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Experiences of Place among Older Migrants Living in Inner-City Neighbourhoods in Belgium and England
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Tine Buffel et Chris Phillipson

Résumé de l'article

Le présent article explore l'expérience de l'environnement chez les personnes âgées immigrantes vivant dans des quartiers défavorisés. Cette recherche qualitative réalisée dans des cités en Angleterre et en Belgique est fondée sur une série d'entrevues semi-dirigées avec des personnes âgées d'origine pakistanaise et somalienne à Manchester et Liverpool et d'origine turque et marocaine à Bruxelles. L'article montre dans quelle mesure et sous quelles formes est recréée l'idée de « chez-soi » et quelles sont les contraintes pouvant restreindre sa réalisation. On y explore aussi le sens des liens transnationaux dans le lien avec l'environnement. Enfin, l'article se penche sur les concepts et les enjeux politiques soulevés au cours de la recherche.

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ABSTRACT ■ This article aims to explore experiences of "place" among older migrants living in deprived urban neighbourhoods. The data for the present research are derived from two qualitative studies in inner-city neighbourhoods in England and Belgium. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with older Pakistani and Somali people in Manchester and Liverpool, and Turkish and Moroccan elders in Brussels, the paper reviews the variety of ways in which the idea of "home" is created, the constraints and environmental pressures which may prevent people from developing a sense of "home," and the meaning of transnational ties for the experience of place. The final part of the paper discusses conceptual as well as policy issues raised by the research.

RÉSUMÉ ■ Le présent article explore l'expérience de l'environnement chez les personnes âgées immigrantes vivant dans des quartiers défavorisés. Cette recherche qualitative réalisée dans des cités en Angleterre et en Belgique est fondée sur une série d'entrevues semi-dirigées avec des personnes âgées d'origine pakistanaise et somalienne à Manchester et Liverpool et d'origine turque et marocaine à Bruxelles. L'article montre dans quelle mesure et sous quelles formes est recréée l'idée de « chez-soi » et quelles sont les contraintes pouvant restreindre sa réalisation. On y explore aussi le sens des liens transnationaux dans le lien avec l'environnement. Enfin, l'article se penche sur les concepts et les enjeux politiques soulevés au cours de la recherche.

KEYWORDS ■ Aging, urban environments, migration, older migrants, place attachment.

MOTS CLÉS ■ Vieillissement, environnement urbain, migration, personnes âgées immigrantes, lien avec l'environnement.

Population aging and urbanisation are two of the most significant social transformations of the twenty-first century (Burdett and Sudjic 2008; Phillipson 2010). At the same time as cities are growing, their share of older residents is increasing (United Nations 2009). By 2030, the major urban areas of the developed world will have 25 per cent or more of their population aged 60 and over. Urban populations have also become increasingly diverse as a result of international migration. Global cities host large numbers of older migrant populations with diverse characteristics, including some of the most affluent and accomplished and some of the most deprived and socially excluded. The most numerous in Europe are those labour migrants who moved from south to north within Europe or into Europe from the late 1950s onwards (Warnes 2004). A large presence of labour migrants who are "aging in place" has become a feature of many European cities in recent decades. Many migrants came from regions facing agricultural decline in southern Europe; others moved as a result of limited employment opportunities in East Asia and North Africa. By the 1960s, migration flows from other continents took place, in particular from the Indian sub-continent and Southeast Asia. Warnes makes the point here that:

> [...] in comparison to the host population, they [i.e. older migrants] have had a lifetime of disadvantage and deprivation, including poor health care and housing conditions, few opportunities to learn the local language, and very often the insults of cultural and racial discrimination (2004: 312).

In recent years, social gerontologists have responded to the need to increase understanding of the "structured disadvantage" and special needs of experienced older migrants (Warnes and Williams 2006). At the same time, discussions about the intersection of aging and migration have been largely detached from the various problems facing urban environments, notwithstanding the fact that many labour migrants reside in inner-city neighbourhoods experiencing poor housing conditions, poverty and crime (Becker 2003; Penninx *et al.* 2004).

Urban settings may impose limitations on daily life in old age (Becker 2003), with older people who become reliant upon their immediate environment especially vulnerable to area-based social exclusion. A study in

England found that older people living in deprived urban areas faced multiple risks of exclusion, and that these were significantly greater compared with other types of locations. Research in urban areas in various countries has also highlighted the precariousness of the living conditions of older migrants living in inner-city neighbourhoods, especially in terms of housing quality and a lack of basic comfort and safety (Becker 2003; Naegele 2008; Scharf *et al.* 2002; Talloen 2007). All of these elements present particular challenges to create a sense of home in old age.

On the other hand, despite the constraints, the existing and potential advantages of such urban areas for older migrants must also be highlighted. With respect to ethnic elders living in inner-city neighbourhoods, Becker has argued that "such locales are not only sources of danger [but] sources of community, where multigenerational families live and where social bonds with others are forged and maintained" (2003: 130). Other potential advantages of urban environments that may bring opportunities for older migrants are found in the presence of communal spaces, parks, ethnic businesses, corner shops and cafés, which may all be used to increase the quality of life (Phillipson 2010). In this respect, it is noteworthy, as Sahin *et al.* (2006) suggest, that migrant entrepreneurship is typically occurring in the city. In the context of Amsterdam, they found that first generation migrants from Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean backgrounds show high levels of entrepreneurship based on values such as close family and religious ties and trust, which enable them to compete successfully in business. The presence of and involvement in ethnic businesses such as travel agencies, shops and restaurants may all contribute to older migrants' sense of feeling at home in their neighbourhood.

