



## The Letter of Complaint to the Netherlands. A Way to Plan Intervention in Migratory Grief Cases

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### ABSTRACT

In migration care, effective interventions require a phenomenological understanding of the individual's experiences, especially when cultural differences are part of both the problem and their identity. Two observed phenomena are migratory grief, characterized by the loss or separation from one's culture of origin, and migration stress, defined as ambivalence and uncertainty in the face of the challenges of integration. While the intervention in the cases presented follows the principles of Gestalt therapy, the complaint letter technique is incorporated as a means of identifying focal aspects for intervention. The theoretical foundation of this technique is based on the contributions of White and Epston's narrative therapy, as well as the concept of protest as a typology of innovative moments. This article presents this application in two cases of Spanish-speaking residents in the Netherlands, following a mixed-method design. The analysis of complaint letters addressed to the migration project is described, complemented by data provided by the Migratory Grief and Loss Questionnaire and the Barcelona Immigration Stress Scale. The key steps for identifying recurring themes and difficulties inherent to the migration process are detailed, which guide therapeutic intervention. Of the cases presented, the first identifies a problem associated with migration stress, while the second identifies a situation of migratory grief.

## La Carta de Queja a Países Bajos. Una Forma de Planificar la Intervención en Casos de Duelo Migratorio

### RESUMEN

En la atención migratoria, las intervenciones eficaces requieren una comprensión fenomenológica de las experiencias de la persona, especialmente cuando las diferencias culturales forman parte tanto del problema como de su identidad. Dos fenómenos observados son el duelo migratorio, caracterizado por la pérdida o separación de la cultura de origen, y el estrés migratorio, definido como la ambivalencia e incertidumbre ante los desafíos de la integración. Si bien la intervención en los casos presentados sigue los principios de la terapia Gestalt, se incorpora la técnica de la carta de queja, como medio para identificar aspectos focales de intervención. La fundamentación teórica de esta técnica parte de las aportaciones de la terapia narrativa de White y Epston, así como del concepto de protesta como tipología de momentos innovadores. Este artículo presenta esta aplicación en dos casos de residentes hispanohablantes en los Países Bajos, siguiendo un diseño mixto. Se describe el análisis de plantilla de cartas de queja dirigidas al proyecto migratorio, complementado con los datos proporcionados por el Migratory Grief and Loss Questionnaire y la Barcelona Immigration Stress Scale. Se detallan los pasos clave para identificar temas recurrentes y dificultades propias del proceso migratorio, a partir de los cuales se orienta la intervención terapéutica. De los casos presentados, en el primero se identifica una problemática asociada al estrés migratorio, mientras que en el segundo se detecta una situación de duelo migratorio.

#### Palabras clave:

Duelo migratorio  
Técnicas narrativas  
Terapia Gestalt  
Análisis de plantillas  
Intervenciones psicoterapéuticas  
con personas migrantes  
Migración voluntaria

## Introduction

Migration is a constantly growing phenomenon in a globalized world, in which millions of people move due to a multitude of circumstances or motivations. This process involves not only a geographical change, but also an emotional and psychological transformation that affects the identity, sense of belonging and general well-being of those who migrate (Achotegui, 2000; Renner et al., 2024). During the realization of their migration project many people may experience both grief and stress. The former is linked to the loss of the family environment, the culture of origin and support networks and social contact; the latter manifests itself as emotional ambivalence and uncertainty in the face of the challenges of the host country (Mak et al., 2021). Migratory grief is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that can have a significant impact on a person's mental health and well-being (Achotegui, 2019; Lakatos, 1992). It consists of the psychological and emotional experience of people who have migrated from one place of residence to another and go through feelings of loss, sadness and disconnection from their former home, community and culture; while dealing with adaptation to a new environment and trying to establish new relationships.

This process is observed beyond the reasons that motivate the migration project, even in the case of voluntary migration. The difference between forced and voluntary migration lies in the degree of choice involved in the decision-making process towards leaving the country of origin. Forced migration occurs as a result of events that force people to move, such as war conflicts, natural disasters or political persecution, and usually involves situations of direct threat to safety or even survival (Becker & Ferrara, 2019). On the other hand, voluntary migration involves a higher degree of personal decision, often motivated by the search for better financial, educational or family opportunities (Ottonelli & Torresi, 2013). However, these categories are not rigid, as many migration experiences include a combination of compulsion and decision, placing them on a spectrum rather than a binary dimension, highlighting the psychological complexity of motivations to migrate (Erdal & Oeppen, 2017). This dichotomous view also contributes to a particularly notable gap in the case of research on voluntary migration in the case of expatriates (popularly known as *expats*), i.e., the case of those who migrate for professional or personal development reasons, and not necessarily for reasons of survival or fleeing conflict (Andresen et al., 2014; Arifa, El Baroudi & Khapova, 2021).

