Understandings of successful ageing in the context of migration: the case of Iranian immigrants in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Gerontological inquiries into understandings of successful ageing have been culture-specific. This means that they have only been studied in the specific cultural settings that have given them their meaning. Understandings of successful ageing that are simultaneously influenced by two cultures have yet to be studied. This study is based on a newly-designed culturally-relevant theoretical framework for the study of successful ageing, and focuses on the context of migration where culture of origin and host culture meet. Interviews based on vignettes have been conducted with 30 Iranian immigrants in Sweden in order to reveal if, and how, the pre- and post-migration understandings of successful ageing differ. The findings show that cultural contexts determine how the construct in question is understood and that migration between different cultures can challenge these understandings.

KEY WORDS – successful ageing, value orientations, migration, culturally-relevant theoretical framework, Iranian immigrants.

Introduction

Attempts to shed light on the manner in which the concept of successful ageing is understood have so far been culture-specific (Torres 1998). Gerontologists have only studied understandings of successful ageing in the cultural settings that have given them their meaning: Chinese understandings of successful ageing have been studied in China, Americans' in the US, and so on (*e.g.* Keith *et al.* 1990; Keith *et al.* 1994; Gibson 1995; Fisher 1995; Ikels *et al.* 1995). Understandings of successful ageing that are transcultural in nature, that are simultaneously shaped by two cultures, have yet to be studied.

The process of migration has the potential to challenge most of life's spheres (*e.g.* Weeks and Cuellar 1983; Moon and Pearl 1991; Torres

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1995). Immigrants are therefore likely to redefine the understandings of successful ageing that they hold. This is specially so if they migrate to a culture that holds an understanding that differs from that of their culture of origin. Understandings of successful ageing that are formed in the context of migration are therefore bound to be transcultural in nature. Hence, the context of migration provides a study angle that surpasses the cultural boundaries within which culture-specific studies of successful ageing have been confined.

Successful ageing

Gerontologists' quest for the unveiling of what it means to age successfully in modern times and within Western society has been traced to 1944 when the American Social Science Research Council established a Committee on Social Adjustment to Old Age (Stock 1982). Ideas regarding successful ageing[1] can, however, be traced back to 44 BC when Cicero wrote an essay about what is necessary to age well (Bowling 1993).

The gerontological construct of successful ageing has been associated with, among other things, the reaching of one's potential (Gibson 1995), generativity (Fisher 1995), activity (Havighurst *et al.* 1968), autonomy (Rowe and Kahn 1987), capacity for self care (Days 1991), the avoidance of disease, the maintenance of high physical and cognitive functioning and an active social life (Rowe and Kahn 1997), coping strategies aimed at the maintenance of a positive outlook (Fisher 1992), as well as tolerance, optimism and courage (Keith *et al.* 1990).

A critical assessment of the state of affairs within gerontological studies on successful ageing attests to the fact that there are primarily two study angles in this field: the strategies needed to age well (*e.g.* Rowe and Khan 1997, Baltes and Carstensen 1996) and the manner in which the construct in question is understood (*e.g.* Keith *et al.* 1990, Keith *et al.* 1994). This particular study is concerned with the latter.

It is therefore interesting to note that within the field of cross-cultural gerontology there has been at least one major research endeavour concerned with shedding light on different cultural understandings of successful ageing. This was Project AGE, an anthropological study of seven sites: Hong Kong; Swarthmore, Philadelphia; Momence, Illinois; Blessington, Ireland; Clifden, Ireland; Kung, Botswana and Herero, Botswana (see *e.g.* Keith *et al.* 1990; Keith *et al.* 1994; Ikels *et al.* 1995).

One of the major findings of Project AGE was that elders' understandings of successful ageing are contingent upon their culture of origin (Keith *et al.* 1990). American elders, for example, associated successful ageing primarily with self-sufficiency and the ability to live alone, while Hong Kong elders could not understand why an elder would want to be self-sufficient. Contrary to American elders, Hong Kong elders viewed their families' willingness to meet their financial, psychological and physical needs as a sign of successful ageing. Another major difference in the definitions of successful ageing held by American and Chinese elders, concerned the quality of the 'personal characteristics' dimension. In answering this, Chinese elders referred to how they were viewed by others, whereas American elders were concerned with how they viewed the world. A suggested explanation for this contrast is that intergenerational living is the norm in Hong Kong: 'dependence on the younger generation is the primary means to a good old age' (Keith *et al.* 1990: 314). The fact that Hong Kong elders were mostly concerned with how others view them is therefore understandable.

It has been suggested elsewhere that Project AGE disregarded the value systems that led to the differences they had found, when they referred to intergenerational living in their explanation of the differences between Chinese and American elders' understandings of successful ageing. This was because they departed from their own value system: one that sees independency in old age as one of the keys to successful ageing (Torres 1999*a* and 2001). Although the project generated vast amounts of culture-specific knowledge, it failed to contribute to gerontology's theoretical understanding of the relationship between culture and successful ageing; it lacked a theoretical framework. Project AGE was not therefore able to shed light on the different value systems from which it departed.

