

Portrait of a sojourner academic: Reconstructing professional identity in a xenophobic context

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Abstract

This study set out to explore how the resettlement of an African female immigrant academic in a new country and her repositioning in a foreign academic context influenced the reconstruction of her professional identity. A qualitative constructivist lens and a phenomenological case study approach was utilised. Data capture included a mix of semi-structured interviews, field notes, and a researcher journal and was analysed by means of the content analysis method. Findings revealed the use of language as an instrument of exclusion; and, the juxtaposition between a continental identity and rejection. This study recommends that induction programmes intended for sojourner academics at higher education institutions should be thoughtfully designed and that the complete journey of sojourner academics should be taken into consideration to ensure proper management thereof through appropriate policies. [129]

Keywords: African female immigrant academic, professional identity, reconstruction, South Africa, xenophobia

Introduction and background context

The political, economic, social and educational landscape of South Africa has changed quite dramatically since the country's first democratic elections in 1994. One of the most obvious changes has been the relaxation of the country's immigration policy and the consequent arrival of immigrants from the rest of the African continent (Vandeyar & Vandeyar 2011). One reason for this is the perception that South Africa is a relatively stable country (Chigeza 2012), with an established economy. The majority of these immigrants have successfully gained access to all spheres of the South African labour force (Kalitanyi & Visser 2010), most noticeably that of the education sphere, and in particular higher education. South Africa's higher education landscape reflects the ensuing change of citizenry as African immigrant academics are appointed at institutions throughout South Africa.

These appointments often reflect South Africa's attempts to internationalise its higher education institutions through, *inter alia*, policy changes, an internationalised curriculum, and diversification by means of the appointment of international staff. African immigrant academics are thus welcomed in these host institutions where they are expected to contribute to the internationalised edge of disciplinary competence and to facilitate learning experiences of an increasingly diverse student body (Harrison & Peacock 2010).

South Africa's social, cultural, linguistic, and education contexts represent a reality which differs extensively from their countries of origin. As immigrants, they follow a process of adapting to

the host society and its peculiarities. As immigrant academics, they follow a process of reconstructing their professional identities at the host institution and within the South African higher education context. This reconstruction process may be influenced by numerous factors.

A review of the voluminous literature reveals that immigrant academics engage with various challenges regarding transition, social differences, and diverse mindsets. There is “an almost complete discursive silence with regard to the experiences of staff with a migrant history” (Mählck, 2013: 66). An abundance of research exists on various aspects of migration, and yet “little research has been done on immigrant scholars” (Walker, 2015: 64). The dearth of literature, combined with the changed landscape of South Africa, provided the initial impetus for this study. Accordingly, this study asks how does an African female immigrant academic against the background of an unfamiliar host country reconstruct her professional identity within the host institution.

The portrait of one immigrant academic is therefore sketched in this paper. The focus on a particular individual from the broader study was necessitated by her decidedly specific journey. Her compelling account related the complexities regarding her gender, her immigrant status, and her academic profile. Her professional identity reconstruction process is described through a variety of discourses. The crafting of a professional identity occurs as a response to individuals with which an academic engages, and to a wide array of experiences (Marks & Thompson, 2010). Her personal journey also received attention as identity is profoundly connected to an individual’s complete interaction with the world (Billot 2010). Although the frame around the portrait is an enclosure which reveals Kileen as a 46 year-old academic from Kenya, her portrait reveals a decidedly individual journey. The research question of the broader study was: How do Black immigrant academics reconstruct their professional identities at a South African university

of technology? Secondary research questions focused on transitional factors of the migratory process which affect an immigrant academic's personal and professional well-being; the influence of collegial and student interactions on professional identity reconstruction; and, the process of navigating issues of inclusion and exclusion within the host society and the host institution. Responding to these research questions are deemed significant as our world becomes "increasingly migratory" (Samuel 2010: 108), and our higher education institutions function progressively in an "international and intercultural context" (Hamza 2010: 52).