From a psychological perspective, the application of the continuum model in the bereavement process (Klass, et al., 1996) suggests that the integration of elements of the culture of origin into the daily lives of migrants is a key strategy for adaptation. Instead of a total break with the past, it is proposed that migrants can construct a hybrid identity in which elements of their history coexist with new experiences from the host country (Henry, Stiles & Biran, 2005). In this sense, Gestalt therapy offers a phenomenological perspective that understands grief as a dynamic process of creative adjustment, in which the person reorganizes his or her experience of loss and reconfigures their identity linked to the personality function of the self, within the new migratory context (Francesetti, et. al., 2013; Perls et al., 1951).

Understanding migratory grief requires phenomenological exploration, that is, attending to how each person lives and

processes this experience in a unique way, especially in voluntary migration contexts. Narrative techniques, such as letters, are widely recognized tools in both qualitative research and clinical intervention (White & Epston, 1990). Letters have been shown to be a useful technique in bereavement treatment (Larsen, 2024) and narrative-based approaches have been applied to both therapeutic and migration research work (Boswell et al., 2021; Kogen, 2014), but there is no documentation of the use of therapeutic letters in migratory grief. In this work, the letters allow externalizing emotions and thoughts related to the migration project, offering a safe space for people to express the preeminent aspects of their experience. A letter to the host country or migratory project was chosen, a format that allows for the expression of sometimes repressed emotions, such as anger, which are common in the grieving process. This choice is based in the category of "protest" from the innovative moments model proposed by Gonçalves et al. (2017), who point out that grievances represent exceptions to inflexible meaning systems associated with psychopathological suffering. Protest is defined as the expression of a complaint about a problem, indicating either the limitation that the problem imposes on the person (level 1 protest), or the expression of the objective to be achieved (claim) as a way to overcome the problem (level 2 protest). The manifestation of the complaints is pivotal in determining the therapeutic objectives to which therapy must be oriented. Furthermore, it enables the search for procedures to resignify the problem (Gonçalves et al., 2017; Matos et al., 2009). Protests, when conceptualized as innovative moments, might not only be seen as resistance but also as activating moments of change. For instance, a person's protest against oppressive structures (like social inequality) or emotional distress can be viewed as the point where they engage with their feelings and begin to assert their personal needs, challenges, and desires. According to White (2007) these innovative moments may manifest when a patient re-frames their story in a way that includes protest or resistance to oppressive narratives. This new narrative could empower them to challenge the status quo of their life or identity.

In Gestalt therapy terms, an inflexible meaning system is equivalent to a rigid personality function of the self. With less conflict, contact, and figure/ground differentiation, only a diminished self is possible. Psychopathological suffering, particularly neurotic suffering, is characterized by the absence of shifting boundaries in contact (Perls et al., 1951). In this sense, protest can be seen as a mechanism that promotes greater psychological flexibility.

Within the framework of this research, which encompasses a broader study on migratory grief in self-initiated expatriates (Andresen et al., 2014) living in the Netherlands, the use of narrative techniques allows for capturing the ambivalence inherent in the migration process and facilitates clinical case formulation, helping to structure therapeutic interventions based on the core elements identified in the narratives of the participants. In particular, this approach is relevant when considering the Dutch cultural concept of *gezelligheid* (Lindemann, 2009; Verhoef, 2023), which might act as a premature pacifying element in the natural development of migratory grief, inhibiting the full processing of emotional conflicts. According to Meertens Institute researcher Irene Stengs, *gezelligheid* is a way of life that has a moral side as it is used as a way in which everyone has to adhere to the norm of socializing and not dealing with painful topics. It is a social dimension with unspoken codes of conduct

(RTL Nieuws, 2022). This norm thus implicitly demands to put aside that which is not in tune with a pleasant and harmonious atmosphere, i.e. conflict. In this sense, complaint letters emerge as an effective narrative technique to help migrants structure their experience, identify problematic aspects and reorganize their personal narratives. Through this tool, they can express their dissatisfaction, unfulfilled expectations and feelings of loss. Essential aspects for emotional integration and psychological adjustment.