Similarly, urban environments create undoubted opportunities for older migrants through the access of specialist forms of cultural, social, and religious participation and self-organisation (Phillipson 2010). Through such forms of participation, or activities such as volunteering and providing support across their communities, older migrants may contribute to civil society in a variety of ways. Warburton and McLaughlin (2007), however, make the point that the social contributions of older migrants to society have been largely underestimated and generally unacknowledged in social research. This may be attributed to the primary focus of researchers on the social problems experienced by these groups, as well as to the dominant western (European/North American) ways of conceptualising and measuring aspects of social engagement in later life. Therefore, Warburton and McLaughlin (*ibid.*) argue that there is need for approaches sensitive to cultural dimensions that focus on the views and experiences of older migrants themselves in relation to community involvement.

Against this background, this article aims to explore experiences of place and community among older migrants living in deprived urban neighbourhoods. A number of studies have suggested that older migrants' relationship to "locality" must be understood in relation to transnational ties and practices, in that they often stay "connected" with (and are simultaneously influenced by) more than one culture and place at a time (Silverstein and Attias-Donfut 2010; Torres 2006: 235). Therefore, the next section will explore the role of context and place in the experience of growing older, and will further link this to discussions of the complexities of migrants' transnational ties and multiple belongings. This will be followed by a brief introduction of the study neighbourhoods and the methods used in the study. The article combines qualitative data derived from empirical studies conducted in similar types of deprived urban areas in England and Belgium, exploring the following research questions:

- How do older migrants create a sense of "home" in their current neighbourhood?
- What are the constraints and environmental pressures which may prevent them from creating a sense of "home" in their present neighbourhood?
- How do older migrants maintain transnational ties, and what is the significance of such connections for the experience of place?

Using a similar research design, but different environmental contexts and different groups of older migrants, the study reflects an endeavour by social researchers in two European countries to identify jointly the dynamics underlying experiences of place among older migrants living in deprived urban areas.

Theoretical approaches to (multiple) place(s) in old age

Interest in the role of the physical and social environment has been a long-standing feature of research into aging, covering different approaches that influenced the development of the sub-discipline of environmental gerontology (Phillipson 2010). The field of housing provided the initial focus for research, with studies in the 1950s and 1960s using this topic to explore debates around "age integration" versus "age segregation" (Kleemier 1956; Webber and Oserbind 1960). These discussions focused on the extent to which older people wished to be either "integrated" into or "segregated" from mainstream society. By the 1970s, researchers shifted their focus to examining the reasons why some physical contexts achieved a better fit with the needs and abilities of older residents than others, with the "Press Competence model" (Lawton and Nahemow 1973) emerging

as a dominant framework for understanding person-environment relationships. The basic assumption of this approach is that individual behaviour is a result of congruence between the demand character of the environment (*environmental press*) and the capabilities of the person to deal with that demand (*personal competence*) (Lawton 1982). This model, alongside its variants (Carp and Carp 1984; Kahana 1982), addresses the ways in which mismatches between personal needs and environmental options to fulfil these needs can undermine wellbeing and mental health.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, further approaches developed focusing in particular on experiential perspectives relating to aging and the environment (Rowles 1983, 1978; Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992). Rowles (e.g. 1983, 1978), for example, has been highly influential in developing the concept of place attachment in old age, drawing upon phenomenological approaches. He developed the argument that older people who have resided in the same community for a long period of time maintain different types of attachment to their environment, and these can be framed within the concept of "insideness." Rowles suggested three complementary dimensions of insideness: *physical insideness*, reflecting "body-awareness," an intimate familiarity with the physical configuration of the environment; *social insideness*, arising from integration within the social fabric of the community; and *autobiographical insideness* reflecting the way in which lifelong accumulation of experiences in a place can provide "a sense of identity" (Rowles 1983: 302-307).

These developments in environmental gerontology ran parallel with a research literature exploring the relationship between global and local ties (Eade 1997), this research examining the extent to which "globalization has changed how we think about and experience place" (Becker 2003: 131). Attachment to place, for instance, may be compromised by global changes affecting communities, these undermining the strategies identified by Rowles (1983) for maintaining a sense of identity in later life. This may be the case in inner-city neighbourhoods which can be seen as "localizations" of structural forces (Becker 2003; Sassen 1999); and in particular in those areas characterized by rapid population turnover and the physical deterioration of buildings and infrastructure (Phillipson 2010; Scharf *et al.* 2002; Smith 2009).

Processes of globalization also introduce complexities at a local level through the emergence of transnational communities (Faist 2000). One example of the ways in which transnationalism is expected to alter the study of "place" in old age is found in the variety of social ties that older migrants establish across geographical borders, and the linkages they sustain between countries of origin and host countries (Torres 2006: 234). A study on transnational care-giving by Baldassar (2007), for example,

has shown that support between aging parents and adult children can be maintained across considerable geographical distances (see also Zechner 2008). In similar fashion, Huber and O'Reilly (2004) have questioned the overriding importance attached to physical proximity for developing a feeling of "being at home." Consequently, as Smith argues:

> People might be capable of multiple attachments or ambivalence. The view that people are attached to a single location and that they are either attached or not attached might be inappropriate and might lead to misinterpretation as to how we analyse individuals' connection with place (2009: 180).

