterioration culminating in death' (p.76). The same authors recognize that these scripts are anachronistic and that literature is now beginning to provide us with different scripts.

The humanitarians who are the subject of this study present a more energetic, rich and varied picture of the transition into retirement. Their stories are balanced, refined and more thoughtful than a simple description of crisis or decline. Flora has begun a new business; Dave and Lars are active with consultancy and travel projects, Charlotte has extended her home and is committed to regular, socially engaged activities, Luigi has continued to work in humanitarian work although now with a feeling of less pressure than when his income depended on it. It is as if they have resisted assimilating these cultural myths into their own meaning making stories. Perhaps they are the ones who are providing different scripts.

The existential themes which emerged from my reading of the content of these scripts will be examined next and will focus on the answers discernible to the question of what the future holds.

What does the future hold?

Of the three who mentioned the future spontaneously in their stories, Ian, Dave and Flora, all were comfortable with the ambiguity and uncertainty they described. Dave´s approach is typical:

'Whatever the situation, future prospects are rather exciting, albeit incredibly

unclear.

Where will I be in 5 years´ time?

No idea.

One thing for sure, so far retirement has been one of the best assignments I have

ever had'

Flora does not see the future of her business clearly but she has a deep faith which enables her to feel fulfilled and supported.

Ian whose story is perhaps the least optimistic of the group still finds satisfaction with his daily life:

'I don´t have any grand plans for the future.

I am fairly content in the day to day life

I now have'.

The stories of this group were more in line with those of the baby boomers described in Chapter 2 of this report who are barely contemplating retirement.

The findings summarized here were written and narrated in a specific context where I am located with multiple roles. In the next section I discuss my experience of the research process and the way in which I managed these roles.

ENGAGING WITH THE RESEARCH PROCESS

At the time I undertook this research, I was a career counsellor working with a team of 9 other counsellors each assigned approximately 200 internationally mobile staff to support as they navigated the complexities of their careers. I had been recruited into an 'expert' role and was expected to bring into the organization best practice from the career development sphere and also to build the counselling skills of the team. I took holistic approach to this work understanding career as a pattern of work and non-work experiences and life events all of which had a legitimate place in career counselling conversations. As I complete the writing of my final report, I remain in the same area of work but in a supervisory role.

In my day to day work, there are times when I experience tension between the role of counsellor in an organizational context and the approach of a counselling psychologist. The context is one in which individuals may be engaging unwittingly in defensive practices which sustain an insensitive bureaucracy or where individual trauma is played out in a collective need to avoid any engagement with vulnerability. On a daily basis I wrestle with the alternative conclusions which are drawn on any issue depending on which perspective I take. The organization needs to staff its operations, the individual staff member needs to manage his or her working life in spite of what this means for their health, family and wider relationships. Conflicts are frequent and my role is to support individual staff as they navigate these. Over time I have come to rely on a range of approaches to manage myself when involved in these conflicts which involve self-care, reflective practice, and participation in different fora with colleagues where cases are discussed and a way forward is agreed. This process is underpinned each time by an underlying commitment to respect the individuals involved, including myself, to accept the complexity of each situation and also to accept that multiple truths are equally valid.

My research has taken place against this back drop and has presented different kinds of challenges for me. The opportunity to put myself into the position of a non-

judgmental observer and witness of human experience as part of the researcher's skill set was welcome. The tantalizing possibility of really understanding the experience of those with whom I work every day but from the perspective of the viewer of a whole life perspective was attractive to me. Many of the skills to achieve this are part of the counselling psychologist's specialization. This was not difficult although there was a tension in the frame which I sensed in the written stories of my co-researchers and my conversations with them. It was clear that my co-researchers were very aware of   my dual role as researcher and employee in the same organization from which they had retired. I have explored how this was manifested in their stories in the *Findings* section above.

The power of the organizational context over me and my co-researchers was, however, stronger than I anticipated both in their written stories and during our conversations. If I followed up during our conversation on a query related to vulnerability, I often sensed the response was as much to me as an human resources colleague as to an individual with shared vulnerabilities. By extension, it was difficult to reveal my own vulnerability especially as a researcher who felt distant in some ways from the experience of my co-researchers. I could perhaps have shared this more by including a reference of how difficult it was for me to reach beyond my own role in order to understand their experience more. I did not do this, however, and I wonder now about the influence of organizational culture on me both as a researcher, counselling psychologist and manager. I am influenced by this culture and in turn influence it. It is a culture shaped by multiple individual defensive reactions to intolerable experiences and may have rendered the organization as a whole dismissive of the impact of these on the individuals within it. This observation has enabled me to appreciate this fact more fully and I hope it will make me a more sensitive practitioner in all of my roles in the future.

The other tension I experienced was more of a challenge. It hinged on an ethical consideration of where and how my research and the stories of my co-co-researchers would be disseminated and is therefore linked with personal vulnerability in an organizational context, both mine and that of my co-researchers. I have commented on this issue in the section on the '*Ethical representation of results*' above but I will now describe in more detail. During my conversations I felt the need to maintain the balance of achieving the stance of researcher who seeks to observe, understand and communicate albeit a situated experience and the need to avoid converting my conversations with co-researchers into encounters with an explicit therapeutic purpose. An example of a time when I felt this most clearly was after Luigi's comments on home being a place you choose to die. In a therapeutic relationship Luigi may have chosen to reflect more on this. I might have offered an observation on how this thought made finding a home in which to retire very difficult but I did not. Another moment when I experienced this tension was when one co-researcher whilst describing a plan for almost frenetic post retirement activity, briefly described an image of his own, now deceased, mother incapacitated and immobile in a chair. As a counselling psychologist, I would have wanted to explore any connection between the two different future visions just revealed. I did not and as a result my research did not achieve the depth of findings particularly in the area of dealing with existential givens which it might have done. Perhaps I will have the opportunity to explore these issues at greater depth in other relationships once I have explored them in more depth for myself!

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this research, I have explored the retirement experience of 6 humanitarians using a narrative methodology which viewed their written stories and conversations as situated in specific organizational, social and cultural contexts. I have also identified themes which arose in their narrative in the three areas of inquiry which framed this research: *finding meaning and identity in retirement, the importance of relationships in retirement and dealing with existential questions.*

What follows in this chapter is firstly a discussion of these findings in relation to each area of inquiry which explores possible underlying meanings and explanations of the phenomenon of the retirement of humanitarian workers. Secondly, I discuss and make some suggestions for the critical application of these findings for three groups identified in the introduction to this report: humanitarians themselves, counselling psychologists and humanitarian organizations. I then go on to present some methodological considerations and critical reflections before finalizing the chapter with some suggestions for future research.

1. FINDING MEANING AND IDENTITY IN RETIREMENT

Finding meaning and identity in retirement for this group of humanitarians was a complex process with rich individual differences and intricate layers of contributing elements visible in each of their stories. In this section I review the ways in which the transition into retirement influences the ways in which they see themselves. I summarize the findings in relation to the importance of place and possessions in the

meaning and self-making processes of retirees and I complete the section by reviewing one of the most surprising findings of this research which emerged in the paradoxical experience of some: the approach of retirement is known and anticipated on one level but its arrival is experienced as a shock and is accompanied by unexpected feelings on another.

Creativity and generativity were considered as vital elements of healthy development in the stage of life where retirement falls according to Erikson, (1998). All of the retirees, who shared their stories as part of this research with perhaps the exception of one, had found new roles and life activities after retirement which they found fulfilling. Flora had started a business working with the next generation of her family, Charlotte was still an active lobbyist in humanitarian affairs, Luigi had taken a less stressful job still in the deep field and still in the area of refugee protection, Lars and Dave had consultancy commitments and only Ian was still contemplating his future. These positive aspects of the retirement experience were visible both in the individual themes which emerged in their stories and also in their overall form and shape.

They saw themselves as protagonists of their own very often moving stories, who had navigated the challenges of a humanitarian career and survived them. They had not only survived but had emerged relatively unscathed and ready for the next stage of life after retirement. In other words, it was as if they saw themselves in many ways as returning heroes at the end of their career journeys. The exact shape and texture of the return was still to be worked out for most. These challenges they had risen to were summarized graphically by Dave:

'Separation from family,

hardship conditions,

managerial stress,

bureaucratic challenges,

friends who come and go (some never to be seen again and in some cases not even remembered),

constantly buying and selling possessions,

wondering where one should call home,

bringing up third culture kids who certainly don't know where home is,

all have an impact on one's life and that of one's family.'