The following paper focuses specifically on the content analysis of the complaint letters written by two Spanish-speaking migrants using the qualitative technique of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is structured in a series of iterative steps designed to extract meaning from the qualitative data. The outcome of this analysis is further triangulated with data collected from quantitative measures to assess migratory grief (Casado & Leung, 2002) and immigration stress (Tomás-Sábado et al., 2007). This process allows for capturing not only individual emotional dynamics, but also how these relate to the cultural and social environment of the host country, providing a solid basis for tailored therapeutic interventions. The subsequent intervention procedure follows the principles of Gestalt therapy, although a narrative technique (the complaint letter itself) has been integrated as a procedure to locate the experiential foci of the intervention.

The main aim of this article is to explore the complaint letters of two people who have decided to migrate voluntarily to the Netherlands. Thematic analysis of these narratives will be used to identify the emotional and cultural patterns central to the migration experiences. It is also examined how this technique can facilitate the formulation of therapeutic interventions from a Gestalt therapy perspective.

## Method

### Participants

Two individual cases were selected for analysis as part of a larger study on migratory grief in expatriates. The first case is that of a 34-year-old Spanish-speaking woman, married and without children, with studies in Telecommunications and working as an engineer, who had lived in the Netherlands for seven years. The second case is that of a 32-year-old Spanish-speaking woman, single and without children, with a PhD and working as a researcher, who had been living in the Netherlands for 10 years. These cases have been selected for their illustrative capacity, as they exemplify two distinct, albeit relatively pure, approaches to understanding migration issues in terms of stress or grief (one per case). The subject in Case 1 obtained an initial score of 22 on the Migratory Grief and Loss Questionnaire (MGLQ) and 68 on the Barcelona Immigration Stress Scales (BISS), indicating the presence of higher immigration stress. The subject in Case 2 scored 34 on the MGLQ and 46 on the BISS, underlining a higher presentation of migratory grief variables. Cutoff scores were established at 26 for the MGLQ and 48 for the BISS.

### Instruments

The research study on which the present article is based was conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative

instruments for the planning and analysis of the intervention. The following instruments were employed in the analysis and triangulation of the data derived from the letters of complaint.

#### 2.1. Quantitative measures:

##### 2.1.1. Migratory Grief and Loss Questionnaire (MGLQ)

This instrument utilizes a four-point Likert scale, with scores ranging from 0 to 60, with higher scores denoting more intense levels of migratory grief. The MGLQ demonstrates adequate reliability, evidenced by an alpha coefficient of .94. The three factors of the MGLQ (searching and yearning, nostalgia, and disorganization) exhibit significant correlations with the total MGLQ, thereby substantiating the instrument's content validity (Casado & Leung, 2002).

##### 2.1.2. Barcelona Immigration Stress Scale (BISS)

The Barcelona Immigration Stress Scale is a 42-item measure in which items are scored positively (from 3: Strongly Agree to 0: Strongly Disagree); thus, the range of possible scores is from 0 for no stress to 126 for maximum stress. This scale was developed to measure acculturation stress applicable to immigrants in Europe, and it has acceptable internal validity. This tool, in agreement with other scales, suggests that migration stress is a complex construct. The 42 items exhibit a range of correlations between .31 and .62, all of which were statistically significant and lower than the reliability of the scale. This measure demonstrated an internal consistency index estimated on the basis of Cronbach's alpha of .94. (Tomás-Sábado et al., 2007)

#### 2.2. Qualitative measures:

##### 2.2.1. Letter of complaint.

The letter is to be addressed either to the Netherlands or to the migration project. The instrument was designed ad hoc as a procedure to understand the initial demand from a qualitative perspective, following the format proposed from the narrative approach in psychotherapy. The utilization of complaint letters as a narrative technique is predicated on the notion that it facilitates the articulation of emotions and the elucidation of internal conflicts, which are often concomitant with experiences that engender psychological distress (White & Epston, 1990). Its contents are studied using template analysis.

## Procedure

This study used a multiple case design, including, in the initial assessment phase, the analysis of letters of complaint written by non-Dutch individuals demanding private psychological care in the Netherlands. The procedure consisted of the following steps:

#### 1. Recruitment of participants.

Participants were recruited through social networks and communities for *expats* in the Netherlands (e.g., ACCESS, Internations, Facebook, LinkedIn), as well as among those seeking care in private psychological practice with

complaints involving stressors related to their migration experience. Non-Dutch adults who had been living in the Netherlands for at least one year, with signs of migratory grief and clinically significant anxious-depressive symptoms were included. The former were measured with the MGLQ and BISS scales, and the latter with the DASS-21 scale.

2. Implementation of the assessment.

In the initial case assessment phase, in addition to completing the quantitative measures questionnaires and writing their life history, each participant was asked to write a “letter of complaint to the host country or migration project” as an exploratory task. As a prompt, the letters were asked to address personal aspects related to the experience of cultural adaptation to the Netherlands, challenges experienced, and emotions related to the migration process.