This paper presents Kileen's journey of professional identity reconstruction in a xenophobic context. Her academic sojourner status reflects her journey from Kenya to the United Kingdom and then to South Africa. Her immigrant status exposed her to the hardships of migration and the "psychological impact of acculturative stress" (Samuel 2009: 16). The xenophobic reception accentuates some South African mindsets which, according to Facchini, Mayda and Mendola (2013:327) "have become increasingly hostile to foreigners". These mindsets are reflected in occurrences and experiences in both the host society and the host institution. This paper will follow a structure to figuratively sketch her particular portrait and present the ensuing argument. We outline the background to place the study within selected parameters. This is followed by a review of the literature to build the argument on scholarly debate. The theoretical frameworks and research strategy of the study are presented. We describe the findings and the subsequent analysis thereof. The study concludes with recommendations for policies and practices which govern the journeys of sojourner academics.

The immigrant academic as a wandering scholar¹

An immigrant academic's personal and professional well-being is described in the reviewed literature as having an influence on her capability and functioning (Kolapo 2009). This study considers the reconstruction of professional identity by first placing the immigrant academic within the context of human movement. Second, we define the concept professional identity according to the literature and discuss its reconstruction process as it pertains to immigrant academics in higher education. Third, we consult the literature on the xenophobic reception which immigrant academics are often exposed to in South Africa.

The context: the wandering scholar and human movement

Human movement is a global phenomenon existing since the beginning of mankind. People have always moved in search of an improved existence and an increased quality of life; what Isike and Isike (2012: 94) describe as “greener pastures”. Against this background of migration, Flum and Cinamon (2011: 377) refer to the “otherness” of the host society and consider how immigrant academics would navigate the stressful balance between inclusion and exclusion. The tension of dealing adequately with unfamiliar social and cultural behaviours in the host society results in the reviewed literature focusing primarily on immigrant academics “struggles” (Abla 2012: 3). In addition to issues of migration related to hardships, “resolving inconsistencies between incompatible social expectations” (Roccas, Schwartz & Amit 2010: 399), and status within the host community, Haste (2009: 10) notes that “immigration has identity issues”. Identity, according to Marks and Thompson (2010: 10), “is not limited to the influence of one group but is created and amended as a response to the whole range of people who engage with workers.

¹ A form of this literature review first appeared in Vandeyar, S, 2019. *Migrating Selves: Reconstructing and renegotiating Black immigrant academic identities*. Higher Education Research and Development, (in press).

Individuals therefore “construct their social selves within the everyday realities that they inhabit” (Clarke, Hyde & Drennan 2013: 8). The reconstruction of a professional identity occurs against the background of collegiality and a “collective identity” (Billot 2010: 710).

The concept: the wandering scholar and professional identity

Definitions of professional identity usually focus on its fluidity and continual “re-interpretation of experiences” (Clarke et al. 2013: 9). The fluidity of professional identity is established within a process where an “individual interprets, adapts and remodels behaviour” (Billot 2010: 713) and with “the interplay of the agency of the individual with the structures and boundaries that they encounter” (Whitchurch & Gordon, 2010: 129). The combination of professional identity with migration results in processes where immigrant academics reconstruct their professional identities within host institutions and host societies. Weinreich (2009: 125) notes that “the matter of cultural experience is an issue of personal identity development and reformulation”. An uprooted individual might therefore experience the intricate connection between culture and identity reconstruction as debilitating and as taking “its toll on the formation of African identity”. (Eno & Eno, 2010: 61). Although Larner (2015) emphasises the internationalisation of higher education, and Liu and Jernigan (2012: 505) consider the significance of “foreignness as a resource”, immigrant academics are not always treated professionally. Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo (2011: 167) mention immigrant academics who were “met with opposition” and who experienced an “unwelcoming climate”. In South Africa this hostility has an added layer of complexity as African immigrant academics are often inextricably labeled as “foreigners” and could be exposed to a xenophobic reception. Facchini et al. (2013: 327) note that, “while the official rhetoric has turned pro-migration, South African voters have become

increasingly hostile to foreigners”. Establishing a professional identity thus has an added layer of complexity.