This study departs from a culturally-relevant theoretical framework that stipulates that understandings of successful ageing are framed within the context of the value orientations that have given them their meaning (*e.g.* Torres 1999*a*). This study does not, therefore, depart from a single definition of the construct in question. Instead, the working assumption is that there is a variety of ways in which the construct can be understood: a variety that is based on different existing value orientations (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961).

Theoretical framework

Usui (1989), Burton *et al.* (1992) and Torres (2001) have discussed the culturally-oblivious manner in which some gerontologists have dismissed the role that culture has played in the empirical questions they have posed, and the interpretation of the findings they have obtained. This cultural obliviousness has been claimed to be the result of, among other things, the focus on culture specificity alluded to above (Torres 1998). This focus, combined with the atheoretical state that has been characteristic of cross-cultural gerontology up until recently, has led some gerontologists to assume that conducting research *in* a culture is the same as conducting research *about* a culture. But, as Burton *et al.* (1992) argue, knowledge gathered on a culture does not necessarily increase our understanding of that culture, nor is culture-specificity the same as cultural-relevance. In this respect, I have suggested that, in order to make sense *about* the root of the culturally-related results we obtain, we must depart from the cultural values that have given these results their meaning (Torres 1999*a* and 2001). If we take the study of successful ageing as an example, this means that in order to make culturally-relevant sense of different cultural understandings of successful ageing, we must take into account the value orientations that have shaped these understandings. If we dismiss them, we jeopardise being able to grasp the reasons behind the variety of ways in which successful ageing can be understood and risk cultural-obliviousness.

Acknowledging that there is a difference between knowledge gathered *in* a culture and knowledge gathered *about* a culture, I have proposed a culturally-relevant theoretical framework for the study of successful ageing (Torres 1999*a* and 2001). The underlying assumption in this framework is that there are a variety of ways in which the concept of successful ageing can be understood. This variety is the result of the different value orientations that Kluckhohn (1952) and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) claim to be the key to understanding cultural variation. According to them, all cultures must orient themselves in regard to five cultural values (which they call value orientations): *Human nature*, *Man-nature*, *Relational*, *Time* and *Activity*. For each of these values, there are two or three alternative ways in which a culture can orient its preferences. For example, regarding the *Human nature* orientation, the assumption is that we can either conceive human nature to be 'good', 'evil' or a combination of both. There are also three alternative ways in which we can conceive the *Man-nature* orientation[2]: we can think and relate to nature as something that can either be 'mastered', something that we need to 'surrender' to, or

something that we should live in 'harmony' with. In terms of the *Relational* orientation, we can opt for relationships that are either 'collateral', 'lineal' or 'individual'. In respect of the *Time* orientation, the theory of cultural variation states that we can relate to time from a 'past', a 'present' or a 'future' orientation. Finally, in regard to *Activity*, we can either have a 'doing', a 'being' or a 'being in becoming' orientation.

This culturally-relevant theoretical framework assumes that the key to understanding the variety of ways in which the concept of successful ageing can be understood lies in the different alternatives there are for each of these five orientations. The empirical testing of the framework in question supports the validity of this assumption: there is congruence between value orientations and understandings of successful ageing (Torres 1999*b*, 2001). Thus, this framework has been found to shed light on how culture shapes the manner in which the construct of successful ageing is understood.

The study's aims

This paper presents the results of a transcultural study of understandings of successful ageing (abbreviated henceforward to U/SAs). The study aimed to answer two questions: does the process of migration between cultures challenge U/SAs? And, if so, how does this happen? The working hypothesis is:

Those that hold a U/SA that they believe to be different from those held by members of their host society will feel compelled to change the manner in which they make sense of this construct.

In other words, changes in the manner in which successful ageing is understood will be reported by those who hold an understanding they believe to be incompatible with the understanding held in their host society.

Method

Iranian culture differs from Swedish culture regarding:
- their respective ways of thinking (Ahmadi and Ahmadi 1998);
- the manner in which they approach modernity and change (Hosseini-Kaladjahi 1997);
- the traditions, norms and values that they hold (Eyrumlu 1997, 1998; Emami *et al.* 2000);
- the manner in which gender roles are ascribed (Darvishpour 1999).

Iranians have, for example, been found to be less individualistically oriented than Swedes (Ahmadi and Ahmadi 1998). Eyrumlu (1997, 1998) claims also that these two cultures differ in the family values they hold: Iranians are more family-oriented than Swedes. Darvishpour (1999) has, in turn, suggested that some of the marital problems encountered by Iranian immigrants to Sweden are caused by the different gender roles ascribed in these cultures. Iranians are, in his view, more traditionally-oriented than Swedes regarding gender-appropriate behaviours and roles. As a result migrants encounter difficulties adapting to Swedish ideas in these respects.

In the light of all of these differences, immigrants to Sweden whose primary socialisation had taken place in Iran, were deemed to be a theoretically profuse group to study.