3. Data Analysis

The letters were analyzed using a variant of the thematic analysis method proposed by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#), called template analysis ([Brooks et al., 2015](#)), to identify emerging themes and patterns related to cultural adjustment and the elaboration of migratory grief.

Template analysis is a qualitative technique that is used to organize, categorize, and analyze data from interviews, transcripts, or any type of textual information. This technique allows the identification of patterns or themes in the data in a flexible way, which makes it useful for research with an inductive and deductive approach.

The steps followed for the development of the Template Analysis in the letters of complaint were as follows:

- Familiarization with the texts to be analyzed:  
Given the size of the sample allowed for it, the first step was to completely read the letters written by each participant. Being a multiple case study with a limited number of participants, this step was done in depth to ensure that the key elements of each letter were well understood.
- Preliminary coding of the data:  
An initial coding was performed to identify relevant themes within the letters. Although themes could have been defined a priori, such as those related to migratory grief and emotional adjustment, emergent themes were allowed to emerge based on the specific contents of the letters. This coding was flexible and open to revision as the analysis progressed.
- Organization of the emerging themes into meaningful clusters:  
The themes that were identified were then grouped into categories that could in some cases exhibit either hierarchical or lateral relationships. For instance, within the letters, themes such as ‘helplessness in familial caregiving’ and ‘guilt over missed milestones’ were grouped into the broader category of ‘guilt and helplessness’, which in turn had a lateral relationship with the category of ‘relational loss/loneliness’ and a hierarchical one with the broader category of ‘double loyalty/ambivalence’.

- Definition of an initial coding template:  
Preliminary coding of the letters resulted in the definition of an initial template, the function of which was to organize the themes into structured categories. The development of this template was informed by a thorough analysis of the two letters, with the emerging themes being adapted to ensure that they accurately reflected the key points of each narrative.
- Application of the initial template to additional data and modification as needed:  
Once the initial template was defined, it was applied to the additional data obtained from the charts. In cases where the new data did not fit the existing themes, the template was modified, adding new themes or reconfiguring the categories to fit the new information. This process was iterative, continually reviewing the template as new data was integrated.
- Finalization of the template and application to the full data set:  
Upon completion of the analysis of the two participant’s letters, the coding template was deemed to have sufficiently captured the themes relevant to the study. Although there is never a definitive ‘final version’, the template was considered sufficiently refined to provide a complete representation of the experiences described in the letters. Relevant data was not left uncoded and the template was used to fully interpret the narratives in relation to the research questions.

## Data Analysis

The present study is grounded in a mixed-type approach as part of a multiple case study design, with a focus on the analysis of narrative letters of complaint written by two of the participants. The design selected for this research precluded the use of statistical analyses. Instead, this paper utilizes a thematic analysis to extract meaningful patterns and insights from the participants’ narratives.

The decision to restrict the sample size to two cases was due to the primarily qualitative nature of the study. This approach aligns with the exploratory nature of the study’s initial phase, which prioritizes the generation of in-depth, context-specific knowledge over generalizable results.

The integration of psychometric data from the MGLQ and the BISS with the thematic analysis of the letters ensured the triangulation of methods. The scores from these scales were used as complementary data to validate and contextualize the conclusions derived from the qualitative analysis.

## Results

This study used a template analysis approach ([Brooks et al., 2015](#)) to analyze each letter of complaint, focusing on the principles of migratory grief and Gestalt therapy. The process rendered the results shown below.

### 3.1. Template analysis stages

- 3.1.1. Familiarization: Repeated readings of each letter to identify emotional tones and key complaints.

- 3.1.2. Initial Coding: Thirty descriptive codes were generated inductively from the participant's language (e.g., *No me advirtieron* [I was not warned]→ Unclear agency decision-making).
- 3.1.3. Clustering: Codes were grouped into clusters based on conceptual similarity (e.g., Paradoxical agency in migration).
- 3.1.4. Template Development: Clusters were organized into 7 main themes, integrating migratory grief literature (e.g., identity loss) and Gestalt therapy frameworks (e.g., double loyalty).
  - Relational loss / loneliness
  - Paradoxical agency in migration
  - Identity loss
  - Guilt and helplessness
  - Environmental grief
  - Double loyalty/ambivalence
  - Disillusionment with host society
- 3.1.5. Validation: Iterative refinement ensured thematic coherence, with particular attention to overlaps.
- 3.1.6. Template representation: The management of the data was undertaken using Atlas.ti 25, with the coding, clustering and theme identification being represented in network diagrams to visualize the relationships, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 4 (see below). This process is also reflected in the word clouds presented in Figures 1 and 3.