The crisis: the wandering scholar and a xenophobic reception

Although xenophobia is defined as being “contemptuous of that which is foreign, especially of strangers or of people from different countries or cultures” (Fayomi, Chidozi & Ayo 2015:1), the xenophobic discourse in South Africa typecasts African migrants as “a threat to the economic, social and cultural rights and entitlements of citizens” (Crush & Ramachandran 2010: 216). African migrants are stereotyped as foreigners and are often mistreated, vilified and insulted (Mail & Guardian 2015). The emotionally charged and derogatory term *makwerekwere* is “selectively used to describe only African ... foreigners” in South Africa (Umezurike & Isike 2013: 54). The term was “originally used to describe foreignness, in particular the strange sounds of foreign languages, especially languages spoken by African foreigners in South Africa” (Umezurike & Isike 2013: 54). In South Africa, xenophobia is “not restricted to a dislike of foreigners” (Harris 2002: 170). Mail and Guardian (2015) note that, while most societies mete out “anti-immigrant hostility”, South Africa is unique in its “ferocious mob violence against fellow Africans”. This is not just a case of being suspicious of the unfamiliar, but it raises questions about South African society and the elements of “hatred and prejudice against foreigners” (Singh 2013: 53). The presence of African immigrant academics at South African higher education institutions should ignite the discourse about internationalisation and global perspectives. However, it frequently “raises controversial comments and debates” (Kalitanyi & Visser 2010: 376).

Theoretical Moorings

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986) was selected as the most applicable theory to support the focus on professional identity reconstruction. Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan 2000) was used to consider the perspective of the study on xenophobic reception.

Advocates of social identity theory postulate that the careful interplay between individual uniqueness and group membership is an integral part of identity. Social identity theory discusses an individual's sense of being a member of certain groups (Feitosa, Salas & Salazar 2012: 529). This cultural complexity is structured as social categorisation, social identification and social comparison. Self-esteem is maintained by the positive identification with the memberships to selected groups.

Integrated threat theory considers four identified threats namely, realistic; symbolic; intergroup anxiety and negative stereotyping that are “used to predict attitudes towards out-groups” (Stephan & Stephan 2000: 27). Realistic threats are perceived as real threats which threaten the survival of the in-group and often revolve around identity and resources while symbolic threats focus on the worldview of the in-group. Symbolic threats highlight perceived differences among; inter alia, the beliefs, attitudes, and moral values of the two groups. Intergroup anxiety considers the abovementioned threats as focused purely from the viewpoint of the social group and translates it into the uneasiness and severe emotions experienced by the in-group. The emotional anxiety and anticipation of some negative action from the out-group leads to prejudice between the disagreeing groups (Harrison & Peacock 2010). As the negative attitude of the in-group towards the out-group increases it leads to negative stereotyping. Negative stereotypes create “the fear of negative consequences” (Stephan & Stephan, 2000: 27) which is the essence of the threat.

Research Strategy

Meta-theoretically we were drawn to the tenets that govern social constructivism as our worldview. Methodologically the lens we utilised was that of phenomenology, which describes the development of a phenomenon in relation to how an individual experiences it (Hammersley 2012). The research design was a qualitative case study and employed the narrative method. The case for the study was defined by an institution with Black immigrant academics. The site of this research study was Freedom University of Technology. The research sample of the broader study was fifteen immigrant academics and was varied in terms of, ethnicity, gender and years in the South African academe. Purposive sampling (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2005) was utilised to recruit participants across all faculties of Freedom University of Technology namely, Education; Management Sciences; Science; Arts; Humanities; Economics and Finance; Information Technology and Engineering and the Build Environment. This paper reports on the data captured from one of these immigrant academics.