The complexities of multiple and sometimes conflicting attachments of older migrants have been illustrated by studies addressing questions of returning to the country of origin (Naegele 2008; Ramji 2006; Silvaira and Allebeck 2001; Talloen 2007). In exploring first-generation British Indians transnational belongings, Ramji (2006) found that the idea of "returning home" (for their retirement) – whether imaginary, anticipated or undertaken – is a key feature of this generation's relationship to both London and their place of origin, and highlights the ambivalent nature of their sense of identity, home and place. Similarly, a study among older Somali men living in East London reported that:

> Despite (unfulfilled) initial plans as expressed by one of the participant: "The aim was to work, make money and go back home, we never settled in this country," feelings of pride about "being British" were common and equated with being a pensioner or more remarkable deeds e.g. fighting for England in the Second World War and the Falklands (Silvaira and Allebeck 2001: 313).

The idea of returning "home" (what Anwar [1975] describes as the "myth of return") has also been found to be of importance in how older Turkish migrants living in Germany (Naegele 2008) and older Moroccan and Turkish migrants in Belgium (Talloen 2007) give meaning to place. Both studies show that older migrants express strong attachments and feelings of homesickness for their countries of origin, but their wish to return has become an illusion due to both practical and emotional reasons. Alongside family and health-care related factors, the opportunity to commute comfortably between both countries has been found to be important for staying permanently in the host country (Naegele 2008). Such "back and forth" movements, as well as the transnational ties and exchanges, show the need for adopting a "geographically elastic," rather than a "unitary" conception of place in the study of migrant aging (Gardner 2002; McHugh and Mings 1996).

Methods

The data for the present research were derived from two comparable empirical qualitative studies in England and Belgium that explored perceptions of place and community among people aged 60 and over living in deprived inner-city areas. This paper analyses interviews conducted with Somali and Pakistani older people in England, and Moroccan and Turkish elders in Belgium. In both countries, the study areas were selected on the basis of criteria of urban deprivation, using the Index of Local Deprivation (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions –DETR 1998) for those in England and the Atlas of Deprived Areas (Kesteloot *et al.* 1996; Kesteloot and Meys 2008) for those in Belgium. Each of the England communities was ranked in the 50 most deprived neighbourhoods in England (out of more than 8,000 neighbourhoods) at the time of the study. The research areas in Belgium were ranked in the 20 (of 178) most deprived areas in Brussels (Jacobs and Swyngedouw 2000).

While the areas differ in their population profile, socio-economic structure and their proximity to their respective city centres, they share an accumulation of features associated with intense urban deprivation. These include above average rates of unemployment and low-income households, and relatively poor housing conditions (Kesteloot and Meys 2008; Social Exclusion Unit 1998). The Belgian study areas are characterised by a range of ethnic groups with Moroccan and Turkish migrants highly represented in their respective neighbourhoods. The UK study areas in Liverpool and Manchester were equally diverse with important groups of Somali and Pakistani migrants in particular neighbourhoods.

The findings presented in this study are based on 20 interviews with Moroccan, and 23 interviews with Turkish elders in Brussels, 19 interviews with older Somali people in Liverpool, and 20 interviews with older Pakistani people in Manchester. Recruitment of respondents ranged from the more formal to the fully informal: through relevant community organizations, including social service centres, voluntary and religious organizations as well as through informal gatherings or meeting places in the neighbourhood. Participants were selected purposively to reflect the diversity of the migrant populations, but especially to ensure coverage of older migrants experiencing different forms of exclusion from and attachments to the neighbourhood.

The respondents in Belgium (Brussels) were aged between 60 and 73 with an average age of 65 years. The majority of participants in England were also in their sixties, although exact birth dates were often uncertain, mainly due to the absence of birth certifications in the case of migrants from Somalia. Eighteen men and 25 women participated in the Brussels

study; 21 men and 18 women in the English study. Over half of the participants were married (23/43 in Brussels and 21/39 in England); 8 respondents in Brussels and 13 in England were widowed; 9 participants in Brussels and three in England were divorced with three and two respondents single in Brussels and England respectively. Most of them had adult children and grandchildren living in the current country of residence; some had children who moved back to the country of origin, and 7 were childless. The respondents in Brussels had lived on average 18 years in their current neighbourhood; the participants in England, 24 years. The vast majority lived in (social or private) rented accommodation, with the exception of the Turkish elders, nearly half of whom owned their flat or apartment. In both countries, the participants were predominantly Muslim. The great majority of Pakistani, Turkish and Moroccan people were labour migrants, recruited by the receiving countries to meet labour shortages from the 1950s and 1960s onwards. About half of the Somali respondents were labour migrants; other Somali arrived during the 1990s, seeking asylum from the civil war in Somalia.

In both countries, interviews were undertaken by members of the research team, or by interviewers recruited from the relevant ethnic group in the language of respondents' choice. Both studies employed a similar topic-list, including such issues as older people's experiences of place; views about their social relationships; and issues of transnationalism.