The template analysis applied to the two complaint letters (see below) revealed distinct thematic configurations aligned with the experience of migratory grief. Each case displayed a unique emotional tone and compendium of experiences, supported by the code network diagrams (Figures 2 and 4, see below) and the word clouds (Figures 1 and 3), which were generated from the full content of each letter.

In Case 1, the letter reveals a strong sense of ambivalence toward the migration experience. The participant initially characterizes her decision to leave as a spontaneous reaction to a distressing personal circumstance rather than a deliberate choice. She writes: “No era capaz de acabar con una relación de mierda, así que hice lo ‘más fácil’: desaparecer” [I wasn’t capable of ending a shitty relationship, so I did the ‘easiest’ thing: disappear] (translation by author). While the initial objective of the migration project was met, it was soon accompanied by a sense of disillusionment with the work ethics that had been expected from the host country prior to departure. As time passed, the migratory endeavor transformed from a provisional escape to a more permanent reality, with the acquisition of a residence signifying a pivotal turning point. This transition instigates a shift in her perception, wherein the initial pursuit of freedom is supplanted by a sense of entrapment, and the temporal experience is modified, rendering the passage of time more conspicuous.

The network of codes for this case (Figure 2, see below) highlights the theme of *double loyalty/ambivalence*, with codes such as *solitude for self-discovery*, *integration struggles*, and *isolation from family/friends* grouped under this category. This central theme connects to others like

*disillusionment with the host country*, illustrated through expressions of disappointment in social dynamics and work culture. The participant critiques the Dutch ideal of efficiency and directness, while also acknowledging traits she values. She describes cultural expectations around harmony—*gezelligheid*—as silencing, making it difficult to express discomfort without being dismissed. She writes: “Te tachan de ingrata o te dicen con cariño que cuando quieras te vuelvas a tu país” [They label you as ungrateful or tell you with affection that whenever you want you should return to your country] (translation by author).

Terms like *work*, *complaints*, *leaving*, and *promise* illustrate the participant's focus on the discrepancy between expectations and lived experience (see Figure 1). These findings point to a formulation centered on migratory stress and the psychological cost of a failed strategy of assimilation. From a clinical perspective, this case suggests a need to support the patient in processing ambivalence, addressing disillusionment, and rebuilding clarity around needs and values in the host context. Although the complaint is directed at the country of arrival, its narrative function is also to access the patient's anger—an affect often inaccessible during earlier phases of grief. Within a Gestalt therapy framework, this emotional emergence supports the reestablishment of contact boundaries and the differentiation of self from context, thus enhancing the organism's capacity for creative adjustment.

In Case 2, the letter is shaped by grief and longing. The participant conveys a profound sense of identity fragmentation and distance from loved ones, describing how she no longer knows where she belongs. She writes: “Ya no sé cuál es realmente mi casa a la que volver” [I don't know what my home is really to go back to] (translation by author). Her narrative is organized around themes of relational loss, guilt, and identity disorientation. She frequently expresses sadness at missing milestones in the lives of family and close friends, and the experience of trying to build new relationships is marked by instability due to the mobility of others in her community.

The network diagram for this case (Figure 4, see below) shows codes like *cyclical loss of social networks*, *guilt over familial abandonment*, and *displacement / homelessness*, clustered under the themes *relational loss/loneliness*, *guilt and helplessness*, and *identity loss*. These themes collectively reflect a marginalization strategy of acculturation (Berry, 1997), where the individual feels disconnected both from the culture of origin and from the host culture. In this case, the word cloud (see Figure 3) reinforces this structure, with dominant terms like *family*, *pain*, and *home*, signaling the centrality of grief and disconnection.

The formulation of Case 2 highlights the role of confluence, a boundary disturbance in Gestalt therapy characterized by difficulty in distinguishing one's needs from those of others. The patient's struggle to make decisions that diverge from her introjects or the expectations of significant others, as well as her wish that someone had “warned” her about the migratory consequences, illustrates a deferral of