Data capture comprised a mix of semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes and a researcher journal. Semi-structured interviews were used to provide an opportunity for academics to share and reflect upon their experiences as well as to bring new meanings of change and growth in their lives. Each interview was approximately an hour in duration. Follow-up interviews were conducted for clarification or elaboration of certain issues that arose in the first interview. Participants were also observed during the interview process and during informal settings. Data was analysed utilising qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014, Stan, 2010). Codes were generated from the data and continuously modified by the researcher's treatment of the data 'to accommodate new data and new insights about the data' (Sandelowski

2000, 338). This was a reflexive and an interactive process that yielded extensive codes and themes. Multiple readings of the data were conducted, organizing codes and themes into higher levels of categories within and across the interviews, observations, and other sources of data (Merriam 1998). Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Education. The ethics application went through a rigorous blind peer review process (Lindsay, 2010). Pseudonyms were given to the research site and to participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Findings

Findings that emerged from the study can be categorised as follows namely, the hardships of human movement; unfamiliar cultural behaviours of the host society and the professional context; influences that hindered or enhanced professional identity reconstruction and a xenophobic ethos of reception.

Hardships of Human Movement

The process of immigration is often accompanied by complex transitional factors which may result in quite an ordeal for immigrants. Samuel (2009) comments on the anxiety which co-exists with the assimilation of the peculiar behaviours of the host culture into the immigrants' own distinct conduct. Immigrant academics are not spared these transitional difficulties which can be distressing. Kileen's decision to move to South Africa was based on academic progression. She considered the benefit of an intra-continental move, particularly the advantage of emigrating with her infant child: "The scholarship, although small, was manageable ... I had the enthusiasm to come". The reality was however not as effortless, as she had to sell all her possessions and move into a garage on someone else's property: "I sold everything ... I ended up in a garage, living in a garage ...". The isolation she experienced was particularly pronounced during

weekends: "...because I never visited anyone". She described the weekends as "the time you feel so homesick ... I just want to go home ..."

Most immigrants endure hardships during transitions and Kileen's journey reflected these hardships. The female role resulted in added responsibility during the migration process, specifically because of her single-mother status. Shaw and Rowe (2012: 10) concur with this gendered perspective on migration "family responsibilities ... make this a disproportionately difficult choice for women".

Unfamiliar cultural behaviours of the host society and the professional context

Kileen expressed immense pride in her ethnic roots and indicated that she continues to identify with her home country: "I'm from Kenya; I'm still a Kenyan". A cautious interplay thus resulted in the way she honoured her background while reconstructing her professional identity in the host country. She commented on her international experience as being directly responsible for her perspective as not overtly focused on cultural differences: "Actually culture is not an issue with me ...". However, certain issues were relayed which she experienced as alienating from South African society. Kileen remarked, for example, that her individual dress style differs from social norms she experienced which made her uncomfortable: "There is no way I can wear sleeveless ... I cannot wear miniskirts, I cannot wear very tight clothes... I can call it a culture because where I come from this is how we dress ... Their [South African] dressing is inappropriate ... according to my value system." She expressed her discomfort at the familiarity of strangers and the intimacy of some exchanges she experienced in South Africa.

As you walk along the men that see you, the black men, ... they are like hey lovey... it was so strange for me and this man, is on the roof there, doing some repairs and you are walking, he shouts I love you.

Kileen mentioned her first encounter at a South African gym and shared her shock of the open nakedness of the ladies in the cloakrooms. Her friends informed her that this was common practice because “she is a woman like you”. One of the friends referred to her as “being backward” because of her perspective. She found this nonchalant attitude towards nakedness as a blatant disregard for dignified behavior and regarded such conduct as improper “I don’t want to be near anybody else’s nakedness”.

