Older migrants reflecting on aging through attachment to and identification with places

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ABSTRACT

With increasing numbers of older migrants adopting a transnational lifestyle or returning to their country of origin following retirement, the sense of attachment to and identification with the places they inhabit remains an under explored field of enquiry. Through an ethnographic approach, this paper seeks to raise awareness of the diversity within a group of older migrants, given the heterogeneity of affective bonds established with places. By highlighting the perspective of older Italian migrants living in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, this paper illustrates the role of a sense of identification with the context of migration in later life. In referring to migration as a process of transformation, some older Italians re-define their identities, as these become interwoven with the characteristics of the places in which they grow older. However, older migrants' sense of attachment to places also reveals the complexity of aging in the context of migration, when a sense of identification with these is never fully achieved in older age. This paper argues that the notion of aging that these older Italian migrants uphold is not only altered by their experience of migration, but also shaped through their identification with the places they inhabit, given formal and informal practices of identification. Thus, by addressing the determinants for a positive experience of aging in the context of migration, this paper challenges the ways in which older migrant groups are conceptualized in gerontological scholarship.

Introduction

Understanding how people engage with places through the aging process has become a significant research foci (Skinner, Andrews, & Cutchin, 2017). Social and geographical gerontology has emphasized how place attachment contributes to a positive experience of aging (Altman & Low, 1992; Andrews & Phillips, 2004; Chaudhury & Rowles, 2005; Peace, Kellaher, & Holland, 2005; Rowles, 1983; Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992). This affective bond with places does not merely refer to attachment to homes, neighbourhoods and communities in which older people have lived over their lifetimes, but also to the social and the cultural sphere, at community or national level (Andrews, Cutchin, McCracken, Phillips, & Wiles, 2007; Wiles et al., 2009; Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve, & Allen, 2012). Rowles (2017) defines place attachment as constituted by personal place identification (such as an individual component) and the identity of place (namely characteristics of the place). Focusing on the sense of 'being in place', he stresses the need of intervention to support and reinforce identification with places, as essential for wellbeing in later life. This argument raises an important question: what is the role of place attachment amongst those who age in homes or communities where they have not resided for all their lives, such as, for example, an older migrant population?

Despite the fact that over past decades older migrants have been acknowledged as a substantial component of the aging population (Gilroy, 2008; Torres & Karl, 2016; Warnes, Friedrich, Kellaher, & Torres, 2004; Warnes & Williams, 2006), little is known regarding the ways in which they might experience and negotiate place attachment. As such, this paper aims to address this knowledge gap, situating itself at the intersection between aging and migration by exploring the affective bonds established with places from an older migrants' perspective. This paper focuses on the informal (i.e., socially constructed) and formal (e.g., citizenship) practices of identification from the point of view of older Italian migrants' in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. It argues that the sense of attachment to and identification with places inhabited, firstly can shed light on the diversity within the group of older migrants and, secondly, that this shapes the interpretation of a positive experience of aging in the context of migration.

Diversity within older migrants

The theme of 'diversity within' the group of older migrants has received a great deal of attention in aging studies. By highlighting the difficulties of interacting with social services (Warnes et al., 2004), the risk of social exclusion (Scharf, Phillipson, & Smith, 2005) or isolation (Victor, Burholt, & Martin, 2012), mainstream social gerontology research has tended to frame older migrants with several disadvantages and vulnerabilities, influencing the way these groups are perceived. Without neglecting previous research on aging migrants, it has been remarked that over-generalization of experiences and the vulnerable conditions of aging migrants leads to the construction of 'otherness', with older migrants portrayed as having 'special needs' (Torres, 2006, p. 1351). Hence, assuming that ethnicity determines identities (Torres, 2013), aging research has taken for granted cultural homogeneity of older migrants, only partially addressing the diversity within the ethnic group(Torres,2015).Consequently, scholars looking at the intersection between aging and migration highlighted that the simple categorization of older migrants in terms of ethnicity does not reflect the complexity of aging and the experiences of older age (Phillipson, 2015; Torres, 2013; Torres, 2015; Zubair & Norris, 2015). Previous research illustrated that diversity amongst aging migrants depends on different factors: e.g., social and economic status; the cultural background derived from the region of provenance (Warnes, King, Williams, & Patterson, 1999); the age at which migration took place; and the reason for migrating (Warnes et al., 2004). Further diversity relates to the transnational lifestyle (Torres, 2013), such as the process by which some long-term migrants, many years after the process of migration, continue to maintain contacts across nations by, for example, having two or more houses, speaking two languages, and have built social fields in both the country of origin and in the one of settlement. As a response to intense cross-border activity and long-distance mobility, adopted across their whole working life, aging migrants might be more influenced by the challenge of being-in-between and experience the hybridity of cultures in older age (Torres, 2013). This implies that the relationship older migrants build with places in later life – as well as the meanings attributed to them – cannot be disregarded. The relationship that older migrants establish with the places they inhabit, requires specific research attention, given the alternative pathways they consider following their retirement, namely: returning to their home countries; staying in their host countries; or establishing residence in both (Barrett & Mosca, 2013; Baykara-Krumme, 2013; Baykara-Krumme & Platt, 2016; Bolzman, Fibbi, & Vial, 2006; Ganga, 2006; Klinthäll, 2006; Phillipson, 2015; Razum, Sahin-Hodoglugil, & Polit, 2005;Rodríguez & Egea,2006;Torres,2013;Torres &Karl, 2016; Zontini, 2015). According to Phillipson (2015), movements across nations, the maintenance of transnational ties, relationships with others, the nature of communities, and how all these factors change over time as people move through life, have to be considered when looking at the diversity of aging migrants. Similarly, research has highlighted the differences of older people's lifestyles – such as retired labour migrants, international retirement migration, and older people left behind