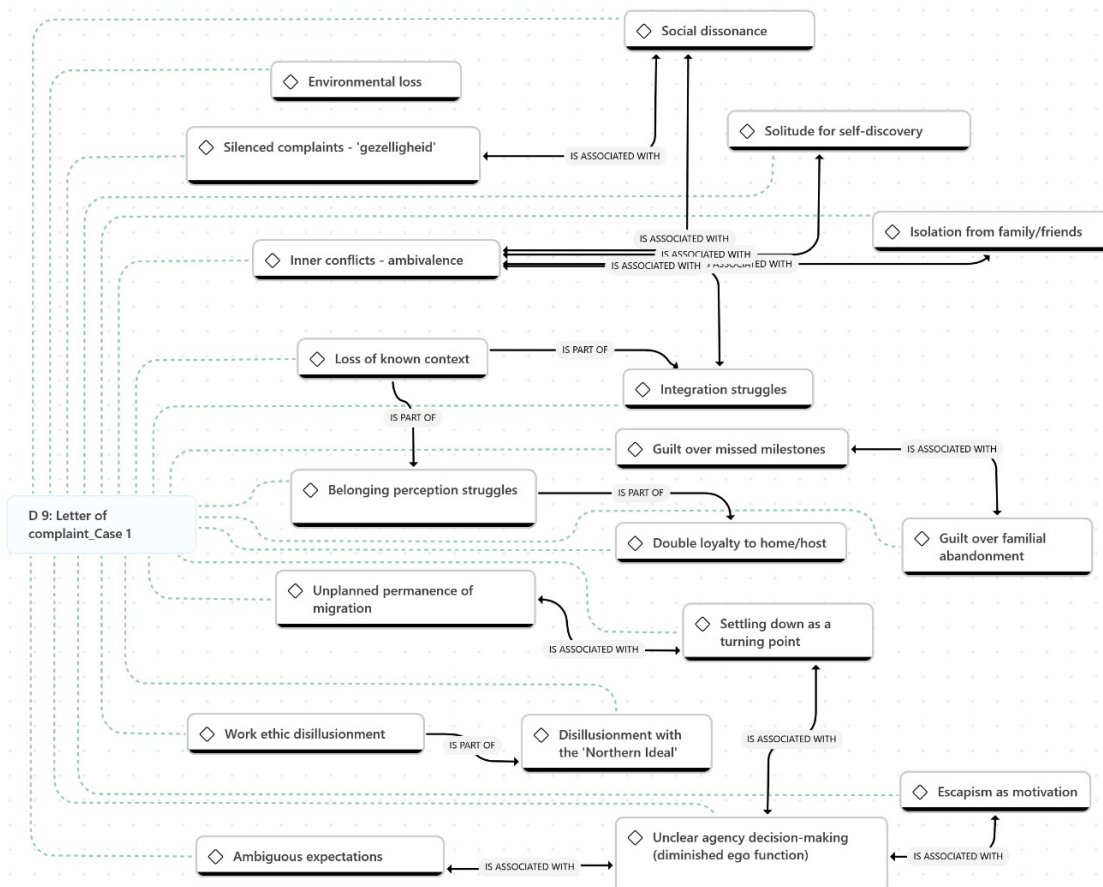


The image shows the most frequently used terms in the participant's original letter (written in Spanish), sized in proportion to their occurrence. For clarity and international accessibility, the English translations of the most prominent terms are provided below:

*trabajo* (work), *reclamaciones* (complaints), *cosas* (things), *años* (years), *sensación* (feeling), *irme* (to leave), *vida* (life), *tiempo* (time), *veces* (times), *relación* (relationship), *falta* (lack), *vaya ética* (such ethics), *carta* (letter), *promesa* (promise), *facilidad* (ease)

(Author's translation)