The sample

Through advertisements in Iranian newsletters published in Sweden, and through pre-arranged interview slots in one of the Iranian radio stations that operates from Stockholm, people who had migrated to Sweden after the age of 25 were recruited. All in all, 36 potential respondents expressed their interest in participation. In order to ensure that the sample was sufficiently diverse in regard to gender, present age and age at migration, 30 respondents were chosen (see Table 1). The sample included 16 men and 14 women aged between 35 and 59, who migrated to Sweden between the ages of 25 and 48. Twenty-two of them (14 men and 8 women) had a university degree while the remaining eight (two men and six women) had a high school diploma.

The instrument

This study's point of methodological departure is the anthropological instrument that Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck designed for the empirical testing of the theory of cultural variation. Twelve of their original vignettes were used to test the value orientations that constitute the middle level of the framework. Since their theory of cultural variation does not address U/SAs, their original instrument had to be further developed. Following the methodological guidelines that Kluckhohn (1960) and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) gave for designing comparable instrument, 12 new vignettes were designed to elicit the different U/SAs that were assumed to follow from the value orientations in question[3].

TABLE 1. *Demographic-related information for each of the respondents*

Respondent code number	Gender	Age upon migration	Age at present	Years in Sweden	Marital status	Education
01	Male	44	54	10	Married	University
02	Female	37	48	11	Married	University
03	Male	44	54	10	Married	High School
04	Female	29	39	10	Married	High School
05	Male	37	45	8	Single	University
06	Male	30	43	13	Married	University
07	Male	25	39	14	Divorced	University
08	Male	32	47	15	Married	University
09	Male	33	45	12	Married	University
10	Male	33	50	13[1]	Married	University
11	Male	31	40	9	Married	University
12	Male	33	40	7	Married	University
13	Male	30	41	11	Married	University
14	Female	41	48	7	Married	University
15	Female	30	41	11	Married	University
16	Female	30	41	11	Married	High School
17	Female	35	45	10	Divorced	University
18	Female	27	37	10	Married	University
19	Female	46	57	11	Widowed	High School
20	Male	32	44	12	Married	University
21	Male	29	43	14	Married	University
22	Female	31	35	4	Married	High School
23	Male	31	42	11	Married	University
24	Female	30	44	14	Married	High School
25	Female	26	38	12	Married	University
26	Male	29	41	12	Married	University
27	Female	31	43	12	Married	University
28	Female	25	37	12	Married	High School
29	Male	26	39	13	Married	High School
30	Female	48	59	11	Married	University

[1] Respondent lived somewhere else prior to setting in Sweden.

Extensive analysis of data regarding U/SAs indicated that the Human nature orientation was not as influential with these understandings as I had first assumed (Torres 1999*a*). I therefore decided against operationalising the alternatives that pertain to this value orientation. Neither the Kluckhohns nor Strodtbeck operationalise the 'being in becoming' alternative of the Activity orientation – deciphering how it differed from the 'being' and 'doing' alternatives was not easy. Thus, I, too, abstained from operationalising it in this study.

Each of the vignettes depicts a type of problem that was general enough to be understood by most people, and two or three solutions to the problem presented. In the case of the vignettes presenting value orientations, the solutions offered are the operationalisations of the

alternatives that the theory of cultural variation stipulates for each of the four remaining orientations (Man-nature, Time, Activity and Relational).

When it comes to the newly-designed vignettes, the solutions are the operationalisations of the different U/SAs that have been hypothesised to follow from each of these value orientations. Assurance was needed as to whether the respondents made their choices on the basis of the essence of the entire vignette and not just on some aspect of it, and so three vignettes were used for each of the four value orientations and for each of the four US/As studied, making 24 vignettes in total. The empirical base of this article are the 12 vignettes concerned with US/As[4].

The interviews

The interviews centred on the vignettes. Each of them had been transcribed onto flash cards, and interviewees were given time to read these. They were asked to pick the alternative that they had thought prior to their migration to Sweden was best associated with successful ageing, and similarly what alternative they now thought was the best. Those who chose different alternatives for the two periods were asked to talk about these differences.

The analysis of data

The analysis of the data was undertaken in four phases. The first concerned the analysis of the notepads used during the course of the interviews[5]. The objective of this phase was to decipher the pre- and post-migration choices that each of the respondents made in regard to the U/SA vignettes that they were asked to consider. Since the instrument consists of three vignettes for each of the four US/As that were tested, the second phase of the analysis established the dominant profiles for each of the respondents interviewed. One particular alternative was defined as dominant if a respondent chose it at least twice when presented with the three vignettes.

In the third phase of the analysis, the aim was to obtain an overview of the data by plotting the dominant profile of the entire sample for both periods of interest (see Tables 2 to 5). The focus of the final phase of analysis were the transcriptions of the tape-recorded interviews. The aim was to shed light on the reasons for the changes that had occurred in how successful ageing was understood. The analysis of the reported post-migratory U/SAs has been conducted on the assumption that they

reflect the migrants' own ideas about Swedish U/SAs, rather than the actual U/SAs that are held by Swedish people.

