INSIDE THE ORACLE'S CHAMBER. THE EXPERIENCE OF COUNSELLING SUPERVISION IN A MALTESE CONTEXT

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Summary. This presentation will explore the experience of counselling supervisors in Malta, who work without a supportive structure in a very small living space and within a relatively small population, engaged in trying to live harmoniously in the shadows of both western materialism as well as traditional religion. A bricolage of enquiry and data analysis based on heuristic and narrative methods was used. These included unstructured group interviews, reflexive process and narrative analysis. The researcher tried to search for meaning and understanding through the integration of the research tools combined with tacit knowing and accurate understanding of the context. The collaborative nature of the work is manifested by the representations of the research participants' 'voices' and 'stories' set against a Maltese background. Due to the circumstances arising from the context, ethical issues involving anonymity and confidentiality were thoroughly discussed and agreed upon by the research participants. The presentation is intended to start an informing process on counselling supervision in Malta.
Key words: counselling supervisors, heuristic and narrative methods, unstructured group interviews, reflexive process, narrative analysis.

Introduction

This research started as a result of my interest in what McLeod (2003) calls 'contextual awareness'. Hailing from a small island in the Mediterranean Sea with very strong historical, cultural and religious roots has left its mark on all the aspects of my personal and professional life. I am aware that it has also left its indelible mark on my research. A space for an oracle's room has existed in a Maltese context since the building of the megalithic temples. A space for an 'oracle's chamber' has also existed within me since I was a child. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2001: 13) comment that: «As a researcher you will find it useful to understand why you are involved in research. This will affect how you go about your research and what you will get out of it».

A look at my past history will give an idea of my personal and professional journey. As a young man, I joined a youth group that organised voluntary work in Malta and abroad. Thus, as an adolescent I was exposed to poverty, loneliness, misery, homelessness and despair. Our work was aimed at alleviating pain and suffering, though I have to confess that there were many times that I felt overwhelmed.

Inspired by missionary fervour, I read for a degree in Education and after I graduated I was posted to a vocational school, where I came face to face with students going through the humiliation of not being academically 'good enough'. I therefore became a guidance teacher and started reading for my diploma in counselling. After nine years of teaching and counselling in a vocational school, I took the challenge and applied for a post within the University of Malta Counselling Service. This new post brought me in touch with the training and supervising of student counsellors. I became aware of how small the profession was and how counselling supervision was only mandatory whilst the training was going on. I also became aware of the difficulties of Maltese counselling supervisors who had, up to that time acted in good faith guided by their individual code of ethics. In January 2002 I was involved in the setting up of the Malta Association for the Counselling Profession. Later that year I was awarded a scholarship to read for a M.Ed. at the University of Bristol. Three months into the course I switched to the M.Sc. where I was exposed to training in counselling supervision. During my first sessions as a supervisor, I experienced feelings of responsibility and care towards both the client and the supervisee. But the most devastating feeling was the aloneness I felt once the supervisee left the room. As a supervisor I stood alone with no support and with a voice that wanted to speak out but could find no space to do so. I became aware of the stark reality that counselling supervision in Malta is not informed or regulated in any way.

Etherington (2001) speaks of 'voices' that are enabled to be heard through research. Through this work, I would like to enable the voices of Maltese counselling supervisors to be heard for the first time. I hope this to be a work which would not just be an important milestone in my professional life, but also to contribute something important to the development of counselling and counselling supervision in my country, as well as to make other professionals aware of the stories and experiences of counselling supervision in an island community.

Malta

The Maltese archipelago is made up of three main islands, Malta, Gozo and Comino, and has a population of around 400,000. Their strategic position at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea as well as the well renowned natural harbours made them a historical bone of contention and Malta was colonised many times over. Malta in the twenty-first century presents itself with a curious mix of a western lifestyle trying hard to cohabit with Catholic traditions.

For the Maltese people, the past two decades have been characterised by rapid changes that have left a mark on the Maltese social fabric. Maltese society is becoming increasingly secular and 'Europeanised', with the result that some traditional values are starting to be undermined. Abela (2000) commenting on the results of a national research on Maltese values says that the family remains the foremost value for the Maltese people, but the values of work and religion, though still higher than other European nations are gradually being caught up by leisure, friends and politics. In a comment which, I feel, encapsulates the present mood and way of life in Malta, Abela (2000: 45) continues to say: «It seems that the greater importance of family life in Malta

overshadows the importance of friends and acquaintances. Possibly, however the political and socio-economic achievements of the past few years are gradually leading people to give greater importance to leisure, friends and acquaintances. In a European perspective, the Maltese stand out in the importance they attach to religion and leisure».