All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and translated where necessary. In order to increase the credibility of the findings, the same coding schedule was adopted for both the English and the Belgian study. All interviews were coded and analyzed using a computer software program designed to facilitate scientific text analyses: Winmax for the English study and ATLAS.ti for the Belgian study. Both programs employ a query tool that was used to retrieve quotations, based on the codes they were associated with during the coding process. Once the interviews were coded, we proceeded to identify how these themes were interrelated to one another for all respondents in each of the studies separately (Silverman 2001). The aim was further to identify similarities and contrasts in experiences of place of older migrants in both countries.

Findings

As mentioned above, our findings deal with, first, the ways in which older migrants create a sense of "home" in their current neighbourhood; second, the constraints and environmental pressures which may prevent the development of a sense of "home"; and, third, the ways in which older migrants maintain transnational ties, as well as the significance of such

connections for the experience of place. In this first section we report on findings about the construction of home and neighbourhood among the participants.

The transnational lifestyles and discontinuous life course patterns of many of the respondents in this study introduce a number of complexities into experiences relating to space and place. Moreover, the study areas in this research present numerous environmental pressures linked to urban change and deprivation (see further below) which may compromise people's "feeling of home" in their neighbourhood (Chaudhury and Rowles 2005). It is important to note, however, that despite such pressures, most participants commented on how they strived to transform their current physical environment into a meaningful place; a place that comforts them, where they feel at home and to which they had become attached to varying degrees. Such a sense of local attachment to place was especially evident in people's narratives about memories and experiences that had accumulated about their neighbourhood, with two recurring themes emerging across all study areas: first, the proximity of members of the own cultural community which offered opportunities for developing social networks and realising common social bonds; and, second, the proximity of (ethnic) amenities. Typical comments included:

> *I like this neighbourhood. My children have grown up here, and I know everyone here; they are like family. All my dreams lie here* (Moroccan woman, Brussels).

> *It's a good area… because everywhere is pretty close, you know, especially the community and the mosque and that's the important thing* (Somali woman, Liverpool).

> *The best thing about living here is that there is a large Turkish community. I don't feel like a stranger here, we are all the same* (Turkish man, Brussels).

> *This is the only other place I've known as home other than Pakistan. So I would say that I feel very at home in this neighbourhood. Your home is what you make, not what people think it to be* (Pakistani woman, Manchester).

The idea of "making" your home and neighbourhood, as expressed by this Pakistani woman, also reflects older migrants' active role in the construction of urban space. Feldman and Stall (2004) suggest that this may be realized by a variety of means: individuals may possess, construct, enhance, or care for their home environment, and mark it with identifying signs, symbols or practices (de Haan 2005). Such processes were evident in narratives about a) transnational practices, and b) engagements in community life, both of which appeared to contribute to a sense of home in the neighbourhood.

First, the transnational ties and practices of older migrants in this study show how they visibly transform their current place into a "transnational social space" (Faist 2000), not only in a material, but also in a symbolic sense. For example, the establishment and use of ethnic business and communal places such as tea houses and watching satellite TV, all reflect transnational practices, but at the same time, they are part of what has been termed "the creation of new places of belonging" (Ehrkamp 2005) within the receiving society. Lefebvre (1991) has suggested that such productions of – potentially new – forms of social space can be seen as an integral part of group identity formation, which he considers as a fundamental right of all inhabitants of the city. Next to the use of specialised shops and communal spaces, access to the local mosque was also considered to be of major importance by many. A Pakistani respondent in Manchester reported how he had contributed to the construction of such "an own place" for the community where people could meet each other:

> *Twenty years back we hired the halls and then we prayed there... I said why we are hiring this hall...? Why don't we make our own place? So... you gave according to your pocket, I gave according to my pocket. We were all people who were praying there; everybody contributed something to that kitty you know... We bought that place where this mosque is now.*

Second, the findings point to the importance of what Rowles (1983) termed "social insideness" in developing a sense of home, both in terms of loose relationships with "friendly" people, as well as kinship relations and friendships, especially with those from their own cultural community. Although social gerontologists have tended to focus on the social isolation and exclusion of older urban dwellers, increased attention must also be given, as Becker notes, "to the wealth and complexity of social relationships in the lives of many ethnic elders, for these relationships are key to understanding what keeps these elders rooted in place" (2003: 145). This point is clearly expressed by an older Pakistani man living in Manchester who argued that moving away from his neighbourhood would be "*the biggest mistake ever, because my wife, children and myself get a lot of support from the people in this area.*"

Our analyses of the respondents' social relationships provide substantial support for Warburton and McLaughlin's (2007) point that older people from diverse cultural backgrounds contribute to social capital in a variety of ways. Many older migrants in Belgium and England had important roles in providing support to their families, neighbours and members of their cultural community; some were also engaged in their neighbourhood through social and religious activities. Such social roles

reflect the various ways in which those elders contribute to the construction of their neighbourhood as a collective space; a setting for interaction, activities and the establishment of social values and norms. The following comments illustrate the importance attached to values such as cooperation and social support within their communities:

> *Cooperation is the very essence of our community; we try to help people, keep society together, educate young people and direct them how to get good education* (Turkish man, Brussels).

> *I would say that the people that I have got to know over the years… are people who would come to my need if I ever required it, as I would for them. I am not only talking about friends but also neighbours and other community members* (Pakistani man, Manchester).