Findings

The findings have been organised in the four areas that were empirically tested. Examples of the operationalisations of these four areas (*i.e.* of the vignettes) are presented; the results regarding the pre- and post-migration choices that respondents made; and the reasons they gave for the eventual changes in US/As that they reported.

Man-nature

As stated earlier, U/SAs that have to do with the relationship between man and nature can be synonymous with a 'mastering of', 'a surrendering to' or a 'living in harmony with' attitude towards the ageing body. The following is an example of one of the three vignettes used:

> Three elders were talking about the various bodily changes that ageing brings about.
> A) One of them said that one shouldn't try to fight the bodily decline that the ageing process brings about. 'It is normal for one's vision, hearing, memory etc. to start to fail in old age and that there isn't much of a point in fighting these things', he said. (Surrender)[6]
> B) The second elder said that he thought that one should figure out ways of preventing or delaying the various physiological changes that ageing brings about. 'Why should we just accept the deterioration of our bodies? I think we should try to beat the odds against us in any way we can', he said. (Master)
> C) The third and last elder said that there is little point in trying to prevent or give in to the various changes that ageing brings about. 'One must try to live in tune with nature since men and nature are the same.' (Harmony)

Table 2 shows that all three variations of this particular U/SA were represented in the sample. This shows that the understandings in question can be constructed in a variety of ways and not just in the master-oriented way that most Western gerontologists take for granted (*c.f.* Baltes and Carstensen 1996; Rowe and Khan 1997).

In regard to the migration-related changes that were anticipated, Table 2 shows that the changes reported were in either of two directions: from Surrender to either Master or Harmony, or from Master to either Surrender or Harmony. Typical of the four

Table 2. *Respondent code numbers by man-nature value orientation, pre-
and post-migration*

		Post-migration		
		Surrender	Harmony	Master
Prior to migration	Surrender	04 05 15 22 28	24 26	16 17 21 25
	Harmony	–	06 08	–
	Master	07 09 10 14 29	11 12 13 20 30	01 02 03 18 19 23 27

respondents that reported a change from Surrender to Master is the
following:

I would have chosen A [Surrender] before. I just thought, like I said earlier,
that I had to give up. I didn't know so much about science and things like that
for example … . Like I said I didn't know that one could hinder it … .
Nowadays I know that it is possible; I find that enticing somehow … . I also
think that a fighting attitude like this one [he points to alternative B] [Master]
is good. The idea that I have of a successful ageing like you call it has to do
with a continuation of the joy of life – of the will to live. To put up a fight
seems good to me nowadays … . That way one is a part of the process instead
of letting the process takes its course like I thought it was meant to be before
I came here. (Respondent 21)

The tendency among those who, like this respondent, reported a
change from Surrender to Master or Harmony was to make allusions
to the process of migration. Some stated, for example, that migrating
to a Western society had given them access to many magazines where
scientific advancements were reported in a popular and easy-to-read
form. That sort of access had led them little by little to believe that
nature could be mastered if one had the right kind of knowledge and
technique to do so. It should be noted here that some of these
respondents were eager to point out that there were scientists in Iran
who were very successful. According to them, the problem in Iran was
not that they lacked science, but that somehow scientific advancements
were not spread as easily to the masses. The following quote eloquently
expresses this view in explaining a switch from Surrender to Master:

I would have chosen A [Surrender] in Iran … . I didn't know that much when
I lived there … knowledge about the various possibilities we have is almost
non-existent there. … I didn't have it … not because we lack knowledge in
my country … we have knowledge but because it isn't as easily available as it
is here … attitudes towards knowledge are different in Iran … if something
happens we just say that that is the way it is … we say … pity but that is just
the way it has always been … we just don't ask ourselves why this and that has

happened … we are just not that curious … not that eager to find out why … it is totally different here … take for example the tunnel accident in Hallandsåsen where a nature catastrophe happened and everybody wanted to know what caused it … an investigation was ordered at once … in Sweden one looks after the reasons why things happen … not in Iran … not regular people at least so most of us believe in faith … everything is investigated here so after a while one learns to ask why … it becomes natural … thinking that everything can be dissected becomes natural here … it is just a different attitude … a different point of departure. … (Respondent 25)

There were ten respondents who reported a switch from a Master attitude towards the ageing body to either Harmony or Surrender. In contrast to those who reported a change in the opposite direction, all of these respondents alluded to maturity when explaining this change in how they understood this nature-related aspect of successful ageing. The following comment is representative of the allusions that were made to maturation in explaining a switch from Master to Surrender:

Like I said before when I was younger I thought that old age was something we all needed to fight against … . That is the way it is for most people that think that getting old is an awful thing … . That is why one thinks that something needs to be done to prevent this … but with age comes wisdom. The body ages, there is nothing that can be done about that so one becomes more realistic. One starts to realise that one must accept one's body with all of the wrinkles and cramps it gets. It is best if one lives by that motto I think. (Respondent 10)

This illustrates how, for those who held a Master-oriented U/SA before migration, growing older and feeling more mature appears to be the reason why they had abandoned this orientation and now had a sense of harmony or surrender instead. Among the reasons for abandoning the Master attitude were: becoming wiser; maturing into old age; being in tune with one's ageing body; accepting the inevitability of the ageing process; and realising that old age is quite joyful. In other words, as a reason for the changes reported, maturation was either explicitly alluded to or implicit in their reflections.