The way their stories were structured also indicated that, as they wrote, they had an audience or reader in mind even if this was not made explicit. In so doing, they were showing an awareness of both organizational and cultural context. Their stories contained much heartfelt advice for others who would retire after them or for me, as a fellow professional in the organization, who may be in a position to improve things for retirees in the future. They were adopting ancient, Western characters common in personal myth making (McAdams, 1993 p.124) of 'The Teacher' and 'The Counselor', 'The Humanist,' and 'The Sage'. And they were also illustrating their life long vocation for serving others which extended beyond the refugees whose welfare had often been their responsibility during their working lives. The very act of writing these stories was an act of generativity.

The humanitarians who adopted these story forms and these mythical characters were conveying important messages about their personal qualities. These qualities are those expected of humanitarians and so they were also demonstrating sensitivity towards the reader and eventual audience for their stories. The adoption of these narrative strategies may have been an adaptive and mature way of confronting a major life change that make sense both to the narrators and readers of these stories. Atchley, (1989) in his 'continuity theory of normal aging' postulates that change is linked to a person´s past producing continuity in inner psychological characteristics as well as in social behaviour. By aligning their narrative to grand cultural stories, humanitarians may well be achieving social coherence which otherwise might be denied to them. At an individual level when they retire, they do not experience social continuity, as they do not remain, in the communities where they end their connection with the organization.

However, it may also be that in adopting these forms, some writers denied themselves the possibility of including more personal vulnerability in their narratives. This in turn reflects aspects of organizational culture where subtle injunctions against feelings of vulnerability may operate as a result of the work of the organization with some of the most vulnerable people on the planet. These aspects, when meshing with the sense of self denial and humility of many humanitarians (Thomas, 2008), may make the expression of personal vulnerability difficult if not impossible.

Luigi was one of the co-researchers who shared his personal vulnerability more with me during our conversation and he adopted more modern auto biographical story form. Narrative scholars describe this as self-formation through actualizing the only authentic mode of being that is possible for a person in that it expresses profoundly meaningful values which differentiate them from others (Linde, 1993). I found his account of personal transformation through the acquisition and articulation throughout his working years of a profound life lesson very moving. He had come to understand during the review of his not always easy or smooth career path:

'What I learned in professional terms was impressive

but certainly less enriching than the way I grew as a human being.

My initial cultural prejudices vis-à-vis people from different cultural backgrounds gradually faded away.

It was a long process but eventually successful.'

Luigi was certain that the life skill he had acquired would support him as he moved into retirement enabling him to feel at home in cultures and countries all over the world. The life lesson he narrated illustrated a fundamental change in outlook on life which carried forward and also provided Luigi with a sense of coherence and continuity. For another retiree, the retirement transition had initiated a more fundamental shift in identity.

Lar´s is a story of the realization brought on by retirement of the enormous 'chasm' that had opened between him and his country. He experienced this as a deep

'betrayal' which he explained in our conversation as involving intense feelings of powerlessness particularly when engaging with officials:

'I felt exposed and at the mercy of others who had the power over my life.

I was no longer in the driving seat'

Feelings of loss and the sense of change in key relationships are frequently triggers for self-reflective awareness and interpretations of changes in identity (Schultz, 2001). Lars continues with his story which illustrates, I think, just such a transformation. He describes that although he was always aware of the pleasure afforded to him by opportunities to connect with people of many nationalities and cultures at work, he finally became aware of himself as a person no longer identified with his country of birth. Instead, he realised he was a citizen of the world, 'you realize you were in a society where geography stops existing'.

Luigi's ability to feel at home in all cultures and Lar's profound transformation into a citizen of the world can be seen as one of final stages of Campbell's hero's journey: the return with an elixir or treasure. (Campbell, 2008. p.210). It is at this stage that the insight the hero gains from the journey finds its value when applied to the challenges of daily life. Both Luigi's and Lar's personal treasure is in the form of a greater resilience and self-belief. In Luigi's case, his knowledge will equip him to feel at home all over the world and for Lars, he is a citizen of the world and in an echo of Campbell's words, where he had thought to be alone, he is with all the world.

This treasure is of deeply personal significance but, also, as with the treasures discovered in mythical journeys, it has meaning and significance on a collective scale. Just at Charlotte's and Flora's stories, reviewed earlier, could be understood as story structures enabling and pointing to a gender inclusive future for humanity, so Lar's and Luigi's point the way to the integration of global diversity into a harmonious form 'where geography stops existing' and we all have the potential to become citizens of the world.

The other retiree who had a positive encounter with valuable aspects of herself both whilst writing her story, and when reviewing it a year later, was Flora. This was not, in my opinion, the deep shift experienced by Lars but rather a transformation similar to the ones identified by Pals (2006) when people openly acknowledge the negative impact on themselves of difficult life events. The healthiest patterns of self-narration, in Pals´ view, then involve an active analysis of the event that leads to resolving it by seeing the self as positively transformed.

The patterns of change and transformation and continuity and coherence wove themselves like a dance in the stories of the retirees. All of whom, achieved different degrees of balance between the two elements. External continuity was provided by the choice of organizational and culturally recognizable plots and imagoes and internal changes in life or self-perception, when they were most profound, involved a degree of self-awareness and acknowledgement which allowed in some way 'a dynamic conceptualization of self and the impact of developmental vicissitudes on identity' (De St Aubin et al, 2006 p.236)

One of the aspects of humanitarians' life which changed as they retired as a matter of obligation was where they lived. The importance of place in retirement will be reviewed next.

FINDING OUT WHERE HOME IS

For some humanitarians like Flora, Charlotte and possibly Ian, the choice was clear; home was where their families were and where they were born. For others, Lars, Dave and Luigi, the choice was not so clear.

Dave after retirement was living in a third country, not his own or that of his wife. His children were located in two further countries. He was thinking of making a final choice about where to retire definitively according to where he and his wife could

make friends more easily. Dave did not speak the language of his current country of residence and longed to strike up insignificant conversation with the people he met every day. Until then he and his wife were enjoying travelling as they had both done when younger. Visiting his children and former colleagues throughout the world was an important and satisfying aspect of this.

Lars was living part of the time in his home country and part of the time in another hemisphere. He fulfilled family responsibilities when at home but ambivalence with his country, necessitated, I think, frequent travel and extended periods away in line with his espoused identity of citizen of the world.

Luigi, although not decided on a home as yet was planning an itinerant retirement which would involve, as with Dave, visits to dispersed children and friends. He had not felt quite ready to make a definitive decision and had kept on working taking up another deep field post immediately after retirement.

Each of these retirees had a coherent explanation for their choices but I couldn´t help thinking of the co-researchers in Madison´s (2006) research on voluntary migrants whose stories of paradoxical consequences allowed him to coin the term 'existential migration'. One of the consequences for those making this choice in Madison´s study was that many reported being in a limbo state where no place would feel like home again. Perhaps this was the case for Luigi, Lars and Dave. Madison cautions against the profound psychological consequences of repeated exposure to a vast range of different people and foreign places as it can lead to feelings of not being at home anywhere. For Luigi and Lars, however, this consequence had a contrary effect and was largely positive. Their exposure had enabled them to feel like citizens of the world with a capacity to feel at home anywhere. The one place they did not feel at home, however, was in the country where they were born.

Madison (2006) himself makes the comment, 'It is intriguing to consider how our view of life might change if instead we prioritized the migratory over the settled or at least redressed this unexamined bias'. Perhaps with their stories, people like Lars and Luigi are already redressing this bias. It is intriguing for me to consider how their stories might have been different, populated with the character forms of a wise/

teacher traveller, perhaps, if culturally, the migratory was already prioritized over the settled. Dave, in a reflection he makes after outlining his career path, is perhaps recognizing that the shift Madison suggests is already taking place,

'Globalisation, in the sense of family separation, increasing mobility, working in unfamiliar environments, requiring to adapt to new situations, contract uncertainty, and job insecurity and so on are very much the norm rather than the exception.

My generation needed to adapt to the new reality.

I suspect the new generation take it for granted.'

Dave's words concerning the new generation resonate with me as I see my daughters navigating their own mobility with relative ease as they make full use of new technology and social networks to maintain friendships over time and distance. The concept of existential migration does not, however. My own sense of home is bound up with my role as wife and mother and in that sense represents a 'gendered' expression of apparent choice and agency during moments of transition. It is interesting to note that both Charlotte and Flora mention family more prominently in their decision making concerning home during retirement than their male colleagues. This raises the intriguing possibility of applying a gender lens to the narrated experience of a larger number of co-researchers in future research.

One element that makes an itinerant retirement more of a challenge is, however, the accumulation of possessions. It is the findings in relation to this aspect of retirement in the lives of humanitarians that will be reviewed next.

THE ROLE AND PLACE OF POSSESSIONS

Ekerdt and Baker (2014), contrary to their expectations, found in a survey study that people after the age of 50 (in the US) are less likely to divest themselves of their belongings. They propose that retaining possessions may be a story about the self

and that considerable meaning is attached to things that symbolize identity and ties to others.