**Figure 2**  
*Template Analysis Case 1*



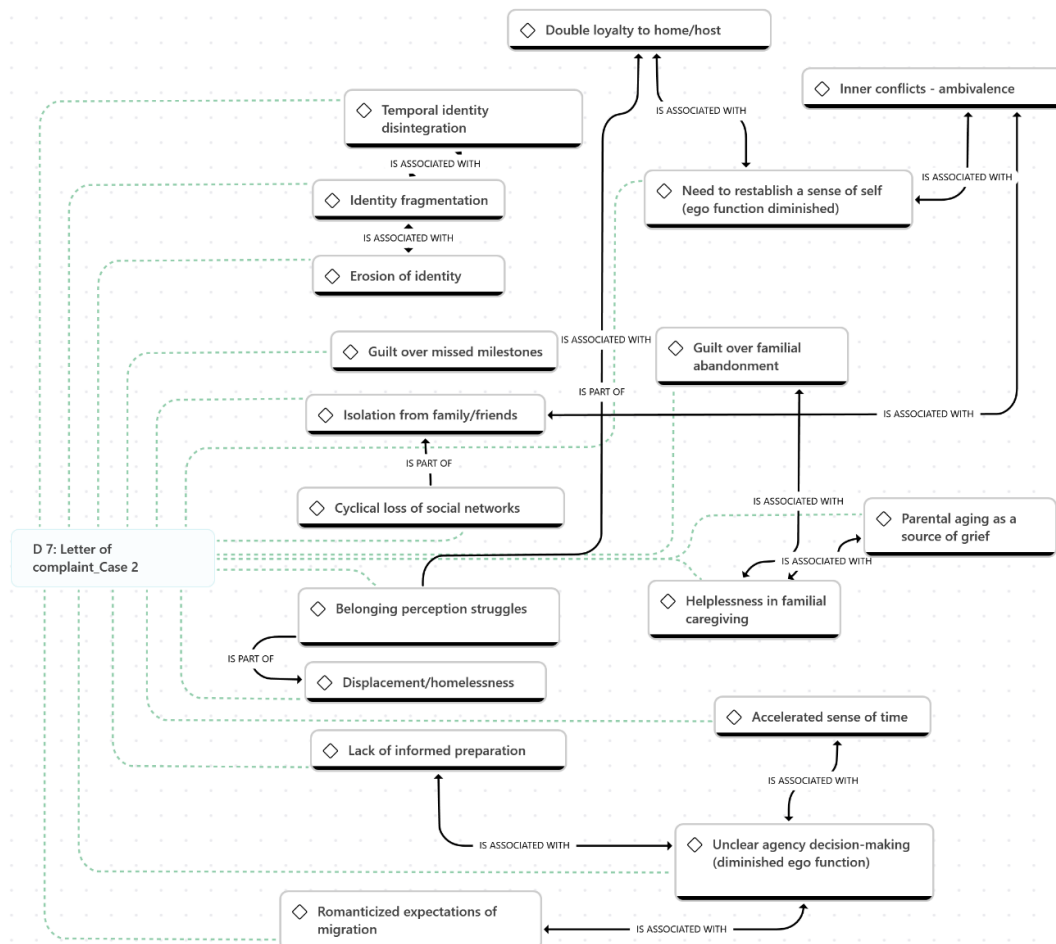
**Figure 3**  
*Case 2 Word Cloud*



The image shows the most frequently used words in the participant's original letter (written in Spanish), in proportion to their occurrence. For clarity and international accessibility, below is the English translation of the terms that appear more prominently:

*tiempo* (time), *advertieron* (they warned), *sentir* (to feel), *casa* (home), *convertirían* (they would become), *estar* (to be), *dolor* (pain), *volver* (to return), *familia* (family), *quejarme* (to complain), *quiero* (I want), *sé* (I know)  
(Author's translation)

**Figure 4**  
*Template Analysis Case 2*



agency. From the start of therapy, this suggested a need to work on differentiation and the development of autonomy, particularly in decision-making and in tolerating both the emotional distance from her family and the impermanence of her relationships in the host country. The letter of complaint became a diagnostic tool to identify the contact disturbances and emotional blockages related to unresolved grief and impaired agency.

### 3.2. Data triangulation

The data extracted from the qualitative analysis was then triangulated with the results obtained by each participant on the quantitative assessments used to measure migratory grief (MGLQ) and immigration stress (BISS). This approach was informed by a mixed-methods design. This convergence across methods serves to strengthen the validity of the case formulations.

**Case 1** demonstrated higher scores on the BISS and lower scores on the MGLQ, indicative of a profile consistent with migration-related stress. As evidenced by the coding and categorization of themes in the letter of complaint in **Case 1**, themes such as *work ethic disillusionment* and *disillusionment with the Northern ideal* emerged, linked to ambivalence about the decision to migrate. These themes were not present in **Case 2**.

Conversely, **Case 2** demonstrated a higher score on the MGLQ, suggesting a prevalence of grief and identity fragmentation. The template analysis of this letter of complaint reveals a predominant presentation of codes associated with the disintegration of identity between the host country and the country of origin. These elements and variables are characteristic of migratory grief.

## Discussion

This article focuses on the specific use of complaint letters as a narrative tool within the broader context of a study on migratory grief. The results confirm that migratory grief is a complex process involving both emotional loss and stress related to adaptation (Mak et al., 2021). Both letters reveal deep feelings of disconnection from the home country and ambivalence about the host culture. These findings align with existing research, which highlights how the loss of cultural familiarity and the challenge of rebuilding social networks contribute to psychological distress among migrants (Renner et al., 2024).

Building upon Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, this analysis identifies distinct strategies employed by the participants. **Case 1** exhibits assimilation, characterized by a complete adoption of the host culture, which appears to have been unsuccessful. In contrast, **Case 2** demonstrates marginalization, where the individual struggles to identify with either their original culture or the new society. These patterns underscore the diverse ways individuals navigate cultural transitions and the potential psychological challenges inherent in each strategy. In **Case 1**, ambiguity is transformed into an inability to predict events, which is consistent with a constructivist perspective on anxiety as anticipatory failure (Kelly, 1955).