It is important to note that Table 2 also indicates that there were 14 respondents who did not report any change in how they understood successful ageing. According to them, the Master U/SA is the alternative most commonly found in Sweden. It is likely that maintaining the Master orientation after migration would not be thought as problematic as the other two orientations that they did not believe to be as common, since the former would be the more compatible with the U/SA of the host culture.

Table 2 shows that whilst there were six reported changes from an

incompatible understanding, there were also 10 reported changes from what they perceived to be the U/SA held by the host society (Master). The former changes are in accordance with the hypothesis, since the process of migration was expected to challenge only those U/SAs that were incompatible with the conceptions of successful ageing held by the host society. Thus, as expected, changes from an incompatible to a compatible U/SA were explained by allusions to the process of migration and access to the various sources of 'new' knowledge that followed.

Those who reported giving up a compatible U/SA alluded to maturation when explaining why they now held a different understanding. Although the hypothesis did not explicitly include maturation-related changes, these were indeed anticipated (see Torres, 2001). Of significance in this respect, is not that maturation was used to explain some of the changes reported but that, except for one respondent who used maturation to explain a switch from Surrender to Master, all those who used a maturation-related explanation reported a switch in the opposite direction. Thus, it was not anticipated that the process of maturation would be used as an explanation for switching to a Man-nature related understanding that is believed to be incompatible with the host society's own understanding.

Time

Regarding Time, the framework suggests that U/SAs can either be past-, present- or future-oriented (Torres 1999*a*). The following is one of the three vignettes used in order to elucidate these orientations:

Three elders were talking about having expectations for the future.
A) One of the elders said that in order to have a good old age one must accept the fact that having a lot of expectations for the future is a bit unrealistic when one is old. 'Elders should concentrate on rejoicing over what they have already accomplished in life', he said. (Past)
B) The other elder said that in old age one must concentrate on the present. According to this elder, the past is already gone while the future is too uncertain to focus on … 'It is the here and now that is important', he said. (Present)
C) The third elder disagreed with the first two. He believed that life should be lived with the future in sight. 'I don't think that I should give up on having goals for my future just because I have grown old; it is the uncertainty of the future that makes life worth living', he said. (Future)

Table 3 shows that all the variations that were theoretically anticipated (Past, Present and Future) were found, even though not all of them

TABLE 3. *Respondent code numbers by time value orientation, pre- and post-migration*

		Post-migration		
		Past	Present	Future
Prior to migration	Past	–	04 13 16 25 27	22 30
	Present	–	02 03 05 08 14 18 19 23 24 28	01 20 21
	Future	–	06 10 12 29	07 09 11 15 17 26

were held in both of the periods involved. This demonstrates that U/SAs having to do with Time are shaped in different ways; there are other understandings besides the Future orientation that are usually taken for granted in mainstream gerontological debate.

Most Swedes were thought by the respondents to hold a Present or Future orientation. With regard to the differences between pre- and post-migration U/SAs, two distinctive patterns were found. As anticipated, those that held a Past orientation reported having switched to a U/SA that was thought to be compatible with the one that most Swedes held. On the other hand, stability was characteristic of the understandings that were believed to be compatible with Swedes' understandings (*i.e.* the Present and Future orientations).

The challenges of migration to a foreign culture were used to explain why a Past oriented U/SA was abandoned after settling in Sweden in favour of a Present orientation:

This one reminds me a little of the other one you showed me earlier about the elders that were talking about how long they could expect to live. It's the same here; I would have chosen A [Past] before … . In Iran growing old is the same as reaching the end of life; that is the norm in my country so everybody accepts it. Here is different. Elderly Swedes take evening courses, for example. They travel … yeah … they do. I have seen that on Allers … You know that weekly magazine that elderly Swedes buy. There are ads for trips and excursions for old people there. … Life continues in a different way; old people seem to enjoy life here … . I don't know but it seems that way so … here I have learned that one can continue to live even though one gets old. (Respondent 16)

In comparison with the migration-related changes that were reported regarding to Man-nature, those for Time attest to a slightly different kind of migration-prompted change. With regard to Man-nature, the changes reported were somewhat indirect: the core of the respondents'

explanations for the switch from Surrender to Master concerned their exposure to the different attitudes towards knowledge that migration had brought about. As illustrated in the above quote, however, the process of migration challenged U/SAs concerning Time much more directly, since it is on the basis of their assumptions regarding Swedes' U/SAs that they have changed the manner in which they think about successful ageing. Hence, concerning Time, the changes in U/SAs reported seem to have been made after the respondents had reflected upon the differences there are between the understandings that are held in their country of origin and the ones that are held by their host culture.