Up to a few years ago 'counselling' was the exclusive realm of priests, who heard their penitents in the confessional and gave them penance and absolution. Counselling started to establish itself in Malta primarily through vocational guidance in schools which started in the late sixties (Degiovanni: 1997). The setting up of a Guidance and Counselling Unit within the Education Department in 1974 signalled the beginning of a service (Sammut: 1997). Counselling also started to be given to couples going through marital distress by a church organisation called 'Cana'. Later, the University of Malta introduced a Diploma in School Counselling and a first degree in Psychology. However, to further their studies Maltese counsellors still need to go abroad. The arrival of qualified people signified the birth of a new profession. Some associations were set up and the need for being supervised started to be felt…

Supervision in a Context

The need for consultation, critical reflection and supervision in counselling has been a historical hallmark long before the creation of formal counselling supervision. The Hypogeum oracle inside the oracle chamber was only one of the ancient forefathers of supervisors. Others followed, notably priests in confessionals and advisors to politicians. Shearer (2003: 213) speaks of how Jung himself saw the supervisory act as being akin to the archetypal midwife who helps in giving birth to critical reflection. Mollon (1997: 24) speaks of supervision as: «…The creation of a space for thinking, the reflective thinking which implies the milling over and the sifting through impressions thus allowing thoughts to germinate and develop».

The creation of a 'space' for thinking is also extremely important for my own reflexive process to start taking shape. I am aware that being Maltese means that I belong to a people who have had a history of being politically and economically colonised for thousands of years. Sometimes this has meant relying on and adopting research literature based in Western civilisations. Thus, my work is also meant to start a germinating process to create an informing literature on counselling supervision in Malta.

Unfortunately, no such literature yet exists. The closest work on supervision in a Maltese context is a monumental unpublished Ph.D. thesis by Cole (2003) focusing on supervision in social work. In the United Kingdom, counselling supervision is mandatory to all those who use the ethical framework of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy. Dryden et al. (2000: 472) comment that the BACP is to be lauded as it does not 'use' supervision as a means of 'management monitoring', but as a strong empowering tool which emphasises the creation of a relationship.'

Having consulted Wheeler's (2003) seminal work on research on supervision, I have also become aware that there are little or no published works which deal with the experiences of supervisors in the context of small island communities. I understand I am taking myself on a journey which includes some uncharted territory. I sense feelings of trepidation and anxiety on one hand, but also excitement and a sense of looking forward to a new adventure on the other. I am aware that these are the same feelings I have whilst boarding an aircraft.

Different contexts produce different styles of supervision. Supervision happens in a place. This can be interpreted as a physical place, like the ancient oracle's chamber. However, it is not just the physical environment where supervision takes place which is important but also the metaphorical psychological space which is created through and because of the relationship. Wiener (2001: 152–155) introduces the idea that supervision and counselling actually happen within a sanctum, a citadel and a souk. The metaphor of the sanctum stands for the metaphorical space where two people can meet authentically. The metaphor of the citadel refers to the confidentiality which surrounds the relationship and is protected by the citadel's bastions. The metaphor of the souk is connected to the relationship which takes place within a place (organisational, work or small community) where information filters through not because there is a breach in confidentiality but because the information is already party to a number of people. All these metaphorical spaces can be applied to the Maltese experience.

In her seminal book, Syme (2003: 99–110) goes into detail to discuss what happens within small communities, where dual roles and dual relationships are inevitable and a 'souk' atmosphere becomes the order of the day. She contends that a professional in a small community needs to remain part of it and at the same time take care of his/her emotional health. In this situation the 'crux' lies in how the professional manages his/her boundaries.

The issues of supervision and counselling across cultures and counsellors working within organisations have greatly increased in importance because of a world that is becoming 'smaller' and increasingly allowing different cultures to meet, permeate and merge into each other, with different results. Efforts to harmonise standards in qualifications and training have been the subjects of international workshops and conferences. This subject is also extremely important to a country like Malta that is trying to shed its isolationism and living its first experiences as a partner with other sovereign states within the European Union.