She was also irritated by what she regards as a South African custom of blame. In conversations with South Africans and their inclination to accuse and assign blame, she tends to question them: “... what did you do? Yes, don’t blame anyone. It is your personal journey; it is your own contributions to your own life”.

These unfamiliar behaviours could influence the professional identity reconstruction process as professional identity is fundamentally related to cultural identity. Clifford and Henderson (2011) note that the transformation to a dissimilar professional identity does not just include career aspects. Immigrant academics’ feel a sense of “cultural dislocation” as they struggle with cultural protocols within a host society (Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010: 295).

Influences that hinder and enhance professional identity reconstruction

Positive and negative influences surfaced in regard to immigrant academic’s interactions with colleagues and students. With regard to students, Kileen recollected her own “very poor background” and explained how she viewed this as a favourable circumstance to connect with the reality of her South African students: “... so when I teach and somebody talks of townships and all this, I know what it is”. Her consciousness regarding issues of diversity has been intensified because of her international background. Migration has a “potentially beneficial

component” (Kalitanyi & Visser 2010: 377) and her consciousness regarding diversity may benefit her students’ experiences.

Although Kileen noted that the students’ conduct is not particular to South African students: “I think students are students everywhere ... they will always be late for classes and all this”, she expressed concern about what she perceived as the students’ lackadaisical attitude. “Students do not take studies seriously”. A significant concept of student loyalty was however revealed when Kileen relayed occurrences where she was treated inconsiderately by colleagues and how her students’ responded: “... but let me tell you right now, my students fight for me”. She shared her true professional delight: “... when my students pass, that is my joy”.

Kolapo (2009: 22) notes that “immigrants’ speech and how it sounds are easily assailed with jeer and contempt”. A dominant opinion about immigrant academics is that “linguistic problems create teaching ineffectiveness” (Abla 2012: 34), and immigrant academics often have low confidence in their English proficiency and proper pronunciation (Zacharias 2010: 40). Kileen regards her pronunciation as a possible barrier to her clarity of communication. Although she indicated that her students never complained that they could not understand her, she was acutely aware of her accent.

Collegial interactions were more tumultuous. Derogatory remarks were xenophobic in nature and were made within the professional context by colleagues. There was also opposition to her appointment and insinuations that she had taken a South African’s job: “Initially when I came here there was resistance ... I was aware of it ... the post was there, I did not shoot anyone”. Kileen experienced this animosity as unfair and noted that academic institutions are open to any academic who wants to pursue an academic career. Pressures of an overwhelming workload

within the department led to ensuing conflict with her Head of Department. She perceived this as being based on a biased system of work distribution: “I don’t think he is treating me fairly”. When she was asked to fulfill a managerial role her colleagues again responded with resistance. This was a decidedly negative experience for her. She apportioned these professional experiences and the adverse tension of her collegial interactions to her position as an outsider.

Issues of quality in the institution and within the South African higher education system were of concern for Kileen. Her view on the continuous process of lifelong learning caused her to question the attitudes of some colleagues: “... the mentality of some people, like I have reached my strength in 1970 ... I am not learning anymore ... People have to change their way of doing things. They have to up-skill themselves, they have to learn new things, get new challenges”. She questioned this complacent mindset and indicated that she could not identify with such a perspective on learning. She again referred to the animosity regarding her appointment in this regard and questioned certain colleagues’ perception of excellence with reference to their unwillingness to pursue further qualifications.

Although all components of a personal transitional journey, and its accompanying challenges, define some part of the professional identity reconstruction process, the occupational environment is integral to professional identity reconstruction. Kreber (2010:172) claims that the “immediate social context is characterised by their departmental and disciplinary communities”. It is therefore disconcerting to note that Kileen did not share any positive influences which could have enhanced collegial interaction. She noted dissimilar viewpoints and hostility. She experienced depreciating language and distrust. Her relationships with her colleagues never extended beyond the professional environment.