The three respondents that reported having switched from a Present to a Future oriented U/SA similarly alluded, in one way or another, to having assimilated the Swedish way of thinking about successful ageing which, according to them, was Future oriented. So changes to Present or Future orientations tended to be based on what they perceived to be the U/SAs of the host culture.

Finally there were four who switched from the Future to the Present orientation. The following is an example of one of the reflections made in regards to this change:

Look how interesting … here the person in alternative B [Present] says precisely what I said earlier; that life is what happens whenever we are too busy making plans … . Through the years I have learned to live my life according to this motto … I think that is the smartest way to live specially when one grows old … to live here and now. We should have plans and think of the future but we must live here and now … I have learned that through the years. (Respondent 12)

Whether the allusions were made in this explicit manner, or implicitly (for example, 'one starts to slowly shift into that orientation … it just happens after years of focusing on tomorrow'), what characterises all these reflections regarding this change are the allusions made to lessons learned through the years, and to growing older and getting a different perspective on time. Neither the process of migration, the under-standings held by the host society nor lessons learned from the host culture, seem to have played a role in the change from Future to Present oriented U/SAs.

Activity

According to the theoretical framework, U/SAs having to do with Activity can either have a 'doing', a 'being' or a 'being in becoming' orientation. As stated earlier, the 'being in becoming' orientation was never operationalised by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) and has

been omitted in this study. Thus, for the purpose at hand, successful ageing can either be understood as being about a developmental orientation (Doing) or a non-developmental one (Being).

The following is one of the three vignettes utilised in this study to elicit the two orientations associated with activity-related U/SAs:

> Two people were discussing the ways in which one can plan for old age.
> A) The first one said: 'When I grow old, I would like to remain as active as I am nowadays. I would like to find new hobbies, take some courses in painting or the playing of an instrument … I don't know what exactly, but I would like to have a lot to do when I grow old'. (Doing)
> B) The other person said: 'I look forward to having an empty calendar and to be able to take it easy, visit family and friends and just have a calmer pace of life. 'That is what growing old is all about', he said. (Being)

Table 4 shows that four of the respondents were unable to choose between the two alternatives that were theoretically conceived. These respondents opted for a combination instead. The Doing orientation was the one that respondents associated with the 'typical Swedish' U/SA. The holding of the Doing orientation after migration seems therefore understandable. The fact that some respondents chose the Being orientation as their post-migration choice, in spite of the fact that they believed it to be incompatible with the Swedish U/SA, is not, however, easily explained. Their understandings seem to have been determined by their strong belief that old age is a stage characterised by the lessening of one's strength, a stage that requires changes in the manner in which one approaches everyday life.

As one of these respondents says:

One must take it easy when one grows old. If you want to be able to live longer you have to slow down … It is not good to be stressed out about what needs to be done all the time … not when one is old.

Or as another respondent phrased it:

One doesn't have the same strength when one is old … that is just the way it is … you can maybe take walks, visit friends and read once in a while but you won't be able to do more than that … that is just the way it is when one grows old … one shouldn't have stress when one is old.

Thus what characterises these respondents' unwillingness to adopt the Swedish view is their belief that growing old is concomitant with diminished strength and with a need to slow down.

Those that kept their Being oriented U/SA were mostly over the age of 30 when they migrated to Sweden. Although the size and type of sample does not allow for conclusive comparisons, one cannot help but

TABLE 4. *Respondent code numbers by activity value orientation, pre- and post-migration*

		Post-migration		
		Doing	Being	Doing/Being
Prior to migration	Doing	01 02 06 07 12 15 17 19 23 30	13	–
	Being	16 22 25 26 27 28	03 04 05 08 09 10 18 20 24	
	Doing/Being	–	–	11 14 21 29

wonder whether these respondents would have been more open to the more active manner that characterises the Swedish U/SA had they migrated at an earlier age. This is specially so given that those who reported giving up the Being orientation after migration, had all been under the age of 32 when they migrated. The reasons they gave for this type of change mentioned exposure to the Swedish outlook on old age in one way or another. The following is a typical example of the kind of reflection that was made by those who reported a change from Being to Doing that they attributed to the process of migration:

Before I came here I thought that B [Being] was right … . An active old age is not the norm in my country. People expect you to slow down when you grow old … Things are different here. In Sweden people can continue to learn new things even though they are old. People are expected to continue to enjoy life here … . You can be active and old here; there are not that many rules for how an old person should or shouldn't be … . In my country there are lots of rules that dictate how old people should behave. Here people are free. We can continue to live here. That is really liberating which is why people continue to look forward here even though they are old … . It will definitely be more fun to turn grey here … (Respondent 25)

This quote attests to an openness to the host society's ideas regarding old age, and to the insight they have gained into different means of ageing successfully. As stated earlier, age appeared significant, and so future research should take into account the role that age plays upon migration in determining U/SAs.