Coleman (1999: 130) discusses three different perspectives that reflect three schools of thought. The *universalist* perspective views individual personality issues as central to all humanity, relegating cultural issues to secondary importance. The *particularist* perspective views

ethnicity and gender as extremely important factors in human experience. On the other hand, the transcendentalist perspective acknowledges that both counsellor and client (and I would add supervisor) have cultural experiences that: «…Deeply influence their world views and behaviour…and it is the individual who has to make sense and interpret those experiences».

Though I agree that there is a case in favour of a *universalist* perspective, this does not mean that different peoples deal with the same issues in the same way. A case in point is abortion. The majority of European countries put a case for 'choice' and women's rights. In Malta abortion is considered homicide by law, and Malta became the only country within the European Union to be granted a protocol which specifies that in specific moral matters Maltese law supersedes European law.

In a Maltese scenario there is a bigger case for a particularist perspective. The Maltese word for foreigner is 'barrani' which loosely translated means 'outsider'. This same word is used to denote someone who does not belong to one's family!

Grant (1999: 9) acknowledges the importance of what she calls 'racial issues' in counselling and goes on to say that these might also resurface during supervision even though they would not have been addressed during the counselling session. Magnusen and Norem (2002: 169) assert that competent supervisors intentionally examine cultural diversities and: «… invite supervisees to engage in dialogue related to cultural differences within the supervisory relationship and the implication of those differences».

Another very important issue to be tackled is the issue of ethics. In places where counselling is an established profession and supervision is mandatory, ethical issues are dealt with quite clearly. In Malta the situation is not as clear, and supervisors have normally chosen to abide with the BACP code of ethics. Besides this, the Maltese situation presents some issues that are completely different to the British way of life, notably the closely knit extended family structure which can make confidentiality less rigid, the deep Catholic traditions of most Maltese, and the illegality of divorce and abortion. The Malta Association for the Counselling Profession issued its own Code of Ethics (2003) which binds members to common ethical responsibilities. However the MACP is still in it founding years and a lot needs to be done to make it an association of the same standing as the BACP has in the United Kingdom.

Bond (2000: 191) highlights the differences regarding accountability that exist within the legal framework of the American and British systems. In Malta there is no legal framework in this area. Feltham and Dryden (1994) and Hawkins and Shohet (2000) comment on the importance of supervision being a monitor of the counselling standards being maintained by the counsellor to protect the clients, and say that it is the supervisor's ultimate responsibility to take action in this regard. The MACP Code of Ethics (2003) has up to now adopted the idea of collegial responsibility where counsellors are urged to first deal with a breach of ethics informally and subsequently to report to an internal Board of Ethics that is, as yet, still not appointed. The Code of Ethics does not speak of supervisory responsibility. This may be a *lacuna* as I think that though the supervisor is not in direct contact with the client, s/he would be in a position to identify malpractice by the supervisee. However I do understand this is not very easy within the claustrophobic and professionally incestuous world of Maltese counselling and counselling supervision.

Research Methodology and Process

Research is guided by questions. My interest in the subject was initiated by my own predicament of feeling alone and wanting to know how other supervisors dealt with certain issues. How is counselling supervision in Malta influenced by the lack of supporting structures? How do different counselling supervisors coming from different counselling theoretical positions deal with situations that arise from the cultural, social, religious and ethnic background that they are exposed to? And how are Maltese counselling supervisors influenced by their own cultural, social, religious and ethnic roots?

Journeying from Malta to Bristol for so many times during the past few years has given me ample time to listen to myself and to make meaning of what has been happening inside me. I sit in the Hypogeum temple and understand that I am continuing a process started thousands of years ago. Yet there is this present moment in time when I can speak with 'oracles' and where I am an 'oracle'. Then I sit on the quay of the Floating Harbour in Bristol, and meet my tutors and colleagues and understand that humanity is so diverse but that humanity is one at the same time.

Like Hertz (1997) I am aware that I need to ask myself «what I know» and «how I know it». I wanted to be sure I would be writing about something that 'makes sense' to me in the context of what I was experiencing. I also wanted to know whether my experiences tallied with the stories of others in the same context. Etherington (2001: 16) echoes this by declaring: «I know that in using a reflexive approach and by including my own story, my personal process would be revealed».