The co-researchers in this study with the exception of two all mentioned material possessions of one kind or another in their stories of retirement. Flora rearranged the possessions one more time in her room as a way, perhaps, of dealing with the anxiety of making the realization upon her return home that her friends had moved on in her absence. Dave finds unexpected pleasure in working with his accumulated collection of photographs. Lars speaks of the joy he found in bringing his possessions together for the first time and sorting them out. Charlotte also writes about sorting out the accumulation of 23 years of postings held in three storage units from around the world.

The details of both Lars and Charlotte´s experience help substantiate Ekerdt and Baker´s (2014) proposition and give an idea of how during the self-making process, possessions are linked with others during the telling of personal stories.

Charlotte and Lars both shed light on the process in terms of their thinking as they kept possessions *and* as they shed them. It would be interesting to know whether the final balance of possessions resulted from more decisions to divest than to keep but this information did not emerge in this research.

Lars explained that for him sorting out his affairs had been a joyful activity of tying up loose ends and a sort of editing of life in which things are sold out of necessity but which in the end means finding a freedom to do other things. I cannot help but think that this process mirrored his own personal transformation in which he divested himself of the national part of his identity to take on a form of global citizenship which he lives out with annual migratory travel and frequent trips from both of his current bases.

Charlotte describes beautifully and poetically the process of opening up box after box and discovering forgotten items that brought back a host of memories. As I read her lines, I imagined her handling and appreciating her possessions one by one and, as she did so, appreciating the richness in herself as she relived the associations

she has with her exotic and varied possessions. During our conversation, a year after she had written these lines, she tells me that she has extended her house and I think this is in part to do with keeping some of these possessions. I ask her how she makes a decision not to keep something. There are boxes, she says, that she will not unpack. They contain papers and press cuttings relating to the cases of the displaced which she worked on earlier in her career. She notes that the information is all available digitally now and that with time these things are no longer relevant.

The stories of Lars and Charlotte also indicate that in contrast to the co-researchers in Ekerdt and Baker (2014) study the process was one by necessity of divesting *and* keeping. They both found pleasure in reconnecting with the elements of their past reassessing those connections and making decisions on what would be part of their futures and what would not. This process carried out in a very concrete way in the material world mirrors, I think a more personal journey occurring at the same time in the interior world. And just as a new identity is open to be understood only after a transition has been experienced and narrated (Schultz, 2001) the role and place of possessions can only be understood after they have been collected, sorted and re arranged as part of a new life.

The process of sorting out possessions was a happy process for these co-researchers but a far from happy event was the moment of retirement itself for some, especially as it landed with them in unexpected ways. This aspect of findings will be discussed next.

THE SHOCK OF RETIREMENT

Two co-researchers were aware and unaware at the same time of the approach of their retirement. For one it shimmered like a distant mirage until his attendance at the retirement workshop broke the spell and obliged him to consider the implications for his life more concretely. For the other, in spite of her commitment not to share the fate of colleagues who had not been prepared, the receipt of administrative instructions for her own retirement were met with surprising, strong emotions. These

emotions were complex and paradoxical. She experienced overwhelm and elation at the same time.

It is not, in my view, a coincidence that Lars and Flora for whom this was the case, were also authors of the stories which had evidenced in a greater way than others a transformed or changed identity. They were perhaps the most prepared, for whatever reason 'to implicate selfhood in jeopardy' (Schultz, 2001) and the end of the lesson was, therefore, more likely to assume the form of a turning point. However, this came as a surprise not because they did not know of the approach of retirement but because not until they had experienced the transition, and written their story, could they understand the impact it had had on them. Only in retrospect, the full impact could be revealed and was perceived by both of them to be a shock to the meaning, purpose or direction of their life prior to retirement.

It was also as if something was seeking expression in their lives concerning the retirement transition which was the need for a meaning making process in itself. If it had been ignored it may have been experienced anyway in a confusing and dis orienting way until its meaning within a life was articulated. Quindioz (2009) touches upon this in her study when she suggests that as people age some become aware of the need to find coherence towards the end of their lives: 'it is difficult to close our internal life-history without first having made it into a whole history, one that belongs to us'. In this sense, retirement can be compared with the concept of an unthought known for these two people (Bollas, 1987), an experience which in some way is known to the individual, but about which he or she cannot think. The opportunity to narrate the story of its impact provides the opportunity for it to be thought about and integrated in some way.

An additional conclusion might also be that there is some kind of emotional transition work that needs to be carried out in retirement which cannot be easily prepared for consciously as it is an unavoidable and deeply personal process more difficult for some than for others. One of life´s 'necessary losses' (Viorst, 1998) defined as the loves, illusions dependencies and impossible expectations that all of us have and

which have to be given up in order for us to grow successfully as adults. The process of recovering from these losses is deeply personal and unique to each person.

It may well be that a relationship with an interested listener or reader is also key in allowing the authoring of new identities. The findings concerning the importance of relationships in retirement will be discussed next.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN RETIREMENT

The centrality of positive relationships in later life and retirement was established in literature reviewed in Chapter 2 of this report. The findings of this research will be discussed under four headings: the erosion of social networks over time, the challenges of establishing new relationships, the loss of relationships with colleagues and finally, the ending of the relationship with the organization.

The first relevant observation I need to make as I review the findings is that a large part of the data concerning relationships but, by no means all, emerged during the follow on conversations with co-researchers. It did not emerge 'spontaneously' as part of their initial stories. This could mean several things. Perhaps the importance of relationships in the lives of humanitarians has been supressed as a way of dealing with the separations and extended periods in isolated conditions. Perhaps like Napoleon quoted in Chapter 2, humanitarians, in spite of being very kind people, have also devoted themselves to silencing the chord of kindness in themselves that never yields a sound now. Alternatively, the importance of relationships is not important rather it was imposed however unintentionally by myself as a counselling psychologist/ researcher who declares the relational important in her work and was determined to find relationships important for retired humanitarians. Perhaps both possibilities are relevant to an understanding of the findings which did emerge.

THE EROSION OF SOCIAL NETWORKS OVER TIME

Most co-researchers had nostalgic memories of how their social networks had eroded during the course of their mobile careers. One described how a decreasing number of people would see him off at the airport another how he would write a family newsletter to an ever decreasing number of friends. Still another described that she was piecing the puzzle together which included trying to connect with people she had not seen in forty years and finding that no one knew what had happened to them. This scenario means that humanitarian retirees may well have to dedicate considerable time to re-building their networks wherever they choose or however they choose to retire. This is in contrast to the pattern suggested by Carstensen et al (1999) and reviewed in Chapter 2, as part of social emotional selectivity theory. This proposes that the social activity of older people is reduced out of an awareness of anticipated endings and diminishing energy. They choose to maintain relationships which are most satisfying and do not maintain or even begin others. The challenges retired humanitarians then face when trying to re-establish or establish for the first time relationships with others in new communities are considered next.

THE CHALLENGES OF ESTABLISHING NEW RELATIONSHIPS IN RETIREMENT

Making new friends is recognized as needing really hard work in Dave´s story, '*Given our transitory nature, one does not easily make friends in new locations'*. Luigi recognized that the same energy is not available for friendships in the same way as when younger.

When retirees do settle, they seem to find making new friends easier if they can find groups with a similar background and with the experience of an international, mobile career. Flora, Lars and Charlotte all made reference to this.

A mobile humanitarian career not only influences supportive networks of friends during a working life but well on into retirement both in terms of the number and kinds of people which can reasonably be expected to be available and able to connect. It is understandable then that the relationships forged with colleagues become very important over time and that their loss represents another challenge for humanitarians in retirement which is perhaps greater than for those with less mobile careers. The findings in this regard will be discussed next.

THE LOSS OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES

The bonds humanitarians build with colleagues in the field with whom they may have to work and live in difficult conditions for years at a time, are strong and not easily captured in words. For Luigi they are a based on a 'solid affinity which is difficult to define'. A sense of loss at retirement of these relationships was visible in most retirees' stories.

With time, and perhaps once the keenness of this loss has blunted, different perspectives on these relationships emerge. Flora commented in our follow on conversation that the sense of loss she had felt when her career had ended was now more a feeling of nostalgia and it did not concern so much the people as the sense of purposeful activity. We had our conversation one year after she had written her story of retirement. She had re-read her story to prepare for our conversation and she made this observation spontaneously indicating that healing is possible with the passing of time.

Charlotte had also reached a more nuanced understanding of her relationships with colleagues and she described perhaps one of the underestimated benefits of retirement. The fact that she no longer had to deal with people she did not like or

with whom she did just not share the same viewpoints. She was only just coming to appreciate that it was one of the luxuries of retirement that made her very happy.