Relational

This particular kind of U/SA can be characterised primarily by either 'collaterality', 'individuality' or 'lineality'. The Collateral orientation assumes that successful ageing is synonymous with dependency in old

TABLE 5. *Respondent code numbers by relational value orientation, pre- and post-migration*

		Post-migration		
		Collateral	Individual	Lineal
Prior to migration	Collateral	01 03 07 19	04 05 06 08 09 10 11 13 14 15 16 20 21 24 25 26 27 28 29 30	22
	Individual	–	12 17 18 23	–
	Lineal	–	02	–

age, specifically with dependency upon one's family. In contrast, the Individual orientation associates successful ageing with independence and self-sufficiency. Last but not least, the Lineal orientation assumes half-sufficiency in old age and specifically reflects the kind of expectations that are typical among elders in welfare state societies such as Sweden, where state-financed programmes and services are expected to provide for elders' needs[7].

The following is one of the three vignettes used in order to elucidate the three orientations:

Three people were talking about the way they would like to live when they grew old.
 A) One of them said that when he grows old he would like to continue to live on his own as long as possible. (Individual)
 B) The other person said that he would like to live together with his adult children and their families when he grows old. (Collateral)
 C) The last one of the three said that he wouldn't want to live alone nor would he want to live with his children. Instead he would rather live together with other elders when he grows old. (Lineal)

Table 5 shows that although all the three orientations were represented, few held the Lineal orientation either before or after migration. Previous research on preferred family orientation has shown that Iranians tend to be Collateral in this respect (*c.f.* Eyrumlu 1997, 1998). In the light of this, I expected that most of the respondents would hold an U/SA that was Collateral in nature before migration. Also, given what was hypothesised regarding the challenges that migration poses, I expected that most respondents would report having experienced difficulty in maintaining this orientation in a society such as that of Sweden. This turned out to be the case; 20 of the 25 respondents who held a Collateral orientation before migration switched to the Individual understanding as a result of migration.

A closer look at the data, however, indicates that there is a qualitative difference in how these respondents reflected upon the reasons behind this change. Some alluded to their assimilation of Swedish ideas regarding relationships in old age:

Alternative B [Collateral] is the norm in Iran so when I lived there I thought that successful ageing was synonymous with ageing in the company of my children. Nowadays it is different. I don't think like that anymore … I guess that that is the way it is when one moves to another country … . It is different in Sweden, being close to one's family, I mean physically close, is not that important here. One can have a good old age even though one doesn't live together with one's children … . You see, when one migrates one learns from other cultures … I have actually never reflected upon the fact that this is one of the things I have learned in Sweden but now that we are talking about this I realise that I have changed in this respect as well … . This is actually really interesting. (Respondent 14)

In contrast to this explanation, allusions were also made to a kind of change that was much more practical in nature. The following quote is an example of this:

Nowadays it is A [Individual] … Before I came here it was B [Collateral]. That is what is normal in my country … I wish I could have that kind of old age with my children and my family but it won't work. It would be ideal if I could live together with my children till I die like one does in Iran; different generations on different floors but that is a dream … . But it won't be that way for me, not here … My son might marry a Swede, you never know so it won't be that way … yeah, the best is if one could live together with one's children but one has to make the best of the alternatives one has and that is not an alternative anymore … We gave that alternative up when we left Iran. (Respondent 29)

Even though this respondent chose the Individual orientation as his post-migration choice, he still associates successful ageing with the Collateral alternative. Nevertheless, he and others like him opted for the Individual orientation because they had migrated to Sweden and the Collateral alternative no longer seemed a feasible choice. As some pointed out, their children were being raised in the Swedish society where a Collateral U/SA is not acceptable, expecting that they would be able to depend upon them in old age did not seem realistic. These respondents seem to have chosen the Individual alternative because it is what their future holds, and because it 'works for elderly Swedes' as some of them eloquently expressed it. It is as if they have resigned to making an Individual orientation work, even though deep down they regard the Collateral choice as the optimal one.

It is important to note that some of the respondents had migrated with their immediate families (although not all of them had their

families when they first arrived in Sweden); that some had also brought their parents over after a couple of years; and that some had their siblings and/or other members of their families in Sweden as well. No clear trends were observed, however, in how present family arrangements affected the changes they reported.

Table 5 also shows that eight of the respondents did not report changes in the U/SAs they held. This was the case for four respondents who chose the Collateral alternatives and four who chose the Individual alternative, both pre- and post-migration. Three of the four respondents who retained the Collateral orientation were over 44 or older when they had migrated to Sweden. Although the sample is too small to make any generalisations in this respect, it is interesting to note, once again, that those who chose to hold an U/SA that they believed to be incompatible with the one assumed to be held by members of the host society (*i.e.* Collateral) were relatively old when they migrated.

Discussion

These findings show that the process and experience of migration between cultures can challenge the manner in which successful ageing is understood. The transcultural approach utilised in this study sheds light on how cultural contexts shape these understandings.