While my reflexive research process was unfolding, I became aware that, without knowing it, I was following John McLeod's (1999) views on what he terms 'practitioner research' when, in his work he speaks about the research questions being born out of personal experience, and that the goal of the research is to make a difference to the practice. Moustakas (1990) speaking from a phenomenological perspective, asserts that subjective experience is a source of knowledge. I was seeking understanding as a practising supervisor in my context, and I wanted to understand what others in the same context were experiencing. Aware of the depth of the loneliness that I had been experiencing, I was interested to listen to the experiences of others. I knew I

wanted to sit down and discuss these issues with some colleagues but was not sure which 'research tools' to use. Moustakas (1990: 9) describes heuristic research as a process of internal search through which one discovers the: «…nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigations and analysis».

Moustakas (1990: 27 and 1994: 18) also described a six stage process that includes an initial engagement into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication and culmination in a creative synthesis. My own process indicated that the engagement into the topic started with the completion of my supervision module in the M.Sc. and my first sessions as a supervisor in Malta. The incubation phase was the phase when I started to become aware of my own reflexive voice as a supervisor, aware of my experience within a particular setting, and a need to know how others who had been in my predicament but had been silent also had a story to tell. In Speedy's (2000) words, an idea of 'storied supervision' was emerging. At this point in time, I understood that I was 'immersed' in my research and asking questions like: What do I need to do now? How do I go about doing this? Which tools do I need to use to arrive at what I need to do?

A 'hatching' occurred with the idea of convening a meeting inside an 'oracle chamber'. I was actually disappointed at first that this idea did not come earlier, especially as I had been a teacher of Maltese History prior to becoming a counsellor. History is the realm of stories, the realm of facts, and the interpretation of those facts and stories. I was aware that my professional life had turned full circle by going back to the 'stories' but at the same time I was also aware that in the process I had gathered many more experiences, listened to many tales and narrated some of my own as well. Here I was again thinking of stories, this time of intertwining my own with the stories of others. In Abma's (1999) words: «…stories frequently embed concrete, situated examples of actions and the consequences of action that inform choices of behaviour».

My first inclination had been to use a focus group method (Kreuger and Casey: 2000). This would have involved a small group of people with a similar identity meeting to discuss a social issue. The focus group method attempts to elicit data from the research participants through their responses *vis a vis* the social issue in question. It has the great advantage of enabling the research participants to generate a vast amount of data in a relatively short time. The facilitator would need to be involved in controlling the dynamics within the group and would take a role that is not too influential (McLeod: 2003). The sessions would be taped and then analysed. Lockwood (1999: 19) suggests that the advantage of such a method is that it can be: «…a collective shared experience and the understanding of the shared difficulties faced by the group can be used as a learning experience for… (other)… professionals».

This method answered many of my research needs. However I also wanted to take an active role in the discussion without having to facilitate. I therefore settled for an unstructured initial session with the objective of 'sharing experiences as a supervisor within a Maltese context'.

Choosing the 'characters' was not a difficult task. In a Maltese environment, a professional would know most or all of his/her colleagues, especially if the profession happens to be relatively new like counselling or counselling supervision, where the number of people involved is extremely limited. I therefore asked three of my colleagues to be research participants, taking care to choose them from different theoretical approaches and walks of life.

The first session yielded two hours of recorded data. Following this session we met on another two occasions to listen to and comment on the transcribed tapes. These other two sessions yielded close to five hours of data, and in all, almost 150 pages of transcribed text. The objective of meeting to listen to the tapes together was inspired by Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) (Kagan: 1975; Elliot: 1986). These other two sessions were meant to elaborate on issues where participants wanted to expand as well as to recollect and reintegrate the fleeting impressions and reactions which could have been lost during the initial session.

The resulting data was analysed by using McLeod's (2003) five stages approach including immersion, where the data was assimilated; categorisation, where data was identified and coded; phenomenological reduction, where data categories were questioned; triangulation, where categories are sorted according to how much they recurred; interpretation, where the data was used to construct a 'snapshot' of what is happening in the field of counselling supervision in Malta. Following the analysis, the data was re-presented to the research participants for their final approval. Looking back at my research and the whole reflexive process that went along with it, I think I can describe it as being a bricolage of heuristic and narrative approaches.