 One retiree qualified what he had written on relationships in his retirement story during our follow on conversation, echoing perhaps Charlotte´s discovery. He explained that he had shared strong experiences with colleagues and appreciated the bonds created. In fact he had missed the social aspect of work even more than he had anticipated. However, he also said, 'This does not mean you are close friends'. He went on to provide himself an explanation for this and by so doing provided fascinating insight into the functioning of a highly diverse global organization, dynamic at its periphery but bureaucratic at its centre. In his view a tacit understanding exists between colleagues that divisive issues cannot be discussed. It was simply not done. It is almost as if the relationships with colleagues are fit for purpose in the sense that when a humanitarian worker arrives in a new duty station, she or he will find a familiar and family like reception and this enables the challenging work of the organization to be completed. It is as if for this person at least, this notion of friendship is no longer enough upon retirement or in a more settled life; deeper, more genuine connections are preferred.

These more complex views of relationships with colleagues notwithstanding, co-researchers still found the challenge of ending relationships with the organizational entity a difficult one. The findings in relation to this aspect of relationship will be discussed next.

THE ENDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ORGANIZATION

The findings in this section will be reviewed under the following three headings: the process of leaving, preparing for retirement, and the continuing relationship after retirement.

The process of leaving

Two co-researchers mentioned working up until their last day with the organization at probably the same frenetic rhythm and intensity which had characterized the rest of their career. The reasons for this as discerned in one of their accounts appear multi-layered and a complex interplay of personal, collegial and organizational expectations and behaviours, not all of which appear to be in full awareness of the people concerned including the humanitarians themselves.

For one, the final transition was like running a car in fifth gear and then suddenly reverting to first. In retrospect he did not feel that this was healthy and was aware of different practices in organizations in his home nation where a gradual phasing down was possible and access was provided to a coach in some cases. Another suggested that in line with a gradual approach to retirement, more care could be taken by the organization when making posting decisions in relation to a person of over 60, avoiding for example, sending them to deep field locations which are harder for them to cope with.

The other gave an insight into why the process of gradual disengagement was difficult. The people around her became more demanding and she even had a sense of their neediness in relation to her. They wanted to involve her in more things than usual and ask her opinion on a greater range of matters. She has an insight into her role in this, however, and recognized she was kept busy and that she had no time for emotions. Perhaps there was a mutual denial of the ending by her and those around her. The increased activity was a way of dealing with the anxiety provoked by an anticipated separation and was also a way of avoiding other kinds of feelings such as sadness and loss. These feelings did emerge for this co-researcher, but in the privacy of her own room in the evening when she allowed herself to express them, sadly in my view, alone.

Others who are to continue to work and who have their own retirements some way ahead of them need to be prepared to support or at least recognize the likely pattern of transition work which accompanies retirement in their colleagues. The findings in

relation to features of preparing for retirement from the organizational perspective will be discussed next.

Preparation for retirement

Most co-researchers in this research mentioned the retirement seminar run by the organization for those due to retire in the next 5 years or so. This is a five day seminar covering taxation and the administrative aspects of retirement summarized in Chapter 2. In the narrative of all who went into any detail, a need for the seminars to cover other matters could be discerned.

Perhaps the inclusion of an introduction to the emotional work involved with separation and loss might be a useful. An opportunity to tell or write the story of their career journey with its ups and downs in order to exchange them with other co-researchers could also usefully be added to the agenda. The co-researchers of this research indicated that people who had retired before them did come to share their experiences during the seminar but the sharing was in the form of advice on in which location to buy a home or the necessity of making a plan of some kind for retirement. Information on the emotional and relational elements which have emerged as an important part of the retirement transition in this research appear to be missing.

The retirement seminar does offer those nearing retirement the opportunity to exchange views and concerns on retirement with each other but they are extracted from their normal working context and network of colleagues in order to do this. This means that a formal opportunity for colleagues to discuss the thoughts and feelings they all have in relation to the departure of another colleague does not arise in the workplace or duty station. Reasons for this have been suggested above. Perhaps Ayot (2015) quoted in Chapter 2 is right; what is missing is a ritual initiating people into retirement, a ritual which involves those around the retiree and moves everyone involved 'from internal isolation to a kind of ritual belonging'. Ayot also points out that elders prepared to lead and hold rituals are needed even more as the world changes around us. The elders or senior members of an organization probably do have a greater responsibility to recognise what future retirees may be experiencing,

appreciating what their needs for support are and playing a role in meeting those needs, if possible.

One co-researcher recounted with real sadness her disappointment at not receiving any acknowledgement from a senior figure in her regional organization on her last day of work. Her immediate colleagues in the deep field at her last duty station had organized a farewell for her that she would cherish and remember for years to come, but this had a different kind of meaning for her to that she would have derived from a formal recognition of a life time of service from a senior figure.

Savishinsky (2003) cited in Chapter 2 of this report, notes that leaving on a good note is important in setting the tone for how retirements will begin. The co-researchers in his study were not appreciative of the highly formal events which accompanied some of their departures. These featured polite supervisors, canned speeches and formulaic food. A meaningful celebration was more effective: 'one with guests who matter, a thoughtful gift, and an opportunity for the person being honoured to reflect openly on his or her work, its legacy, and hopes for the future.' (p.239). The farewell arranged for the retiree mentioned above sounded as if it was meaningful because it had contained some of these elements.

It is practically impossible for the central administration of a global organization to ensure that a heartfelt farewell is arranged for everyone leaving the organization. However, with an increased understanding of what the retirement process means for the retirees themselves and the people who stay behind to contemplate their own retirements, they would all be better prepared to assume their role in making a good ending for their colleagues and themselves. The role of the organization´s administration is possibly to increase this understanding.

One of the reasons for ensuring that people leave on a good note is so that they are prepared for retirement and for whatever the next stage of life holds for them. Co-researchers were asked to write about what they were thinking of as they looked ahead as part of this research. The findings in this regard will be reviewed in the next section.

The continuing relationship with the organization after retirement

Two retirees mentioned that their channels of communication had been interrupted in a way which they had found thoughtless and brusque. One recognized that eventually all communication would end but that remaining on the internal e-mail system for longer than two weeks would have facilitated many things. Another had stopped receiving a refugee's affairs magazine to which she had subscribed in retirement, but continued to receive obituaries which she found hard.

This suggests that the inclusion of retirees in regular communication concerning current structure of the organization and keeping up with commitments concerning items such as magazines requires a thoughtful and consistent management.

3. DEALING WITH EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS

The findings in this research indicated that the co-researchers are not spending time on contemplating existential questions in a way they are prepared to share in a research context. They are a vital, thoughtful group who may not feel sure about all aspects of their future but who continue to make sense of their lives in retirement in the same way they made sense of their often challenging lives as humanitarians.

If they are dealing with existential issues at all, it is in the same way as the retirees in the town of Shelby studied by Savishinsky (2003); by struggling to find answers to the more practical questions of where to live and how to support aging parents.

One quite 'throw away' comment at the end of Ian's story provides an interesting perspective on this. He speculates that his pension, whilst providing security means that he does not really need to work again:

> *'The financial security of a UN pension has had an interesting effect,*

in that

I don't really need to work again to earn money'

Ian had enjoyed working in emergency contexts and was, I think, finding it difficult to adapt to the very different context of retirement. He was still seeking a more meaningful way to spend his time. For him, the lack of financial motivation as an obvious reason for working, had contributed to the feeling of ennui which pervaded his story.

The other co-researchers in receipt of the same pension are also able to look ahead with relative optimism and security and they are possibly and thankfully cushioned from the need to deal with too many existential givens.

In the next section I discuss the validity and trustworthiness of these findings and the research undertaken as a whole.

VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Any meaningful consideration of the application of these findings needs to be preceded by an evaluation of the validity or trustworthiness of my research in its entirety. In this section I describe the approaches I took to ensuring that this research met some of the most relevant validity criteria for narrative research.

Qualitative research as a whole embraces multiple standards of quality known as validity or trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005). Narrative inquiry needs to take into account the trustworthiness criteria found in the broader field as well as adapting the way it is established given the co-constructed, context-specific, interpreted nature of the stories under review (Loh, 2013). This researcher builds on the 4 often cited validity criteria of Lincoln and Guba, (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of findings, and then suggests two others which he sees as particularly appropriate to narrative research, verisimilitude and utility. I now describe

how this research can be evaluated in relation to these criteria. I finally consider this research in relation to an additional criteria which I think is relevant, identified by Lincoln, (1995) in her review of emerging quality criteria in qualitative interpretative research, that of 'sacredness'.