A xenophobic reception

Immigrants present “an easy target for those who are simply intolerant of foreigners” (Abla, 2012: 37). Not only was Kileen frequently treated in a dismissive manner, but she was treated with condescending contempt within the host society and the host institution. During a taxi commute she sat next to the driver and was unfamiliar with the role of the passenger in that seat who is responsible for taxi fee collection. The taxi driver reacted with furious annoyance towards her ignorance of the taxi-fare system and drove her to a remote destination from where she was forced to use another taxi to get to her destination. She expressed, “I am really shocked by the unfriendliness of people towards foreigners ...” Kileen elaborated on this by sharing an incident where a taxi driver snubbed her by refusing to address her in English: “... he said, what language are you speaking, you are Black? ... He did not like it; he continued speaking in his own language”. He insisted speaking irately in a language she did not understand. Kileen remembers this as “a very bad experience” and shared her anxiety: “... this was a bit hostile because I don’t speak the language and it is going to be dangerous for me”. He later commented in English,

Why are you here, you people, you people you come here to take our jobs, you take our shops, you take everything. What is wrong with your country? Go back to your country!

The xenophobic reception which awaited Kileen in South Africa was revealed in the host society and in the host institution.

... you are an enemy and nobody wants to speak to you ... they exclude you ... They ignore you, sometimes they even ask what is wrong with your country.

She experienced an incident within the professional context when a colleague referred to her as “makwerekwere”. This derogatory term, as mentioned earlier, is often used in South Africa to describe African foreign nationals residing in South Africa. The situation was exacerbated by the

fact that the colleague was speaking in a language which was unfamiliar to Kileen. Colleagues remarked that she has stolen employment from a South African.

Initially when I came here there was that resistance ... I was aware of it and I could see it ...they would tell each other get your degree, get your masters ... and makwerekwere will not come, but for now I am here, yes ...

Kileen responded to the realities of transition and xenophobia with a personal and professional resilience: “Actually I’m very neutral ... the best thing is do your work and talk less to people and meet your deadlines ... when it’s time to laugh, I laugh with them”. In the same vein she commented about the significance of her career: “... I love my job. I do it to the best of my knowledge. Give it all”! And I always say I don’t want to complain because if I have to complain then I pack up and go. Circumstances of Kileen’s social and professional interactions, and her process of interpreting the dimensions of these relationships, reflect Schatz-Oppenheimer and Kalnisky’s (2014:173) observation that “professional identity has an interpretive nature, formed during an extended process of training and professional experience, and influenced by the individual’s past”. Both the social and professional experiences are relevant during professional identity reconstruction.

Discussion and analysis of findings

Some of the findings on Kileen’s professional identity reconstruction are echoed in the literature. The hardships of human movement are witnessed in Kileen’s transition, especially as it reflected on the added challenges of female immigrant academics. This process involved loneliness, isolation, and hardships, for example, the arrangement of living in a garage with her infant son. Although all human movement involves some hardships, the reviewed literature indicates that women often have added responsibilities and anxieties (Wane 2009). In reference to human movement, Shaw and Rowe (2012: 10) note that “family responsibilities ... make this a

disproportionately difficult choice for women”. In addition to these added responsibilities, Ghosh (2013: 5) notes that “there is also an existence of gendered racism in academia” and Harris (2007: 55) comments on the barriers faced by women in higher education “designed to impede their progress because of their embodiment of a racialized or gendered identity”. These concepts add to the combined challenges experienced by female immigrant academics during their professional identity reconstruction process. Kileen’s specific journey reflects these concerns.

The unfamiliar contexts of the host society and the host institution are reflected in culturally-unaccustomed behaviours (Collins 2008), as Kileen referred to confusing behaviours she encountered. These include, for example, her opinion on appropriate clothing styles for young ladies, her beliefs regarding dignified physical conduct, and her dislike for familiarity among strangers, a familiarity to which she was exposed. This reflects findings in the literature about the culture shock that immigrant academics experience within the host society and the host institution (Maadad 2011; Zacharias 2010).