Ethical Considerations

Mcleod (2003: 167) declares that it is impossible to design ethically neutral research. In the claustrophobic Maltese environment, ethical issues assume greater importance. The fact that families are extremely closely knit and that people meet with and know people everywhere, it is very difficult to establish and keep rigid boundaries that help to maintain anonymity. In this situation, the four research participants can be identified. I have discussed this with the research participants who are all aware of the situation and accept it. However, in my invitation to the research participants, the freedom to withdraw from the research at any time was offered, as well as the faculty to change or delete anything that involves them.

I am very much aware of what West (2002) calls 'hit and run research', meaning that after the research sessions, there is no thought about the impact on the research participants. Thankfully, the research itself brought together four supervisors who were conscious of the fact that there was

no support for them up to that time, but who, as a direct result of the first session, agreed to form a supervisory support group. West also refers to what Bond (2000: 242–243) calls 'ethical mindfulness' in that: «…being ethical not only involves wrestling with the issues in a systematic and considered way but also taking personal ownership and responsibility for acting ethically».

During the research process, donning hats of practitioner and researcher, I was aware that these roles, although distinct, were interchanging constantly, though I felt confident that I was rigorously following the research protocol (Lewis Lanza and Satz: 1995). This helped me to keep in mind the four pillars of 'ethical principles' in research (Beauchamp and Childress: 1979; Kitchener: 1984; Bond: 2000; Etherington: 2000; McLeod: 2003), mainly those of benevolence in what I was researching, non-maleficence towards research participants, clients and the community, autonomy of the other research participants through informed consent and fidelity, being fair and just with all those involved directly or indirectly in this study.

Thus I was also aware that during our 'research sessions', the research participants did refer to their supervisees and their supervisees' clients, directly or indirectly. Some of these had ceased to be supervisees or clients. My guiding question in this aspect was: How would I feel if I identified myself in a research that I was not aware of? In this case, aware that certain details could give away the identity of persons who were not research participants, and in the interest of both anonymity and confidentiality, I have camouflaged the cases and the issues, or in some cases decided not to include data, with the approval of and in consultation with the research participants who were involved.

Findings and Discussion

The data gathered yielded a large number of themes which cannot all be represented in this dissertation. However the main themes could be identified distinctly. These centred on the experience of being a supervisor in a Maltese context and the research participants spoke about their feelings of being too 'exposed' whilst trying to keep boundaries and confidentiality, multiple roles and relationships, lack of supportive structures and ethical and cultural issues. All these themes are closely related together in a Maltese context, and are therefore, intertwined. The discussion will try to represent the complex interwoven issues that the research participants experience of living in a small community.

Boundaries and Confidentiality. The *souk* like atmosphere (Wiener: 1991) of living in Malta puts issues like the keeping of boundaries (Syme: 2003) at a level which can be seen as 'hysterical' by people who have not had the experience of living in island communities. The experience is very much like living outdoors, where one cannot fail to see or hear or in some other way experience what is going on. People are many times related to each other, are friends to each other, are friends of friends, have heard about each other, know stories about each other…

Supervisors meet their supervisees not just during sessions but in many other functions. Supervisees can also be ex-students, ex-clients, relatives of them, colleagues. The whole place is too small to support a professional structure that exists in many Western countries.

Boundary keeping thus becomes a source of dilemmas for supervisors and for how they try to live with it. Bearing in mind that Maltese professionals receive their further training abroad with emphasis on strict boundary keeping, they return home to their own reality where some permeation within boundaries is at times unavoidable. One research participant being a therapist and priest from Gozo went as far as choosing to live in Malta in order to try and keep boundaries. Gozo, a tiny island with a tiny population was more difficult to handle for him both in the role of a therapist and in the role of a priest.

Another very important issue in a Maltese context is confidentiality. Through personal experience I am aware that once a case is presented for supervision, even though the supervisee tries to camouflage it, the uniqueness of certain cases makes identification unavoidable. I was in situations where my supervisees presented cases that concerned some of my relatives or my friends, who were seeking counselling for specific issues.

My Frustration
Living in this country
It's amazing how many people
I can see, hear or experience.
I cannot help it
It is too obvious
Even though I try not to.
It is the issue
That is driving me nuts.
And I just cannot help not knowing!