CREDIBILITY OF STORIES AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF INTERPRETATION

Loh (2013) considers that the *verisimilitude* of stories, that is the extent to which they resonate with their readers, is important in narrative research. The design of this study included a follow up conversation with co-researchers, not to establish the historical truth of their stories but rather to allow me to establish the accuracy of my own meaning making process as I applied it to their stories. I was also able to extend and elaborate on my own interpretation as a consequence. The multiple re readings and reflection on my co-researchers' stories as well as these follow up conversations further increased their credibility.

Peer validation is useful in obtaining corroboration of the interpretation of stories (Loh, 2013). I was fortunate to have a colleague in the organization who had completed a Master's research project in the career counselling field and so was familiar with qualitative research methods. She reviewed my findings and made some suggestions for additional, alternative discussion points which I was able to include. The second reader of this research was experienced in narrative methodology and was able to steer my final presentation of results such that I was able to establish more clearly their credibility.

The primary intended readers and users of this research are my colleagues in the organization which this group of retirees had retired from and from where they would retire in the future. The pause in active story collection during 2015 allowed me to have many conversations with interested colleagues on some of my observations, and reflections on findings as far as I had elaborated them. I also regularly reviewed progress in my research with the staff welfare section in the organization and thus

obtained 'peer validation' in this sense too. I often received validation for my meaning making process during these conversations, not to mention motivation and energy to continue with the research!

Transferability

I have endeavoured to provide 'thick description' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the context of this research, my situation as a researcher in this context as well as the procedural steps I took. I have done this with the aim that readers will be able to evaluate how far the findings and meanings I have presented can be transferred to different and similar contexts.

I have been clear about my own subjectivity and its possible impact on my interpretation of stories. For the duration of this research I kept a journal which helped me keep track of my own reflective process particularly during the months when I was reading and re-reading co-researchers' stories and the transcripts of follow on conversations. This was particularly useful when in conversation with interested peers as I was able to 'try out' interpretative ideas which were emerging.

Dependability

The dependability of research refers to the reliability of the process of inquiry, the way data is collected, how it is kept as well as its accuracy. I have been clear on the way I collected and interpreted co-researcher stories. I have elaborated on how the communication which elicited co-researcher stories reflects the ontology of narrative inquiry as a research method. My intention was to impose as little structure on co-researchers' stories as possible allowing what was important for them to emerge in the three, broad areas of inquiry. I think this increases the reliability of the findings.

Confirmability

The confirmability of research refers to the extent to which findings, interpretations and recommendations are supported by the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In order to ensure that my conclusions were based on and justified by the co-researchers'

own words, I numbered the paragraphs in their stories. This enabled me to ensure that the queries I held in mind to be commented on further during our follow on conversations had emerged from their original stories. I also numbered each of the co-researchers' and my own contributions in our follow on conversations. Finally in the interpretative summaries I made for each co-researcher's story, I referred to this numbering. In these summaries I also differentiate between the interpretation and elaboration on this interpretation by referring to this numbering. In this way I could present my findings confident that although they had undergone interpretative elaboration, the starting point for this elaboration was an aspect of the co-researchers' original stories.

Sacredness

Lincoln (1995) identifies sacredness as a criterion for evaluating the quality of research which she saw emerging in the writing of feminists and management specialists. She notes that scientific paradigms are being linked with ecological concerns in a way that 'recognizes the ecological as well as the human…Researchers who conceive of science in this way make space for the lifeways of others and create relationships that are based not on unequal power, but on mutual respect, granting of dignity and deep appreciation of the human condition' (p.284). My research design, the representation of my findings, my choice of methodology which looks at the whole story of a person and not fragments, are done with the aim of safeguarding the dignity of my co-researchers. In part, my research was motivated by a deep respect for humanitarian workers, but it has also increased my respect for them and the specific challenges they face at the end of their working lives. I also hope that it will enable others to appreciate these in a more meaningful way than might otherwise have been the case.

In the next section I consider the ways in which this research may achieve this outcome.

CRITICAL APPLICATION OF FINDINGS

I will describe next the possible application of these findings in the following 3 areas: for humanitarians, for the field of counselling psychology and for the organizations in which they work and from which they retire.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH FOR HUMANITARIANS

The main benefits of this research for humanitarians themselves arise, I believe, from the deeper understanding of the retirement experiences of others like themselves who have lived and worked in mobile and challenging careers. Each story was as unique as the person who wrote it but nevertheless interesting conclusions can be drawn which are relevant for others:

- The inner, emotional journey of retirement can be as important and eventful as the exterior, practical journey to the extent that some of the accompanying feelings are surprising or unexpected.
- It can be a time of paradoxical feelings and thoughts and that these are part of this journey.
- The accumulating and 'rediscovering' of artefacts gathered over a life time of global living can be an important source of meaning and identity in retirement.
- Home in retirement may be an arrangement of different places reflecting patterns of family settlement and the mobile life of humanitarians at work.

- They may be on the vanguard of globalization in that they assimilate at a deep level into their identities the idea of global citizenship during retirement.
- Retirement is a journey and for most of the humanitarians in this research their experience improved with time.

These implications of an increased understanding on the part of humanitarians are also applicable for the work of counselling psychologists who may work with this group or with similar people. These will be considered next.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH FOR COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGISTS

The ways of working with any client are defined by the therapist client dyad as they interact with the different aspects of each other over time. However, this research enables some observations which may facilitate this.

- The potential complexity of the emotional journey of retirement means that therapeutic work may involve working out together the influence on retirees of socially defined roles as they interweave on cultural and personal planes in their stories.

- Although this study has used a narrative research methodology, the use of narrative counselling techniques may be a useful way of working with retirees who are struggling to re-author their identities in retirement.

- Allowing time for reflection on career and life is an important part of supporting their transition. As the work of Quindioz (2009) suggests: 'it is difficult to close our internal life-history without first having made it into a whole history, one that belongs to us'.

- The impact of a globally mobile life on retirement experience is substantial particularly in the sphere of finding meaningful, supportive relationships.

- The relational strategies used to navigate the challenges of a humanitarian career may not be the most appropriate for undertaking the challenge of building relationships in retirement.

- Existential themes appear not to emerge as a natural part of reflection on retirement but they may require an appropriate exploration if they do.

- Traditional conceptualizations of home may have to be re-examined during work with humanitarian retirees.

- Supporting coherence and continuity may be as important as supporting change and transition.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH FOR ORGANIZATIONS

- The content of retirement workshops could be usefully expanded upon to include elements which support preparation for the emotional and relational elements of the retirement journey.

- Others who are to continue to work and who have their own retirements some way ahead of them could be prepared to support or at least recognize the likely pattern of transition work which accompanies retirement in their colleagues.

- Senior figures in particular may have an important role to play in the recognition of the contribution of retirees at the end of their career and need to be prepared for this role.

- A gradual reduction in the work responsibilities of those about to retire which includes an opportunity to make hand over arrangements might facilitate transition and contribute to a good ending.

- The organizational career management of humanitarians towards the end of their careers may need to reflect the challenges that assignment to the deep field represents.

The validity of the findings and implications suggested above are all contingent on the appropriateness of the methodology of this research and this will be reviewed next.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The two step method used in this research was an appropriate choice and allowed a more precise understanding of co-researcher stories. They were first asked to write a story of retirement with the minimum of guidance and this ensured that the elements which were most important to them in the areas of inquiry emerged. They were then engaged in a conversation concerning their stories which enabled me as the researcher to confirm or otherwise any interpretations I had made of their stories. It also enabled me to deepen my understanding of the retirement experience and explore any additional themes which surfaced in our conversation but which had not been included in their initial stories. The time between the writing of their stories and our conversation which in most cases was approximately one year also allowed me to appreciate the evolution of their experience more clearly.

There were co-researchers who were more articulate during our conversations and less extensive in their stories and vice versa. The opportunity to engage on multiple occasions with them allowed a more extensive perspective on their experience in spite of this.

The wide angle and zoom lens perspective on co-researcher stories offered by the use of a narrative methodology enriched the findings in a way that would not have been possible with the use of either a thematic analysis or a structural and contextual analysis alone.

However, the number of co-researchers did not enable the degree of review on the cultural impact on their stories to the extent I would have liked as this would have facilitated the possible identification of co-researchers.

I used the lens of western narrative forms to analyse co-researcher stories and given the provenance of some co-researchers this may not have been the most appropriate lens to use.

The issue of cause and effect often arises in studies using narrative methodology to study transitions in people's lives (Pals 2006). It is a moot point whether the co-researchers in this research used agentic plots in their stories because they see themselves as actors in their own lives or whether the act of narrating facilitated seeing their transitions and, by extension, themselves in this way.