Findings suggest that the social network of most of the respondents was strongly oriented towards the (extended) family. The majority had their children and grandchildren living in fairly close proximity to their homes and had a regular and intense level of family contact. These social ties were not only important for the older person, in the sense that they lower the risk of being socially isolated, but also reflected the social roles older migrants take on in their families. Typical examples were: providing support based on common experience; keeping the family together (especially among women); taking care of grandchildren; taking on an advisory role for the young; and promoting their culture and religion.

> *I'm always busy in the home babysitting my grandchildren* (Pakistani woman, Manchester).

> *When someone of the family is in trouble, they always come to me. They ask for my advice because I'm the eldest* (Turkish man, Brussels).

Many interviewees also contributed to social capital through maintaining "good and trustful relationships with neighbours," these providing them with a sense of security. A Pakistani respondent commented: "*They* [the neighbours] *are there if you need them and you don't have to worry about anything. We always help each other out.*" Several Turkish people made a similar point by using the Turkish expression "find your neighbour, choose your house," suggesting that trustful and supportive neighbours are the most important criterion for determining the choice of a home. For some, the importance attached to neighbours was also inspired by cultural views and Islamic beliefs. This is illustrated through the following expressions: "neighbours are like family in our culture"; "Allah evaluates our efforts to maintain neighbourly relationships"; and "neighbours have indisputable rights to each other." Typical examples of such "rights" were found in the support provided to one another, in terms of

"helping each other financially" when needed and "visiting neighbours when they have a problem or when they are ill."

Although there was a great deal of diversity within a particular migrant group – for example, in terms of occupation, migration history and the region from where they had migrated – most interviewees presented their cultural community as a socially cohesive group. Among older Turkish people in Brussels, for example, such a sense of local social connectedness reflected in the term *akrabalar* – meaning "relatives" or "kin" – which was often used to refer to everyone who migrated from the same Turkish village (which was the majority in this area). A Turkish woman said: "*We treat the people that came from Kayseri as our relatives*" – reflecting supportive, reciprocal relationships across members of the community. At a more general level, "*a sense of belonging to your community and your people,*" as a Somali woman reported, was found to be an important factor for achieving a sense of home in the neighbourhood.

There was some evidence that the social roles of older migrants in their communities were gendered in that women were more oriented towards family, domestic and care-related practices while men were more active outside the home. Women's narratives about social support appeared to be especially centred on relatives, neighbours and sick or vulnerable people in the community. Older men's supportive network tended to be slightly more diverse, in that they also talked about "friends from the mosque" and about "former work mates." This was apparent, for example, in the narratives of some Somali men in Liverpool who had worked aboard ships and who maintained strong, supportive friendship relationships with their former seamen comrades. In comparison with older migrant women, the men in this study also tended to have more informal gatherings with friends outdoors, for example in the mosque, cafes or teahouses; these regarded as "male spaces," both by some men and women. Islamic prescriptions, outlining that men and women should keep sufficient physical distance and should not meet in private, may further support such "male territoriality," since women should not enter a space in which men are already present (Peleman 2003: 159). This was illustrated in our study through a comment made by an older Turkish woman in Brussels: "*I only go shopping in the shop at the corner; I don't go to the Aldi* [supermarket] *because I have to pass that square then where all the men are.*" This woman was especially worried that these men, "*who kept an eye on all passers-by,*" would spread gossip about her which could damage her reputation in the community, and therefore she avoided this particular place.

On the other hand, there was also evidence that older women succeeded in appropriating certain places (see, further, Peleman 2003). This was especially the case in private spaces; in their home or in the homes

of family of friends where they had informal meetings amongst women, but also in some semi-public spaces such as associations and community centres, where women came together to attend language courses or programs against illiteracy; and do voluntary work, such as cooking for the young. Many older Moroccan women also made reference to a particular park which they regularly visited with their grandchildren and where they met with other women. This park was seen as a place where they could escape from the social control of men. The importance attached to such "female spaces" was also evident in comments about a lack of meeting places in the neighbourhood. A Pakistani woman in Manchester, for example, argued: *"we need somewhere for the men to get together and a place for the women to get together. We need a lot more services and facilities for us elderly people here."*

The creation of home: constraints and pressures

In contrast with the above findings, a number of older migrants across all study areas reported difficulty in developing or maintaining meaningful social relationships within their neighbourhood. In particular, those participants who were reliant upon their immediate environment for achieving social integration – for example through restricted mobility or lack of resources to maintain distant relationships – but did not have family or friends living close by appeared to be especially prone to social isolation. Most of them expressed a general sense of discouragement with regard to their neighbourhood, and some reported feelings of depression and loneliness. These narratives generally reflected a discrepancy between desired and actually achieved intimate social relationships (Scharf and De Jong Gierveld 2008):

> *I feel alone; I don't have anyone to fall back on* (Pakistani woman, Manchester).

> *The fact that I have no family here is extremely bad and depressing; no good things come to my mind* (Pakistani woman, Manchester).

A few Turkish people in Brussels expressed a similar sense of discouragement because they didn't feel integrated in their community. A woman who migrated from a different village than the majority of Turkish people in her neighbourhood, reported how she felt excluded from the Turkish community: *"I would like to get to know other Turkish people, but it's difficult. Everyone knows everyone here... It's difficult to find acceptance if you're not from Kayseri."* Further in the interview, she said: *"I became somehow isolated; that's why I'm stuck in the house now and don't see people... nobody helps me, no one cares about me."* This case suggested that the same strong, supportive networks that bring benefits to most

members of the Turkish community can also be experienced as "anti-social" by those placed on the outside (Crow 2004). Thus, social capital may not only foster a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood among members of a community, but may also enable it to bar others from access to such benefits and from feeling part of the neighbourhood (Portes 1998).