Corey, Corey and Callanan (1993: 102) define confidentiality as the: «…ethical and legal responsibility of mental health professionals to safeguard clients from unauthorised disclosures of information given in the therapeutic relationship».

Bond (2002: 260) asserts that: «…the professional guidance stresses the importance of the counsellor using his or her own judgement when the obligation to preserve confidences ought to be overridden».

In the Maltese scenario it seems to be very important for supervisees to tell their clients that they are being supervised and that this may mean that the supervisor may get to know of their identity. This is, however, an unwritten rule as Maltese supervisors do not have, up to now, any regulating or informing structure. This can put the supervisor in a situation where s/he needs to see whether it is important for him or her to know of the identity of the client or the professional involved.

Multiple hats, roles and relationships. The issue of multiple roles and multiple relationships has been discussed

at length and arguments in favour and against have been presented (Lazarus: 1994; Syme: 2003; Zur: 2000). In a small community like Malta, one cannot just speak of 'chance meetings' which will happen inevitably in such a small space. Due to the sheer lack of numbers within the counselling profession, supervisors and seasoned counsellors would invariably lecture, do research, sit on government boards and have roles in different forums and organisations. This produces a curious mix and interchange of power relationships which are a hallmark of Maltese society.

One research participant besides being a psycho-dynamic therapist and supervisor is also a Catholic priest. He goes to great lengths to try to keep solid boundaries and yet he still experiences difficulties. Here he speaks of his two roles and his experience of wearing these two hats:

The Pulpit and the Couch
I wear many hats
I am first and foremost a priest
Some transfer on me as a therapist or supervisor
Others transfer on me as a priest.
So I have to check
All the time
What fantasies
They are having.
Why are you associating me with this situation?
Who am I to you?
What has happened now
That we have met in church?
When there is
This symbolic breaking
Of boundaries
What shall I do?
Should I put myself
In an unapproachable condition
Impossible.
So I work with it.
But then I am a priest!
They come to my parish
And spiritualise the problem!
They come to my therapy room
And spiritualise the problem!
And they assume
That because I am a priest
They can trust me blindly
And without any boundaries!

Multiple roles create multiple relations, and it is up to how these relationships are gestated and developed by both parties that makes them either positive experiences or confusing and negative experiences. Bond (2000: 231) offers a paradigm for ethical problem solving asking the practitioner to first see if the relationship is avoidable or unavoidable and then to assess whether the benefits outweigh the risk of such a relationship or vice-versa. However there are local situations where such an assessment is very difficult to do at the outset because of the ramifications involved with small populations.

Issues of Malpractice. Another situation regards the possibility that a colleague who is also a supervisee should be indulging in malpractice. The dual roles and relationships in such a situation and in such a context would certainly come in the way of a 'good enough' resolution of the situation. And where does the ultimate responsibility lie? Shipton (2000: 203) comments that: «Legislating supervision into ethical codes solves one problem but creates another one: responsibility shifts to another site: the frame of the supervisor him – or herself».

The situation in Malta is compounded by the fact that most people are familiar with each other. The Maltese professional associations do set up regulating boards but as one research participant sums it up: *Participant 1. Yes, there will be a professional board. But anyway, the professional board will be made up of our own people, the same people once again… We live in a culture where if you say something against someone, it's going to stick with you for life.*

Sometimes a Maltese supervisor gets to know of alleged malpractice through supervision, but is at a quandary about what to do because of the lack of regulating structures. The partipant's story of trying to do something about someone who was alleged to be indulging in malpractice shows how difficult this is in an environment where everyone is known.

Kill the Messenger Bearing Bad News!
I would have an open talk
With the person
About what to do
That is best for him
And for the client
If that doesn't work
I will speak to him firmly to stop it.
If that doesn't work
I would report him
But to who?
I know
I've been through it
I know
I pointed a finger at someone
But I was given a harder time
Then the one I was pointing at…
So would I report him?