It has also been shown that, for the most part, those who held pre-migration understandings that differed from those they assumed to be found in the host society tended to have changed towards the latter. As Tables 2 to 5 illustrate, changes were reported regarding all four types of U/SAs that were studied. Although the nature of the data gathered does not allow conclusions to be drawn regarding the actual reason for changes, analysis of their reflections attest to two main explanations: migration and maturation. Allusions were made to maturation by some of the respondents to explain a switch from Master to Surrender in regard to Man-nature U/SAs. Most reflections on the changes reported, however, concerned the process of migration. The findings also indicate that those who did not report having changed the manner in which they understood successful ageing held, for the most part, an understanding that they believed to be compatible with the one assumed to be typical of the host society.

In regard to the age upon migration and gender-related trends, it is interesting to note that those who reported having changed the manner in which they understood successful ageing were, for the most part, under the age of 30 when they had migrated, while those who reported

having held the same U/SA pre- and post-migration were over the age of 30. Clear yet non-conclusive gender differences were also observed. For example, for Man-nature U/SAs, Table 2 shows that three of the four who had changed from Surrender to Master were women while eight of the ten who had changed from Master either to Harmony or to Surrender were men. With regards to Time, Table 3 shows that six of the seven who reported having switched from a Past orientation to a Present or Future one were women, while it was mostly men who alluded to the Future orientation in one way or another. These age and gender related trends can easily give the impression that these variables play a role in the manner in which successful ageing is understood. However, the size of the sample, and the sampling strategy utilised, prevents us from drawing these types of conclusions. Larger samples and quantitative analyses are needed in order to determine how these demographic aspects influence the migration-related changes, the persistence of incompatible U/SAs, and the preferences expressed for certain orientations.

The main shortcoming of this study is the use of retrospective data for pre-migration U/SAs. Longitudinal data is needed to obtain an objective account of U/SAs that were held prior to migration. The results obtained in this study are *subjective* accounts. Nevertheless, most of the respondents who reported having experienced a change did not seem to have a problem identifying the direction of change, and this suggests that retrospective data, to a certain extent, can shed some light on the impact of migration. It is worth noting that the retrospective choices made were just as consequential as those made for currently-held U/SAs. By this I mean that a dominant profile could be extracted easily from them. The retrospective approach utilised in this trans-cultural study seems therefore to offer a fruitful angle from which gerontological studies of life-span changes in U/SAs can develop.

A second shortcoming is that this study was conducted with a very structured understanding of certain kinds of conceptualisations of successful ageing. The interviews were structured in accordance with the instrument that had been designed for the purpose of testing assumptions that were made in the culturally-relevant theoretical framework for the study of successful ageing presented earlier. The respondents in this study were not able to share their U/SAs freely: they were asked to pick and reflect only upon the vignettes that were utilised in the instrument. I would however argue that this theoretically rigid basis was necessary. The gerontological construct of successful ageing is not an easily understood concept. This is specially the case for those who lack knowledge of the kind of issues that are related to this

concept. A structured instrument was necessary, not only because of the study's theoretical basis, but also because successful ageing is a relatively elusive term to define. Metaphorically speaking, one could claim that the instrument in question constitutes a set of glasses that may have blurred U/SAs that are not related to the themes on which the theory is based. In spite of this, this set of glasses allows us to bring to the fore the interrelationship that exists between value orientations and U/SAs, as well as changes that can take place through the lifespan. As such, they allow some theoretically sound light to be shed on the changes reported.

As indicated earlier, cross-cultural gerontological inquiries into how successful ageing is understood have been characterised by culture-specificity and by their exclusive focus on native populations. As a respondent category, immigrants have been neglected. I would suggest that the transcultural approach utilised in this study has allowed us to focus on a theoretically profuse yet unexplored source of information about the manner in which the construct of successful ageing is understood through the lifespan. The process of migration to a culture that is different from the culture one originates from, has been shown to have the potential to challenge understandings. Knowledge regarding the ways in which the experience of migration might challenge understandings of this ageing-related construct is vital, not only to broaden our discipline's conceptual frameworks, but also for those who plan and provide the services that promote the successful ageing of migrant populations.

NOTES

1 The construct of successful ageing, with its indisputably American focus on success, is an obvious example of a culturally-specific construct (Torres, 2001).
2 I have hereby opted to stay true to the wording of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) even though it is a gender-oblivious reference to this orientation.
3 The full instrument can be obtained from the author.

4 See Torres (1999b and 2001) for the results regarding the relationship between value orientations and understandings of successful ageing.

5 A notepad was used during the course of the interviews to tabulate the choices that were made by the respondents. This tabulation facilitated the asking of follow-up questions during the interviews.

6 The flash cards that were used during the course of the interviews did not contain the heading shown here in brackets.

7 As indicated in Torres (1999b), this particular alternative was purposely designed to fit the reality that the respondents could face in Sweden. As such it deviates from the 'lineal' ideas that Kluckhohn (1952) and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) formulated in the theory of cultural variation.

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