These, among other interviews, also provided insights into some of the structural barriers, which prevented some older migrants living in deprived areas from engaging in informal and formal social relationships and from creating a sense of home. Poverty, poor housing conditions, language barriers, perceived vulnerability to crime and lack of access to services and facilities were among the factors which discouraged some people from engaging in community life. These spatial conditions – the situational contexts of older migrants' lives (Becker 2003) – figured prominently in their comments on how they experience place:

> *Basically I can only describe this area as an area that has been forgotten by the authority. It is an area where there are a lot of drugs and violence and it seems the situation is getting worse... There are always children doing anti-social behaviour, breaking windows and throwing missiles against elderly people* (Somali man, Liverpool).

> *I live here because the rents are affordable, but it's not a good area: lots of thefts, lots of noise, and very filthy* (Moroccan woman, Brussels).

> *You can manage* [financially]*... I don't go to entertainment; I don't go nowhere* (Somali man, Liverpool).

> *There are no activities here. There is one place where people come together, but I don't know what it is. Language is a major problem. As we cannot speak the language, we cannot understand the relevant information* (Turkish woman, Brussels).

Older people who were already disadvantaged in terms of ill-health were especially vulnerable to such structural barriers. For example, some lived in houses that were poorly adapted for people with physical disabilities, and for those who lived in high-rise buildings that lacked an elevator, their housing conditions prevented them from leaving their home. A Moroccan woman in Brussels who cared for her husband since he underwent an operation, for instance, reported that:

> *He can't go outdoors anymore because we are on the fourth floor and he can't cope with the stairs. I stay with him... So no, we don't see many people, except from the ones that visit us.*

Similar issues were reported among some participants in England. An older Somali man commented on the problems he experienced in his home:

The stairs are a particular problem for me. There are times when I try to take a cup of tea upstairs and it is difficult for me. Also I need a new heating system because it is very cold and I need a house which will be much warmer.

For these and other participants, the main underlying reason for staying in their current home was financial with the relatively low rents discouraging people from moving.

Multiple place attachments and transnational ties

As discussed earlier, older migrants may be attached to multiple places in that they often maintain linkages to their current neighbourhood as well as their place of origin (Smith 2009), these allowing for new forms of identification that cut across fixed notions of belonging (Chambers *et al.* 2009; Dwyer 2000). Evidence of such "de-territorialisation" of belonging and attachment was found in the way a Somali woman in Liverpool and a Moroccan woman in Brussels talked about their "first" and "second home"; and in the local and transnational connections about which many interviewees spoke. The following excerpts illustrate how several older migrants felt emotionally attached to both their present place of residence and their place of origin, reflecting the ambivalent nature of their sense of home and place.

I feel very much attached to my neighbourhood. Whenever I go to Turkey I miss my friends and children [who live in Belgium]. *But when I'm here, I miss my family in Turkey* (Turkish man, Brussels).

This [neighbourhood in Manchester] *is my home now. I don't think of it as anything else. But there is nothing like your home in Pakistan, which I miss. But this is my home* (Pakistani man, Manchester).

Typical examples of transnational ties were found among older migrants who kept in touch with family and friends in the country of origin through telephoning or visiting them. Keeping in touch with relatives, caring for a family member who was ill, getting children married and attending weddings and funerals were identified as the main reasons for visiting the homeland. There was also some evidence from the study of the continuation of remittances from the older person to family members in the country of origin. Almost all older migrants across both countries attached great importance to such transnational ties and social practices. However, we found differences between older migrants in England and those in Belgium with respect to the extent to which they were able to sustain transnational relationships. Many older Pakistani and Somali people in England mentioned financial or other obstacles which prevented

them from keeping in touch with family members and from returning to their homeland as often as they would like. This was often regarded as a considerable problem which decreased their quality of life; some reported how they had to cut back on essentials in order to be able to send money to their family or save money for a visit to Pakistan or Somalia. Typical comments included:

I haven't seen or spoken to my family in Pakistan for a very long time, as I can't afford to phone or visit them (Pakistani man, Manchester).

My wife is in Pakistan and has been there for the past two years... to look after her elderly mother who is bed-ridden. I would like to go to Pakistan as I haven't been for ten years but I can't afford to go with my pension (Pakistani man, Manchester).

The last time I went to buy like clothes, underwear or [anything like that] *was sometime ago... I need to save something for the family as well because they expect you to send some money* (older Somali man, Liverpool).

The benefit system in England was seen as another obstacle which prevented many of them from returning to their homeland. An older Pakistani man, for example, reported that:

We cannot even go back home for a break, as we cannot afford it. By the time you pay for your tickets and transport fees you have no money left to live on or to spend while you are in Pakistan. On top of all this you cannot stay away for more than four weeks or your benefit will be stopped so that when you come back you are left to face bills and have no money left to pay for essential materials to keep you going. It seems a shame to spend so much money just to stay there for four weeks. I think that this rule should be revised and taken into consideration for us elderly people. It is so expensive.