In the introduction to this research I touch on the fact that my approach to this research is informed by my training and experience as a counselling psychologist. The three areas of inquiry chosen seemed the most appropriate for this reason and because they emerged as important after my initial review of literature in retirement. I look at meaning making in retirement, relationships and the possible underlying existential themes informing retirement experience. Although retirees were asked to be free in the way they wrote their stories, they were asked to think about 3 questions in these areas which shaped their accounts. It may be that this 'shaping' lead to the omission of important aspects of experience and prevented retirees from being 'freer' in their accounts. These and related observations suggest future areas of research.

POSSIBLE FUTURE RESEARCH

In future research a wider range of the retirement stories of humanitarians could be considered and the cultural lens appropriate to the cultural origin of the story teller could be used to explore changes in identity and perspectives detected in them. This research might focus on the impact of cultural influence on the narration of identity and would be able to explore also the impact of organizational culture on narrated identities in more depth.

Given the importance of the impact of mobility in the careers of these humanitarians on their relationships in retirement, a more quantitative study on the attachment styles of humanitarians suggests itself. If humanitarians are supressing needs for supportive relationships as a way of dealing with the constant making and breaking of attachments during their mobile careers, it might be appropriate to use an attachment theory lens to understand this in more depth.

Originally, I had set out to explore retirees' experience from the time they had left the organisation until 4 years after retirement. For reasons explained in the design section, this was not possible. I reviewed the stories of 6 retirees none of whom had been retired for longer than 2 years. It would be interesting to follow these retirees for a longer period of time or even carry out research with another group of co-researchers who have been retired for longer. It may well be that other important themes emerge once the initial rather 'busy' time immediately following retirement of these co-researchers is over.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This research explored the retirement experience of humanitarian workers whose careers are characterized by difficult working conditions and constant mobility often in locations where they are far from family and friends for extended periods of time. Through analyzing co-researchers' stories of retirement I hoped to clarify the impact of their unique career trajectories on their relationships and well-being in retirement and also to understand how they found meaning in retirement and, particularly, what was important to them as they forged their identities as retirees.

Humanitarians have cared for others during their entire careers and it is important to understand how they approach caring for themselves during the transition from organizational life into retirement and beyond. It is also important from an organizational perspective to understand their experience with a view to providing adequate support in the years leading up to retirement. This is particularly relevant as changes in mandatory retirement age mean that more people in the organization will be expected to work until they are older.

Co-researchers were asked to write their stories of retirement in the way they wished. I explored their stories using a narrative methodology which takes into account the cultural and organizational context in which their stories are created including for whom they are told. The findings were grouped into 3 focus areas: finding meaning and identity in retirement, the importance of relationships in retirement, including relationships within the organization and finally dealing with existential questions.

The way in which co-researchers chose to structure their stories indicated the way they saw themselves as retirees. Their stories allowed a view on the degree of personal change experienced during the transition as well as its direction. Most linked their identities in retirement in some way with the way they saw themselves when working full time. This reflected their strategy for managing retirement as part

of their overall life journey and was, perhaps, a way of establishing coherence and continuity in a time of transition. Some had seen their encounters with the vicissitudes of a humanitarian career as an opportunity to learn about themselves reflecting a change in life perspective as a result. In one story, although some sense of continuity was also achieved, a fundamental shift in identity was evident.

All retirees with the exception of perhaps one saw themselves as generative, agentic protagonists of their own stories thus reflecting ancient story forms often used in modern narratives in ways that reflect culturally acceptable hopes, fears and expectations for leading a good life. I speculated that although this communicated the vital and optimistic transition for a group of people who like the baby boomers discussed in Chapter 2, are scarcely contemplating retirement, it may have also denied them the possibility of adopting plots which allowed for the inclusion of personal vulnerability. I further speculated that this may fit with a cultural expectation of self-sacrifice and denial which may be typical of the way humanitarians are seen and see each other.

When I studied my co-researchers' stories for themes which were important to them, other perspectives on retirement were possible. Two co-researchers had experienced the paradoxical emotions which accompanied their retirement as surprising or shocking and this was in spite of a very conscious awareness of its approach. I speculated that for some there is emotional work needed to navigate the transition into retirement satisfactorily. It may well be similar to a grieving process in response to loss identified by Kubler Ross (1970) and discussed in Chapter 2 or the working through of one of life's necessary losses identified by Viorst (1986) and mentioned in Chapter 5.

Another theme which emerged was the importance of place in retirement and the obvious challenges for humanitarians of finding a place to call home after many years of mobility with relatively little time being spent in one place. Half of the co-researchers had returned to the countries of their birth but others had adopted or

were planning to adopt a more itinerant retirement. They would travel between two or more countries continuing in some ways the pattern established during their careers. Madison (2006) in his research on existential migration cautions against the profound psychological consequences of repeated exposure to a wide range of different people and foreign places as it can lead to feelings of not being at home anywhere. But for these retirees this was a largely positive circumstance and reflected an ability to feel at home everywhere. Their career had provided them with the opportunity to adopt an identity as citizens of the world.

The importance of material possessions in finding meaning in retirement was another surprising finding in this research. Half of these retirees, far from adopting a Sannyasin (Savishinsky, 2003) approach to the last stage of life by renouncing the material, had found unexpected joy in finally collecting in one place their possessions which may have been scattered throughout the world. They sorted and arranged. They divested themselves of some things and kept others. I couldn't help thinking that this process mirrored a more personal journey of collecting, sorting and arranging that was occurring at the same time in their inner worlds.

The challenges of establishing networks of friends in retirement after a lifetime of travelling were indeed an important part of most retirees' stories. Most made reference to the gradual erosion of social networks over time in their countries of origin where others had moved on in their absence. Making new friends was recognized as needing hard work by several retirees. Others made the observation that this was easier if they were in communities of people with similar international experience. The possibility of understanding and feeling understood is, perhaps higher, within these groups than it is with others who would find it hard to imagine or empathize with the intensity or range of experiences of retired humanitarians.

The intensity of the bonds established with others who had lived and worked in the same challenging conditions was acknowledged as was the pain at their loss. Others clarified that with time they had come to see that sometimes these relationships while

they had established the harmony which allowed the mandate of the organization to be delivered, had actually resulted in the collusive suppression of discussion of divisive issues. This made the establishment of more nuanced and genuine relationships unlikely.

The process of making a good ending to relationships within the organization was also surprisingly challenging. Some retirees discussed the expectation that they continued to work until their last day with the same intensity and at the same pace as throughout their career. This makes finding the opportunity of making time for good endings more difficult. Endings are inherently difficult and I think that some of this inability to stop on the part of those surrounding the retiree and the retiree themselves is a result of a protective, collective denial which avoids the need to confront more difficult feelings.

Recommendations are made based on these findings for 3 groups: humanitarians themselves, counselling psychologists who may find themselves supporting retirement transitions and the organizations from which they retire.

Humanitarians need to be aware of the emotional journey of retirement which accompanies the outward transition. They may need to make time for the emotional work that arriving at a good ending to their working lives in the organization may entail. They may need to understand that the sometimes paradoxical and apparently conflictive feelings they experience are a normal part of the journey. Seeking help in the case where this is too confusing or difficult is not a sign of inappropriate vulnerability. This may be difficult to come to terms with as the more needy and vulnerable parts of themselves may have been supressed in a life time of service to others. There were joyous and fulfilling aspects in the stories of these humanitarians as well as more challenging ones but the experience of the latter for most became easier with time.

For counselling psychologists there are related implications in the findings of this research. The potential complexity of the emotional journey of retirement means that

therapeutic work may involve working out together the influence on retirees of socially defined roles as they interweave on cultural and personal planes in their stories. Recognizing our role as witnesses to a life time's work may be an important part of our working with humanitarians at the end of their careers. We need to understand that traditional conceptualizations of retirement may need to be set aside when working with this group. The role of material possessions, the notion of one geographical base, the importance of a supportive social network may all take on different dimensions in work with humanitarians. Counselling psychologists also need to fully appreciate the possible impact that a life time of making and breaking emotional bonds has had on the humanitarian's relational capacity and skill in retirement.

For the organizations in which humanitarians work and from which they retire there are also important implications. The support of humanitarians at the end of their careers may extend beyond the traditional pre-retirement seminar which itself may need to be expanded to cover the emotional and relational aspects of the retirement transition. Others, particularly those in senior roles who are to continue to work and who have their own retirements some way ahead of them could be prepared to support or at least recognize the likely pattern of transition work which accompanies retirement in their colleagues. The adjustments needed may include a gradual reduction in the work responsibilities of those about to retire as well as the recognition of a life-time of work as these contribute considerably to a good ending.

As I reach the end of what has turned out to be an unexpectedly long research journey due to the introduction into my own life of some of the imposed mobility experienced by my co-researchers, I realize that the effects on me of undertaking it have been substantial.