One of the key recurring themes is double loyalty, a phenomenon commonly observed in the process of grief (Francesetti, Gecele & Roubal, 2013). Participants express tension between their

emotional ties to their home country and the need to adapt to their new environment. For instance, one participant articulates feelings of guilt for leaving her family behind but also acknowledges relief from previous familial pressures. This theme endorses Gestalt therapy concepts of self-reorganization and the role of unresolved conflict in emotional suffering. Additionally, cultural elements such as *gezelligheid*, a Dutch ideal of social harmony (Lindemann, 2009; Verhoef, 2023), may hinder emotional processing by discouraging overt expressions of dissatisfaction. This dynamic suppresses opportunities for processing grief and ambivalence, complicating the acculturation process.

In intimate connection with the theme of double loyalty, ambivalence appears as another central experience reflected in the narratives. The participants simultaneously value the opportunities provided by migration while acknowledging unmet expectations and social isolation. This mirrors research on the psychological toll of migration, where conflicting emotions can impede both personal and cultural integration. The dissonance between initial ideals and lived experiences supports the notion of innovative moments, where individuals confront and reinterpret deep-seated struggles. The protest, understood as an innovative moment and reflected in the letters, allows us to orient ourselves both towards what we want to reject or change (protest 1), as well as what we want to achieve (protest 2) and in that sense it is a process that allows us to reorient the experience of the problem towards the desired or ideal experience (Gonçalves et al., 2017).

The complaint letters demonstrate the therapeutic potential of narrative approaches, particularly the externalization of distress through structured reflection. The principles of narrative therapy emphasize the importance of re-authorizing experiences to reduce the emotional burden of unresolved conflict (White & Epston, 1990), which is consistent with both the theme of 'paradoxical agency in migration' found in the template analysis conducted and the presence of a diminished ego-function of the self (Perls et al., 1951) in the cases studied. The letters provided participants with a means of articulating ambivalent feelings that might otherwise have remained unprocessed, facilitating a deeper engagement with their grief. This is in line with findings from studies of migration stress that emphasize the role of narrative tools in enhancing self-awareness and coping (Boswell et al., 2021; Kogen, 2014).

In this study, template analysis (Brooks et al., 2015) was used to systematically examine the complaint letters, thereby facilitating the identification of both anticipated and emergent themes within the data. This method's flexibility enables a nuanced understanding of the complex emotional landscapes associated with migratory grief, as it accommodates the use of a priori themes while remaining open to new insights that arise during analysis. Furthermore, this variation of thematic analysis allows for the integration of different theoretical frameworks. For instance, the theme of double loyalty was incorporated from a Gestalt therapy perspective on grief, while ambivalence was drawn from research on migratory grief. The hierarchical coding structure inherent in template analysis enabled the organization of themes from broad categories to specific sub-themes, providing a comprehensive framework to interpret participants' experiences. This approach proved particularly valuable in capturing the dynamic interplay between cultural adaptation strategies and individual emotional responses, thereby enriching the overall analysis and contributing to more tailored therapeutic interventions.

The process was further validated through triangulation with quantitative data. *Case 1* scored higher on the scale for immigration stress (Tomás-Sábado et al., 2007), reflecting greater stress and ambivalence, while *Case 2* showed higher scores on questionnaire to measure grief and loss (Casado & Leung, 2002), indicating that unresolved grief was a central challenge. This supports the argument for integrating qualitative and quantitative methods in the study of complex psychological experiences like migratory grief.

Together, these results demonstrate that the complaint letters not only surface rich thematic content aligned with the literature on migratory grief and Gestalt therapy but also provide clinically relevant insights that directly inform case formulation. Specifically, they enable early recognition of dominant affective responses (ambivalence in *Case 1*, grief in *Case 2*), boundary functioning (deficient self-differentiation in both cases), and adjustment strategies (failed assimilation vs. marginalization), thus guiding the initial therapeutic focus with greater clarity.

These findings have significant clinical implications. Integrating narrative tools with Gestalt therapy principles offers a way to address the emotional conflict that migrants face. Complaint letters allow patients to externalize conflicting loyalties and reframe their experiences, facilitating therapeutic interventions aimed at processing the conflict and restoring contact. Although this article focuses on only two cases, it offers a foundation for future research on narrative approaches to migratory grief. Further investigation with a larger, more diverse sample is recommended to refine these methods and generalize the efficacy across contexts.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article. This work was conducted independently, with no financial, institutional, or personal interests that could have influenced the study's outcomes or interpretations.

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