In contrast, most Moroccan and Turkish older people in Brussels seemed to keep in touch quite easily with relatives in their homeland through phone deals offering cheap rates which enabled them to speak to their family on a regular basis. Moreover, the vast majority belonged to the category of "back-and-forth migrants" (Naegele 2008), in that they commuted quite comfortably between both countries. Most of these elders travelled at least once a year to their home country, either by car with their children or thanks to cheap flights, with the summer months being the most popular time to visit the homeland. Some of them owned a house in their country of origin.

I go back to my country at least once a year. My aunt, cousins, my father's cousin; they all live there. I visit them every year and we phone regularly. I miss my hometown, but we stay connected (Turkish woman, Brussels).

I have a good relationship with them [family in Morocco]*. I talk to them nearly every day because I can call cheaply… And once a year we're going… Within five days we're leaving; I'm so excited* (Moroccan man, Brussels).

The idea of "returning home" was found to be a key theme in the way older migrants spoke about their relationship to both their country of origin and current place. Many interviewees initially migrated to Belgium and England with the idea of returning back home after they worked a few years and earned enough money. At the same time, this idea of "temporariness" also contributed to the present struggles and problems experienced by many of the respondents. For example, some mentioned that this was the reason why they had not learned the local language. Unfulfilled plans to return home were also reflected in current concerns arising from loss of their "first home," whether voluntarily or unwillingly left. Many older migrants still had desires or plans for return. These were shaped for some by the "happy" or "care-free" memories of their former place – "*In Pakistan you have your own grown vegetables and milk…you don't have to worry about all these little things that you do here.*" For others the circumstances under which they currently lived was an important factor. For a Pakistani man, for example, the lack of access to family and informal care, and the daily concerns arising from a life in poverty, were some of the underlying reasons for desiring to return to Pakistan.

I want to go to Pakistan in a few years and spend the rest of my life there away from all the troubles here. At least back in Pakistan I will have someone who will be able to look after me and my wife. The weather is always hot there and I don't have to worry about getting pneumonia or spending so much money just to keep the heating on all the time.

Most interviewees, however, had come to realise that returning to their "first home" was unlikely (Naegele 2008; Phillipson *et al.* 2002) in that they adjusted to the idea of growing old in their current place. We found a variety of underlying motifs for this adjustment, either linked to the living conditions in the current place, or to observed changes in the place of origin: children and grandchildren who live in Belgium or England; feelings of home as a result of transnational practices and common social bonds; benefits linked to the social security and health system; and opportunities for commuting between host and home country (especially among Turkish and Moroccan people) were identified as the main reasons for staying on site. Some interviewees also referred to how the transformations and evolutions that had occurred in their homeland made it more difficult for them to identify with their place of origin. Although many older migrants expressed a longing to return, few did so because of the above reasons. For example:

I would definitely prefer to grow old in my country [Turkey]*... But I don't think I would be able to manage that. My children live here. I go back to Turkey for 3 to 4 months a year, but then I miss my grandchildren too much. I also don't have as much friends in Turkey as I have here. People are different there... Sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own country* (Turkish man, Brussels).

This is the only home that I've really known since I came here. My children have grown up here and this is where we feel safe and secure. It's part of our identity (older Pakistani women, Manchester).

For Somali people, the main reasons for not returning to their country of origin were linked to the impact of the civil war on their homeland. A Somali woman reported that she had nothing to return to because "*I don't know where they* [her family] *live now. With the war and everything; they've moved somewhere else.*" In the narratives of Somali elders, feelings of home and attachment to place were strongly embedded in the notion of "peace": "*I feel like it is home; I'm not feeling any problems, anybody hurt me or doing any bad things to me.*"

A final topic that might need further investigation when exploring questions of return is the place one wants to be buried. Muslims bury the dead in conformity to a number of prescriptions and rituals stipulated by their religion, including a plot held in perpetuity; a burial without coffin, directed towards Mecca; a simple and small gravestone; and no entry to the graves (Talloen 2007). Many Muslims also have difficulties with the commercialization of the dead (Moulin *et al.* 2007). A Pakistani woman in Manchester expressed this by asking: "*Do you know that this is the only country that makes you pay for a place to be buried in the ground*"? Several people across all migrant groups in this study reported how they had arranged the repatriation of their own and family members' mortal remains to their homeland for when they die. Although this involved serious financial concerns, they felt as if they didn't have a choice, as there was no guarantee that the Islamic prescriptions would be fulfilled when buried in the "receiving" country. A Turkish man in Brussels argued:

We need a grave yard for Muslims here. They may say: "there are already enough," but they usually remove the grave yards after twenty-five years; and this is considered to be a big mistake in my religion. This is a very important issue for us in many respects.

On the other hand, for some, the desire to be buried in the homeland was seen as the last possibility to fulfil their "wish to return" which could make the circle of their journey complete (see, further, Gardner 2002; Moulin and Casman 2007).

Discussion

This study calls attention to a topic that has been largely ignored in gerontology: older migrants' experiences of (multiple) place(s) in age-integrated inner-city environments. Three aspects may be singled-out for discussion from the findings presented above: first, understanding the role of place in the lives of older migrants; second, developing "urban citizenship" and "rights to the city"; third, developing social policies that recognise the transnational interactions of different migrant groups.