On one level, these effects were easy to identify. I acted out some of the anxieties I experienced. On some days, as a response to the stories I was reading, where a need to keep moving was expressed, I have found myself planning rather frantically for life post research! I have also been aware when reading the material on the importance of relationships in retirement of committing to many more social activities

in the future and thanking my friends for their patience each time I have turned down an invitation or not made one because I was working.

On another level which I have not found so easy to access, the effects have been more profound. I realize that I have been on my own hero's journey (Campbell, 2008) not only in undertaking this research but also in embarking 8 years ago on the doctoral program of which it is a part. This journey has been transformational and its outcome is paradoxical. The personal 'treasure' I have uncovered is a sense of calm and acceptance in the face of constant change and although my original intention when I began my journey was to change again once my doctoral studies were complete, I have achieved a new understanding of the value I can bring in staying. I feel that the wisdom shared by my co-researchers needs to be shared with the organization from which they retired and the wider humanitarian community. This is a fundamental shift for me personally. At each of life's choice points framed by the need for a decision to move on or stay, I have always chosen the former. Now I choose the latter, ironically, after working closely with those always obliged at the same points to move on.

Campbell (2008, p. 333) describes the end of the hero's journey as a moment when 'the essence of oneself and the essence of the world: these two are one. Hence separateness, withdrawal, is no longer necessary'. The sense of being more at one with the humanitarians with whom I work has been a result of the assuaging of the guilt I experience as a professional who makes decisions concerning the lives of humanitarians but who has never experienced the same kind of hardship they have endured. Carrying out this research has enabled me to achieve a greater understanding of their experiences. In addition, meeting and rising to the challenges of undertaking this research and staying in the organization in order to do so, have enabled me to feel that I have more in common with them than I was able to acknowledge previously.

The principal impact on me of undertaking this research has, however, been to leave me with an immense respect for this group of humanitarians and indeed all who are working in such difficult circumstances on such seemingly impossible tasks. They

have maintained such a level of professionalism and good grace over a sustained period of time that I feel in awe of them. This especially because I think they are wholly unaware of just how extraordinary they are.

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METANOIA INSTITUTE & MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH ETHICS GUIDELINES

Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee

These guidelines exist for candidates and staff, and for any external body wishing to access Metanoia Institute for the purposes of research. Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee must approve all research undertaken by staff and candidates prior to the commencement of the study. If ethical approval has been obtained from a recognised Research Ethics Committee, the letter of approval must be submitted to the Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of the study with the application to Metanoia's research committee. You will need to complete the ethics form itself and also complete a risk assessment for the project work. Risk assessment materials are included at the end of this document. Please read these guidelines carefully, to ensure that you submit the correct documentation.

Approved proposals may be audited at random in order to verify that they comply with the ethical requirements/guidelines of Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee.

All applicants should familiarise themselves with the appropriate code of professional ethics e.g. the British Psychological Society's *Code of Human Research Ethics* (2011) (available to download at www.bps.org.uk); the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's *Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (2002) (available to download at www.bacp.co.uk); and the Health Professions Council's Standards of conduct, performance and ethics (2008) available to down load at www.hpc-uk.org). Applicants should also familiarise themselves with the Data Protection Act (1998). Information and guidance on this is provided by the Information Commissioner's Office (available at: www.ico.gov.uk) – and also the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (2005) (available to download at: www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyandGuidance/ResearchandDevelopment).

Consistent with BPS and BACP guidance, ethical conduct needs to be viewed as a process. Hence, ethical matters should be continually reviewed and addressed throughout the course of the project and in consultation with your research supervisor. If there are significant changes to your research design, you should consider the ethical implications of these changes and consider also, in consultation with your research supervisor, whether formal ethical approval needs to be obtained again.

Before completing this form you should discuss the ethical implications of your research with your research supervisor.

Statement of ethical approval

Candidates should append the ethics approval letter to their research report. Candidates should not start data collection until ethical approval has been obtained from Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee.

Statutory data collected as part of a candidate's employment

Candidates do not need to seek approval for the collection of data obtained as part of their normal professional work roles and under statutory powers. However, should a candidate intend to use the data to address a research question outside their 'normal work role' ethical approval will be required. Permission for the access to and use of the data for research

Research Ethics Form and Participant's Information Form version 1 July 2011

1.1. Applicant's name: Georgina Berrow

1.2. Email address: berrowg@gmail.com

1.3. Telephone number: 00 41 22 739 79 45

1.4. Research supervisor name, qualifications and contact details:

Dr. Jenifer Elton Wilson, D.Prof. (Middlesex)
Metanoia Institute
00 44 20 8579 2505
jenifer@elton-wilson.co.uk

1.5 Institution/contact details (if applicable):

Metanoia Institute
13 North Common Road, Ealing, London W5 2QB
Tel: 00 44 208 579 2505

1.6 Do you have any external funding for this project? Yes No (please circle)

If yes, please provide brief details including the name of the funding body:

1.7. Project title:

The transition into retirement of humanitarian aid workers – a narrative study

1.8. Start & End date

February 2013 – December 2013

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

	YES	NO	N/A
1. Will you describe the research procedures in advance to participants so that they are informed about what to expect? Please attach a copy of any recruitment letters and information sheet to be used.	✓		
2. Is the project based on voluntary participation?	✓		
3. Will you obtain written consent for participation?	✓		
4. If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?			✓
5. Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason and inform them of how they may withdraw?	✓		
6. Will you ensure that participants are not subtly induced, either to participate initially, or to remain in the project?	✓		
7. Will you give participants the option of omitting questions from interviews or questionnaires that they do not want to answer?	✓		
8. Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	✓		
9. Have you made provision for the safe-keeping of written data or video/audio recordings?	✓		
10. Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation?			✓
11. Have you ensured that your research is culture/belief/ social system sensitive and that every precaution has been taken to ensure the dignity, respect and safety of the participants?	✓		

If you have answered 'NO' to any of the questions listed in 1 to 11 above, then please provide further details on a separate page and attach it to this application.
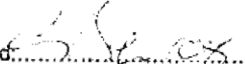
	YES	NO	N/A
12. Does your research involve offering inducement to participate (e.g. payment or other reward)?		✓	
13. Is there a realistic risk of any participant experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If YES, what will you tell them to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help.)*	✓		
14. Is there an existing relationship between the researcher and any of the research participants? If YES, please describe the ethical implications and the safeguards in place to minimise risks.*	✓		
15. Will the project involve working with children under 16 years of age? If YES, please describe parental consent and safeguarding procedures.		✓	
16. Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way? If YES, please explain why this is necessary.		✓	

17. Will you need to obtain ethical approval from any other organisation or source? If YES, please attach letter confirming their ethical approval.	√		
18. Are there any other ethical considerations in relation to your project that you wish to bring to the attention of the Research Ethics Committee that are not covered by the above? If YES, please describe on a separate sheet.		√	

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the questions listed under 12 to 18 above, then please provide further details on a separate page and attach it to this application.*

CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I have read the BACP and the BPS guidelines for ethical practices in research and have discussed this project with my research supervisor in the context of these guidelines. I confirm that I have also undertaken a risk assessment with my research supervisor:

Signed:................................   Georgina Berrow...Date...1st of February 2013

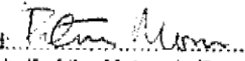RESEARCH SUPERVISOR DECLARATION

- As supervisor or principal investigator for this research study I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that researchers/candidates under my supervision undertake a risk assessment to ensure that health and safety of themselves, participants and others is not jeopardised during the course of this study.
- I confirm that I have seen and signed a risk assessment for this research study and to the best of my knowledge appropriate action has been taken to minimise any identified risks or hazards.
- I understand that, where applicable, it is my responsibility to ensure that the study is conducted in a manner that is consistent with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (see http://www.wma.net/e/policy/b3.htm).
- I confirm that I have reviewed all of the information submitted as part of this research ethics application.
- I agree to participate in committee's auditing procedures for research studies if requested.

Signed:......................Dr Jenifer Elton Wilson   Date 1st February 2013
(Supervisor)

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

This project has been considered by the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee and is now approved.

Signed:..................Print name..............   Date...1/2/13
(On behalf of the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee)

Please note that the Metanoia Research Committee meets twice during each academic year. Submissions between these meetings are dealt with by chair's action in consultation with one other committee member

METANOIA INSTITUTE & MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

CO-RESEARCHER INFORMATION SHEET

The transition into retirement of humanitarian aid workers – a narrative study

Invitation to participate

My name is Georgina Berrow and I am a career management advisor in the career management support section, DHRM, XXX, Geneva. I am currently studying for a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy with the Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University. As part of this programme I would like to research the experience you have had as you have moved into retirement after a career with XXX.

