

## **How does an art therapy intervention cultivate resistance and resilience in migrant populations facing adverse circumstances?**

Comment une intervention en art-thérapie contribue-t-elle à renforcer la résistance et la résilience des populations migrantes confrontées à des circonstances difficiles ?

**Liliana Montoya de la Cruz and Natacha Pirotte**

In the face of current global socio-political upheavals and escalating humanitarian crises resulting in mass displacement of people across the planet, the integration of migrants and asylum seekers in their host countries remains a critical concern.

Whilst it is well understood that resilience is a building block for the human ability to cope with and bounce back from psychological stressors due to adverse circumstances, there is limited research that suggests the applicability of resilience-based art therapy amongst migrant populations. The operating mechanisms are imprecise and are mostly described from the art therapists' perspectives.

Based on our recent study in a convergent parallel mixed-method design, this paper explores the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of employing resilience-based art therapy interventions with displaced adults and focuses the attention on their narrative and perspectives around the changes and mechanisms of change experienced after the intervention.

The paper also discusses the study's results, which identify several of the mechanisms that generate the changes perceived by participants. This research highlights the significance of self-exploration, connection, empowerment, and the search for meaning in the context of displacement. It elucidates how art therapy enables individuals to articulate their experiences, self-regulate, process traumatic memories, and navigate complex emotional landscapes, thereby

fostering a sense of agency amidst the uncertainties of forced migration, all steps consistent with the process of building resilience.

The paper concludes with ethical considerations and recommendations inherent in the implementation of art therapy interventions with diverse populations, emphasizing the importance of cultural humility, and advocates for a holistic and culturally sensitive approach to supporting the well-being and resilience of migrant and asylum-seeking communities.

### **Comment une intervention en art-thérapie contribue-t-elle à renforcer la résistance et la résilience des populations migrantes confrontées à des circonstances difficiles ?**

Dans un monde où les bouleversements socio-politiques et l'aggravation des crises humanitaires entraînent le déplacement forcé de nombreuses personnes, l'intégration des migrants et des demandeurs d'asile dans leur nouveau pays d'accueil demeure une préoccupation majeure. Bien que la résilience soit identifiée comme un élément clé de la capacité humaine à faire face au stress psychologique et à rebondir, il existe peu de recherches suggérant l'applicabilité de l'art-thérapie pour renforcer la résilience des populations migrantes. Les mécanismes opérationnels de l'art thérapie sont imprécis et sont principalement décrits du point de vue des art-thérapeutes.

La présentation s'appuie sur une étude menée récemment par les auteurs dont l'objectif est de mieux comprendre les changements et mécanismes de changements perçus par des adultes migrants après une intervention en art thérapie basée sur la résilience. Les auteurs partagent les bases philosophiques et théoriques sur lesquelles ils se sont appuyés, la méthode utilisée (mixed method).

Les résultats de l'étude, qui identifient plusieurs changements ainsi que plusieurs mécanismes qui génèrent ces changements tels que perçus et décrits par les participants, sont également présentés. Cette recherche met en évidence l'importance de l'auto-exploration, de la connexion, de l'autonomisation et de la recherche de sens dans le contexte de la migration forcée. Elle articule comment l'art-thérapie permet aux individus d'exprimer leurs expériences, de s'autoréguler, d'explorer des souvenirs traumatisants et de naviguer dans des paysages émotionnels complexes, favorisant ainsi un sentiment de contrôle au milieu des incertitudes inhérentes à la migration forcée, et ainsi participe au renforcement de la résilience.

En conclusion, les auteurs partagent leurs réflexions sur le plan éthique et leur expérience de mise en œuvre, mettant l'accent sur l'importance de l'humilité culturelle et plaidant en faveur d'une approche holistique et culturellement sensible pour soutenir le bien-être et la résilience des communautés de migrants et de demandeurs d'asile.

## Biography

**Liliana Montoya de la Cruz** is an art therapist, visual artist and art educator. Born in Colombia, she has lived most of her life in Europe between the UK, France and Spain. She is currently Programme Lead and Senior Lecturer on the MA in Art Psychotherapy at Brunel University London.

Liliana is the president of the Andalusian Professional Association of Art Therapy. She is a board member of Spanish Federation of Professional Art Therapy Associations and council member of the British Art Therapy Association. She is also a member of the European Federation of Art Therapy. She has clinical experience in working in a variety of educational, social and humanitarian organisations in Spain, with people seeking international protection, people at risk of social exclusion, people with disabilities and victims of domestic violence.

Liliana is passionate about the role of art and creativity in education and health as the basis for change in society.

**Natacha Pirotte** is a certified art therapist from the master's program at HAN University, Nijmegen, Netherlands. In 2016, she joined the The Red Pencil Humanitarian Mission and started the Belgian office. She now co-ordinates the association's activities in Europe and in countries such as India, Lebanon and others. She also helped set up the European Federation of Art Therapy (EFAT), of which she was general secretary for the first two years.

Her clinical experience extends to people seeking international protection, young people at risk of social exclusion and cancer patients. She is also involved in art therapy research. Originally trained as a civil engineer, Natacha Pirotte strives to reconcile scientific and art-therapeutic approaches, drawing on the left-brain and right-brain skills she has developed over the course of her life.

## Recent publications and conference presentations

Pirotte, N. & Montoya, L. (2023). **A dialogical look at a three-year collaboration of art therapy work with migrants and asylum seekers.** EFAT conference

Pirotte, N. & Vandenborre, L. (2021). **Art therapy in humanitarian setting.** EFAT conference (online)

Pirotte, N., (2019). **Exile, trauma, imagination: how can they be linked in art therapy?** ECArTE conference

Pirotte, N., Montoya, L., Rodriguez, V. & Joosten, E. (in preparation) **Adult refugees perspectives on mechanisms of change after a short resilience-based art therapy intervention: a mixed method pilot study.**