Such a predicament poses a very important question. To what extent can one speak about supervisory responsibility in Malta? The only clear cut situation is where supervised training is concerned. King and Wheeler (1999) say that supervisors in private setting, though they have a 'duty of care' towards their employer-the supervisee but also towards the client who is the receiver of the supervisees therapeutic interventions. Proctor (1994) says that supervisors have a right not to work with supervisees who do not follow their supervisor's directives. From these discussions it has emerged that this is the provision that is taken by Maltese supervisors, though the question remains on whether the client is protected by it. The issue of taking

action about malpractice in private work is a very thorny one and one which is not easily resolved. Sandra underlines this issue in its stark Maltese reality: *Participant 1: We're talking of reporting or not reporting here. That is a very serious issue because if you are going to report in Malta, you are going to report someone you have a relationship with. Who you are going to report him to you have a relationship with as well…both complainant and defendant. And because of this context, everybody knowing everybody, it's difficult to take a complaint on its own merits and separate it from a person's life. So everybody is going to take it personally.*

Here I speak on how I see the situation:
An Extended Family of Helpers
The people inside the profession
Are my family.
Patriarchs, Matriarchs,
Brothers, Sisters,
Urchins,
Uncles, Aunts,
Cousins and
Sons and Daughters.
I know them all.
And we meet
In many different places
Doing all sorts of different things.

It is not just the absence of legal and the fragility of new ethical structures that are in an embryonic situation, but also the familiarity (here as a negative consequence) which makes the situation so difficult. Clearly this situation calls for norms that need to take the local situation well into consideration.

Conclusion

The context that presented itself prior to this work was one that had not been researched before. My choice of using a group to sit together to share their stories together gave the research in-depth data which resulted from the daily experiences of the research participants. My decision not to interview the group but to participate as a fourth research participant was an idea that was hatched following the pilot test, and one, which I feel enabled me not just to listen but to share and partake of the collective 'voice' that has come out with one 'story' made up of many others.

The participants had known each other for many years (this was inevitable) and their participation was informal but very enthusiastic. We actually visited different 'chambers' during our meetings as we met in each other's houses. Throughout the process we all felt we were participating in something which was extremely important for us. The findings of the research have given me much more understanding of the context I live in. I look at the Maltese context not as better or worse than other countries, but as unique backdrop that necessitates a different scene that is painted in different colours and that portrays different landmarks I understand that the process which has started will give me more insights into the world I live and work in (Davy: 2002).

As a supervisor, I understand that I need to work my way through the inevitable complexities that surround Maltese counselling supervision including multiple roles and relationships, boundaries and ethical and cultural issues and dilemmas. I understand that though some situations are inevitable and have given me scope for personal debate and comparisons in other cultural contexts (Syme: 2003; Lazarus: 1994; Zur: 2000; Bond: 2000) much needs to be understood and researched on the effects these are having on clients, supervisees and supervisors in a Maltese context. However, I have also learnt that in the absence of collective norms, practitioners have provided and created their own.

I am also aware that I have created another dual-role which Etherington (2000 (2): 259) calls 'practitioner-researcher'. Having experienced this dual-role I feel able to declare its importance: through being a practitioner researcher I have become more sensitive to my roots and context and the issues that arise from them.

I am aware that the main recommendations were suggested by the research participants themselves, mainly to start a supportive and supervisory process for Maltese supervisors and to initiate an informing process on counselling supervision in Malta.

Being a research participant myself I know these recommendations belong to me as well. I stand up to go home. I know that tomorrow is as important as today…

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ОПЫТ КОНСУЛЬТАТИВНОЙ СУПЕРВИЗИИ В МАЛЬТИЙСКОМ КОНТЕКСТЕ

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Аннотация. Это сообщение раскрывает опыт консультативных супервизоров на Мальте, которые работают без поддерживающей структуры на очень маленьком жизненном пространстве и с относительно маленькой популяцией, ангажированные в попытке жить гармонично в тени как западного материализма, так и традиционной религии. Были использованы в исследовании и при анализе его результатов эвристические и нарративные методы. Они включали неструктурированные групповые интервью, рефлексивный процесс и нарративный анализ.

Описана попытка исследования мнения и понимания через интеграцию исследовательских инструментов с комбинированием невербального знания и точного понимания текста. Коллаборативный характер работы демонстрируется репрезентацией участниками исследования «голосов» и «историй» на Мальтийском фоне. Соответственно условиям, вытекающим из контекста, этнические спорные вопросы, включая анонимность и конфиденциальность, постоянно обсуждаются и согласуются участниками исследования.

Ключевые слова: консультативные супервизоры, эвристические и нарративные методы, неструктурированные групповые интервью, рефлексивный процесс, нарративный анализ.