I would like to invite you to take part in this study but before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The results of this study may help shape future organizational policy in relation to people approaching retirement age and also in relation to those at an earlier stage of their career. I anticipate submitting a summarized concept paper based on this research to the policy section of XXX to further this aim.

The results may complement the design of training preparing workers for field missions in remote duty stations. The staff welfare section is the sponsor of this research and responsible for this element of staff care. I anticipate making findings available to the section in a useful, anonymized, format which may facilitate this aim.

If all goes well, this research will be completed by the Summer of 2016

Why have you been chosen?

I have contacted you because you are among the professional staff members who have retired from XXX during the last four years and who have rotated during your career. My intention is to contact as many people as possible in this group gradually.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is absolutely voluntary. There is no obligation whatsoever to take part.
If you do decide to, you are asked to keep this information form and to read carefully the consent form which appears below. You would then need to contact me, Georgina, using the following e-mail berrow@xxx.org . I will, by return mail, send you some guidelines for writing your story and a link to an on line questionnaire, accessible only to me, where I will ask you to complete some biographical information and also indicate that you have read and understood the information concerning this research and agree to be a co-researcher. It is important that you take this step so that I am sure that you are aware of important information and whether I can contact you in the future to follow up with you personally.

If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I will contact you and ask you, firstly, to complete a short on line questionnaire as described above and then, secondly to write a story about your experience of your transition into retirement.

I will then analyse your story using narrative analysis. This is a way of reading stories which takes into account their form and structure and preserves their integrity and so is respectful to the experience of the writer. Experiences in retirement are the culmination of a whole life and a storied approach to capturing the complexities of this seems most appropriate. I anticipate making contrasts and comparisons between the ways co-researchers make sense of retirement and how they have integrated their life experience in their stories.

If you are in agreement and once I have received and read your story I would like to contact you by telephone to explore aspects of your experience in more detail. These calls will not last longer than 1 hour and will not involve any cost to you.

Please note that for quality assurance purposes and equity this project may be selected for audit by a designated member of the Middlesex University ethics committee. This means that the designated member can request to see consent forms where you have indicated your acceptance to participate. However, if this is the case, your consent form will only be accessed by the designated auditor or member of the audit team.

What will you have to do?

As mentioned, you will need to complete a short biographical questionnaire and write a story of your transition into retirement. You can make this story the length you like. It can be long or short. It can cover the period of your career from just before your retirement to the present or it can

cover the period of your entire career. You need to return this story to me by e-mail in a Microsoft Word format.

Research shows that people are able to give a clearer and more in depth idea of their experiences if they can write their stories rather than answer specific questions. When they answer specific questions they can be restricted in the areas they communicate.

Bearing this in mind, I would like to ask you to write a story which would have the following title:

My experience of retirement

This is not a test of your writing ability; it is simply a way for me to understand how you are experiencing your retirement and how you find meaning, purpose and identity as a retiree. You may start and end your story where you feel it makes most sense to do so. Your story may begin before you left XXX and continue until the present. It may not begin until several months after leaving the organization and may end in the past. It is completely up to you. It is better, however to describe some of your working experiences and how these have affected your transition into retirement.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

In principle there are no risks or disadvantages to taking part in this research.

Very exceptionally, you may find that after writing your story or while you are writing it, thoughts or feelings may emerge which you may need to talk through with someone. There is a list of XXX´s regional welfare officers below and you are free to contact the person who is nearest to you if this should be the case.

Staff Welfare Contact	Countries
D. S. suzic@xxx.org	All representatives and chiefs of Missions
M. M. mimica@xxx.org	Algeria, Egypt, Georgia, Iraq, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Palestinian Territory, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Syria, Uzbekistan, Yemen
Staff Welfare Officer, HQ	Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, Panama, Venezuela
K. A. ahamdk@xxx.org	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papa New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste
A. K. kodo@xxx.org	Chad, Congo, DRC, Gabon
L. E. ewagata@xxx.org	Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Kenya, Somalia, S. Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
C. R. raymond@xxx.org	Benin, Burkina Fasso, Cameroon, CAR, Cote d´Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Western Sahara

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. I will store your stories, my analysis of them and my completed study in my computer only. This will be accessible only by me and using a password only known to me.

I will anonymize your stories if they are included in any summary or written report so that you cannot be recognised as the writer. To do this I may change some details in these stories such as the geographical location or use pseudonyms for you and the people you may mention. I will do this unless you explicitly tell me that you would like me not to.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

This research will be published as part of my doctoral dissertation. You will not be identified in any way in this dissertation. As mentioned above, I will also be preparing a summarized version of the results of this research for distribution to the Staff Welfare Section and the HR policy section at XXX. You will be able to obtain a copy of these summaries by contacting me and letting me know that you would like one.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed by:

1. My research supervisor, Dr Jenifer Elton Wilson,

2. XXX XXX, Chief of Staff Welfare Section, XXXX,

4. The Metanoia Research Ethics Committee.

Contact for further information

If you would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor using the following details:

Researcher: Georgina Berrow, Career Management Support Section, (CMSS) XXX
E-mail: berrow@xxx.org, Tel: 00 41 22 739 7945

Research supervisor: Dr Jenifer Elton Wilson, Metanoia Institute, West Ealing, London
E-mail: jenifer@elton-wilson.co.uk Tel: 00 44 20 8579 2505

I would like to thank you very much for participating in this research!

APPENDIX 3: EXAMPLE OF INVITATION E-MAIL SENT TO CO-RESEARCHERS

Dear XXXX,

We have met briefly on some of your visits to XXXX, Geneva and we had some interesting conversations on the realities of a career in XXXXX and your experience now that you are retired. I am contacting you again in the hope that this message reaches you safely.

As we discussed, XXX is an organization which demands many sacrifices from its employees during their working lives. These are perhaps greater than those required of others who are not engaged in humanitarian work. Long absences from family and friends are usual, together with constant renegotiation of relationships with them. Time spent in difficult working and living conditions is also part of the picture.

The time of life when the impact of a career spent this way may be the greatest is during the transition from full time work to retirement. I would like to find out more about this. To do so, I would like to invite you to participate in a research project I am carrying out as a student on a doctoral programme in counseling psychology. The research is sponsored by my university (University for Middlesex, U.K.)

I would like you to share with me your story of retirement. Your contribution would be entirely anonymous and would not be shared with the organization in any way which would make your identification possible, unless you specify explicitly otherwise. The results of the research will help understand the way in which you make sense of retirement in your life and perhaps inform future policy concerning the support we offer to our retiring workers.

If you would like to participate, and I hope you will, I would like to ask you first to read the information sheet attached to this mail so that you understand the research fully. I hope any questions you may have will be answered there but, if this is not the case, please, do not hesitate to contact me directly to ask any questions you may have. If you are happy with this information, I would ask you to contact me indicating this. I will then send you instructions for completing a more formal consent form and some biographical questions to answer. Then I hope you will feel ready to go ahead with writing your retirement story.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this invitation and the attached information. I hope to hear from you soon.

Kind regards,

APPENDIX 4: CONSENT FORM AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

* 1. Please provide me with your contact details so that I can contact you in the future by telephone or e-mail, if you are in agreement with this.

Name:

Address 1:

Address 2:

City/Town:

State/Province:

ZIP/Postal Code:

Country:

Email Address: Phone

Number:

* 2. I have read and understood the information sheet which accompanied the invitation to participate and I agree to participate.

⬭ Yes ⬭ No

* 3. I am happy for you to contact me in the near future by telephone or e-mail using the details I have provided. (In this communication we would discuss your story in more detail)

◯ Yes ◯ No

I would now like to ask you a series of biographical questions:

1. What was your nationality at birth?

[   ]

* 5. In which country were you born?

[   ]

* 6. What is your date of birth?

[   ]

* 7. How long have you been in retirement?

[   ]

* 8. At what age did you retire?

[   ]

* 9. How long did you work for XXX before retirement?

[   ]

* 10. How long did you work in other humanitarian organizations during your career prior to retirement?

[   ]

* 11. How many years did you spend in hardship (D to E category) duty stations both with XXX and other organizations?

[   ]

* 13. Where are you living during retirement? (Please choose from the following options)

⃝ In my country of origin

⃝ In a country of my adopted nationality

⃝ In a country of my partner´s origin or nationality

⃝ In another country

⃝ I spend my time in 2 or more countries

Other (please specify)

☐

* 14. How many children do you have?

☐

Other (please specify)

☐

* 15. Do your children currently live near you ? (within 100km)

☐ Yes

☐ No

* 16. For what percentage of your career did you leave your family in a location which was not your work location? (Please give an approximate number)

☐

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire and for agreeing to participate in this research. I hope you will now be able to find time to share your story of retirement with me. You will need to write your story according to the guidance which appears at the end of the invitation mail, include your name and then send it to me, Georgina, at berrow@XXX.org.