Influences which both hindered and enhanced professional identity reconstruction were noted. In the host institution Kileen encountered the baffling situation where her origin seemed to be regarded with more importance than her contribution. Kolapo (2009: 16) notes how a female immigrant academic “endured the questioning of her authority, authenticity, and capability as an effective teacher because she was a female immigrant”. Vandeyar (2010: 931) mentions academics’ “eagerness to have their academic identity and intellectual integrity acknowledged and recognised”. Kileen echoed this sentiment by noting that although she believed that she had much to offer her students and colleagues, it disappointed her that her origin frequently received more attention than her competence. Shaikh (2009: 26) notes that “rarely do immigrants seem to be appreciated or observed by their foreign hosts”.

Kileen's professional context and her interactions with her students were not described as being without challenges. Although Zacharias (2010: 40) refers to "students' resistance and negative attitudes", Kileen's interactions with her students reflect a more balanced experience. She commented on their lackadaisical work attitude but also mentioned the joy she experienced while interacting with them.

When considering the selected theoretical frameworks in relation to the analysis of the study's findings, the following was noted. Social identity theory, with its "us" and "them" distinction, framed Kileen's need to belong both personally and professionally (McLeod 2008). Her negative experiences of exclusion and the xenophobic reception which awaited her in South Africa could have positioned her professional identity in disarray (Saltmarsh and Swirski 2010). Since, identity refers to self-reflexive meaning-making in connection to "development and is sustained [through] processes of social interaction" (Brown 2014: 4), Kileen's isolation could have influenced her process of professional identity reconstruction. With regard to the tenets of social identity theory it was noted, first, that social categorisation regards topics according to social groupings and reflects Kileen's attempts to interpret unfamiliar social conduct within the host context. Second, group memberships are regarded as significant when considering social identity. Saltmarsh and Swirski (2010: 295) refer to "cultural dislocation" and this is noted when Kileen experienced a lack of shared cultural connections. Her social identity contributed to her professional identity reconstruction (Clarke et al. 2013). Third, Kileen's experiences reflected inclusionary as well as exclusionary group behaviour. Although her lack of familiarity with, for example, accepted South African social conduct excluded her from group social identities, her professional skills and personal resolve assured some degree of a social identity. Fourth, a positive social identity's key objective is to preserve self-esteem. Trepte (2006: 260) describes

self-esteem as a “consequence of having fulfilled the need to know more about oneself” and Willets and Clarke (2014: 167) assert that the “evaluation of the individual’s level of respect within the group, rather than evaluation of the group as a whole, has an effect on the individual’s self-esteem”. Kileen’s focus on the power of resilience assisted in reconstructing her professional identity.

In reference to integrated threat theory and Kileen’s experiences, it is significant to note the realistic and symbolic threats perceived by the in-group as well as the concepts of intergroup anxiety and negative stereotyping. All four of these “threats” consider the fears of the in-group as they are perceived to be posed by the out-group, and are therefore “used to predict attitudes towards out-groups” (Stephan & Stephan 2000: 27). These threats consider first, realistic threats, where her mere existence posed threats to survival of the in-group. Second, symbolic threats, which reflected perceived group differences. Both these threats were noted in accusations against Kileen that she needs to go home, that she is taking a South African’s job, that she should not converse in English in society because she is Black, and that she is backward. Third, the intergroup anxiety indicated that she was perceived as threatening the “very existence of the in-group” (Stephan & Stephan 2000: 25) by being different, and fourth, the essence of all these threats accumulated in the creation of negative stereotypes by referring to Kileen as “makwerekwere”, typecasting her as part of the out-group.

Two findings regarding Kileen as a sojourner academic engaging in professional identity reconstruction emerged from the study that is not evident in the reviewed literature and serves to push the boundaries back in this field of study namely, language as an instrument of exclusion in the South African context; and, the juxtaposition of continental identity and rejection.