On the first point, the findings indicate that a focus on place identifies both the daily challenges faced by older migrants in deprived urban settings as well as the way they strive to create a "sense of home" by producing and transforming their current place of residence through transnational belongings, ties and practices. By engaging in their communities, establishing communal places such as mosques, and making use of ethnic amenities, older migrants reconstruct and transform their neighbourhood into a transnational place. At the same time, such exchanges with the environment also transform individuals and groups themselves.

Many respondents connect their sense of local attachment to such transnational ties and practices, suggesting that these enable them to create a sense of belonging to place, rather than preventing it. This implies that transnational and local ties cannot be seen as mutually exclusive (Ehrkamp 2005), but that "new places of belonging" to the neighbourhood can be created through the transnationalisation and production of space. Such processes of transforming, producing and investing in the neighbourhood also reveal how the construction or reconstruction of identities and the continuous reestablishment of those identities occur through the linkage between global and local ties (Eade 1997). This study provided insights in how this process develops in old age.

The narratives of older migrants do not represent the voices of people who have had lifelong settled lives (Becker 2003). The structure of the migrants' life course may be seen as "discontinuous" (Torres 2006), with key biographical events – such as marriage, having children, establishing a home – often occurring in a less predictable order as compared with non-migrants. Given this context, establishing secure and meaningful places may assume particular importance, with the achievement of "social insideness" (Rowles 1983) providing both continuity and support.

At the same time, the majority of older migrants appear to be embedded in social relationships that give meaning to their lives, with these social connections a key element for understanding the ways new places of belonging are created. In this context, it is important to note that older migrants make significant contributions to civil society and social capital

through fulfilling important roles in, and providing support to, their families, neighbours and members of their cultural community. Many respondents have strong social bonds based on reciprocity and trust with people who share the same ethnicity and background ("bonding social capital" following Putnam 2000). In some cases, especially among men, there is also evidence of "bridging social capital," i.e. connections to people with contrasting social characteristics, for example with work-mates from a different cultural background.

On the other hand, there was evidence that language barriers prevented many respondents from making contact with people outside their cultural community. Our study suggests that older migrants who lack bonding social relationships within their cultural community are especially vulnerable to feelings of loneliness, and often express a sense of exclusion from the neighborhood.

The second issue concerns the need to link issues affecting older migrants to a wider debate about developing age-friendly cities and ideas about "urban citizenship" and the right to make full use of the city. The concept of "the right to the city" is closely associated with the work of Lefebvre (1991) and is used to develop approaches to conflicts over the shape of the city and access to public space – or, in Harvey's terms (2009: 315), the right to "make and remake our cities and ourselves" under circumstances in which private capital is dominating the urban process. Commenting on Lefebvre's work, Purcell (2003: 577-578) argues that "the right to the city" implies two main rights for its inhabitants. The first is the right to "full and complete usage" of the city. The second concerns the right to participate centrally in decision-making surrounding the production of urban space.

Such issues may be of particular importance for older people who become reliant upon their immediate environment for achieving a fulfilling existence in old age. Moreover, the so-called "paradox of neighbourhood participation" (Buffel *et al.* [forthcoming]) applies especially well to older people, i.e. they tend to spend a lot of time in their neighbourhood (*being part of the city*), but are often among the last to be engaged when it comes to decision-making processes within their neighbourhood (*taking part in the city*). While cities are increasingly viewed as key drivers of a nation's economic and cultural success, their reconstruction is often to the detriment of those outside the labour market, especially those with low socio-economic status. Achieving recognition of the needs of different generations within cities, and exploiting the potential of the city for groups of whatever age, will be central to the process of making cities more age-friendly (Phillipson 2010).

Finally, the findings of this study point to the need for developing social policies that can handle the transnational interactions of older migrants. Our study suggests that not only the transnational practices in their current neighbourhood, but also the extent to which older migrants are able to maintain connections with their family in the country of origin, has an impact on the wellbeing of older migrants. One implication of the research reported here is that social policy, as a set of arrangements framed within the nation state, should have a more explicit "transnational" dimension than is presently the case. First and later generation migrants will almost certainly continue to be active in their countries of origin (remittances being only one aspect of a broad field of social, economic and cultural exchange). Cross-cultural social networks will continue to thrive, sustained through the expanded possibilities introduced by different forms of technologically-based networks. The key issue, however, is the extent to which these additional elements of citizenship are given due acknowledgement in the countries to which people migrate. The argument here is that without such recognition, new forms of social exclusion may appear with full participation in urban life curtailed.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the lives of older people drawn from a number of minority ethnic groups living in inner city areas of Belgium and England. The research should be seen as an exploratory investigation, using qualitative data to highlight a range of experiences among first generation migrant groups. Despite the preliminary nature of the study, some major themes have been highlighted: first, the importance attached to securing a sense of home and place within these urban settings, and the range of strategies adopted to secure this objective. Second, the significance attached to the transnational dimension for all the respondents, this aspect imposing a distinctive shape and presence to the organisation of social space and institutions within the areas studied. Third, the variety of experiences among our respondents must be highlighted, reflecting in part cultural and ethnic variations but also the complexity of the life course and biographical journeys among those interviewed. Finally, we would point to the implications of the study in respect of re-thinking the nature of social policy in a global world – where people "revisit" home physically, virtually and psychologically. Identities and family ties no longer respect national borders. First generation migrants are pioneers of a new social and economic order, raising major issues for research in urban sociology as well as for social policy more generally.

Acknowledgements

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