Language as an instrument of exclusion

Kileen's lack of indigenous language knowledge did not impact negatively on her professional expertise and abilities. Her accent, although noticeably different from the "mainstream host society" (Kolapo 2009: 22), was not regarded as a barrier to clarity of communication by her students and her colleagues. She was, however, exposed to language as an instrument of exclusion where colleagues in the professional context and individuals in the host society communicated in languages she did not know, thereby deliberately excluding her from conversations. In her professional context, where English is the official language of the institution, colleagues would continue to speak in an indigenous South African language in her presence, knowing that this conduct would exclude her from the conversation. It was during one of these conversations that the term "makwerekwere" was used to describe her, as a colleague later explained to her. Such deliberate exclusion indicates the power of language to depreciate people. South Africa's language situation exhibits complicated dimensions. Cummins (2015: 274) mentions the "linguistically and historically complex context that is South Africa". This complexity echoes South Africa's history where language is charged with emotional implications. Kileen experienced this inference as a premeditated deterrent to social and professional integration.

The complexity of juxtaposition: Continental identity and rejection

It was puzzling for Kileen to recognise the alleged African philosophy of "ubuntu", a continental identity dedicated to the collective good, the "respect for the dignity of personhood" (Higgs & Moeketsi (2012: 148), while being exposed to mistreatment and hostility. Kileen was caught between the "ethical dimension" of African identity (Ndubuisi 2013: 229) and the threat of a xenophobic reception in the South African context. Xenophobia has a "contemporary relevance"

(Van den Berg 2014: 1) connected to the increase in migration. In South Africa, however, it is not restricted to the “fear and dislike of foreigners” (Laher 2008: 10), but is reflected in “harassment, intimidation, and abuse by citizens, employers, and law enforcement agencies” (Gomo 2010: 6), and by extension to institutional culture and climate. Kileen’s fear of being in danger when she was in situations where she was identified as a foreigner and treated with hostility and anger was not exaggerated. The juxtaposition of a continental identity and simultaneous rejection creates an uncertain experience, intimidating due to its unpredictability. Kileen experienced rejection both in the wider host society and in the host institution. Hostility, collegial disregard, and xenophobic incidents influenced her professional identity reconstruction. Although professional identity centres on the institution and the discipline, Clegg (2008: 329) reminds us that identity focuses on “how people understand their personhood and ways of being in the world”. Individual identities form the framework where social identities are constructed and these again inform the identity of work (Marks & Thompson 2010), or in the narrative of this paper, professional identity.

Conclusion and recommendations

We sketched Kileen’s portrait as she journeyed between reconstructing her professional identity at a South African higher education institution while simultaneously dealing with the reality of a xenophobic reception. Her journey has been portrayed as a “wandering scholar” (Kim 2009: 387) within the context of human movement, the concept of professional identity, and the crisis of a xenophobic reception. It is recommended that, at a time where the internationalisation of higher education becomes increasingly prevalent, induction programmes intended for sojourner academics are thoughtfully designed with the immigrant academics’ complete journey in mind. Higher education in South Africa needs to consider the journey of sojourner academics and

ensure the proper management thereof through appropriate policies. Policies regarding, for example, official institutional language usage, and professional collegiality come to mind. Institutions need to recognise immigrant academics' urgency to foster a sense of belonging and institutions should consider providing platforms for social interaction. This study highlighted the need for social interaction and cohesion among university staff, as well as the need for immigrant academics to develop a sense of belonging. An environment geared to build social relationships could reinforce both professional and social interactions. Institutional social cohesion projects such as art and technology exhibitions, lunch hour concerts, a staff cafeteria, and social media connections could be considered.

It is recommended that future research focuses specifically on, first, the plight of female immigrant academics and the added responsibilities encountered in their journeys, and second, the occurrence and background of xenophobic receptions of sojourner academics.

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