while the younger generation migrate for work – and the effects these choices have on health andwell-being (Torres& Karl, 2016). In this respect, the recent typology of older migrants suggested by King, Lulle, Sampaio, and Vullnetari (2017) includes: older people left behind by migration; older family members joining migrants; affluent and retired international migrants; older economic migrants; older returning migrants; and aging-in-place migrants. The authors demonstrate how these categories overlap and that of then older migrants decide to relocate somewhere else to be with their children, or to 'return back' to their country of origin when approaching retirement. Therefore, with increasing numbers of older migrants adopting a transnational lifestyle or returning to the country of origin following retirement, there is a pertinent need to explore aging migrants' affective bonds with places. Research on the distribution of older migrants across Europe has shown how older population differs amongst countries: the UK, being historically a receiving society of migrants, has a higher number of aging people with ethnic diverse backgrounds (Gilroy, 2008; Kristiansen, Razum, Tezcan-Güntekin, & Krasnik, 2016). These older people are susceptible to further 'migration' toward the country of origin (Zontini, 2015) or more likely to reside elsewhere after retirement – if they are not attached to the places where they are growing older in the context of migration. According to this viewpoint, aging migrants' relationship with 'home', abroad or a transnational mix might have an impact on their vulnerability or positive aging and well-being in later life. Whilst the theme of 'return' to the country of origin (Gilroy, 2000; Safran, 1991) is relevant for older migrants, it has been particularly salient for Italian migrants. Having cultivated nostalgic images of a 'homeland', as soon as economic means allows, these would return to Italy for good (Colpi, 1991; Fortier, 2000; Gabaccia, 2000; Wessendorf, 2007). Social gerontologists have also addressed the theme of return after retirement amongst older Italians (Baldassar, 2007; Ganga, 2006; Zontini, 2015). For example, Ganga (2006) revealed how returning to Italy after they reached their pension stage was already embedded in the pre-migration plans. However, this ethnography explained that the motivations for not returning post retirement included socialization in the place of residence. Zontini (2015) illustrates that many older Italians also maintain social contacts with their homeland, through the use of technology or by frequently visiting their home country, such maintaining a strong relationship with their homeland over time. These studies revealed how the relationship with places inhabited and attachment to homeland present nuanced differences, and that this is often constructed within a comparison between 'here' and 'there'. Thus, to answer to how do older Italians identify the best place in which to grow older, this paper focuses on the perspective of older Italians living in Newcastle upon Tyne. The findings of this study are grouped into three thematic pillars: firstly, the extent of attachment to places shows how a 'sense of home' is defined; secondly, data illustrate how identificationwithplacesshapesdefinitionsofpositiveaginginthecontextof migration; and, thirdly, the informal and formal practices of identification are presented to discuss the challenges of aging in the context of migration.

Methods

This research adopts an ethnographic approach according to which the researcher and participants are equally involved in the production of knowledge, by building a series of trusted relationships over time (Geertz, 2008). This approach implies that ethnographers are 'positioned subjects'. According to Rosaldo (1984), different aspects – such as gender, age, personal biography and perspective – play a key role in the research experience during fieldwork. In line with other qualitative research on migration (Ganga & Scott, 2006), in this study, the researcher is considered an 'insider', such as share a similar cultural and linguistic background with research participants. This study draws on in-depth and semi-structured interviews and extensive participant observation.

Ethnographic fieldwork was carried out for 12months (July 2015 – July 2016[1]). Both male and female participants were engaged in this study, with a slightly higher prevalence of females. All participants were of Italian origin – although from different migrant generations (first, second or third generation). However, for the purpose of this paper, data derived from the research encounter with all first migrants' generation, who migrated from Italy to the UK during their youth. Participants' age ranged from 60 and 94years old, with a prevalence of people aged between 75 and 85, and they came from different regions in Italy, both from the North and the South of the peninsula. Participants were primarily recruited at a community centre for Italian migrants in Newcastle City Centre, and whose members unofficially term 'the Club'. Thus, I use the two terms interchangeably. This venue became the setting of my participant observation, which I attended weekly for the duration of the fieldwork and gradually built trust with participants and negotiated consent. I conducted a total of 41 in-depth and semi-structured audio-recorded interviews with 27 participants. A number of participants were individually interviewed on more than one occasion in their own homes. All interviews, whose extracts will be illustrated in the following sections, lasted on average for 3h. These interviews were audio-recorded following prior negotiation of written informed consent, then transcribed and, in some cases translated into English, before finally being analysed using thematic analysis.

Findings

Social aspects of the environment for a sense of 'being in place'

The first thematic pillar is concerned with the different extents of attachment to places, starting with the example of Teresa, an older woman in her mid-seventies from Lazio. She moved to Newcastle in the 1960s when she was about 20years old, after marrying a second-generation Italian. Teresa is now a widow and, reflecting on her affective bonds with places, stated:

'I feel I belong to both and I feel between two fires, as part of my family is here [UK] and part still there [Italy]. Your heart is divided in two. You want to be both here and there, but...how? My brother lives in my old family house. And I would love to spend time with him, as I know that we are older and we won't live for much longer. On the other hand, part of my new family is here. My three children live in Newcastle, and I have to look after my grandchildren. So, what can I really do?'

Teresa reveals her emotional bonds with her country of provenance and her country of migration, both of which have shaped her sense of identification with places in later life. Her dual sense of attachment led to the dilemma that many of the participants experienced: a feeling of 'in-betweenness' (Bhabha, 1994). This concept refers to the feeling of being in a liminal space across different cultures, which impact on the articulation of identity. In the extract of conversation, this feeling materializes in the idiomatic expression 'living between two fires', as social ties are seen as the driving forces of aging across countries in later life. Thus, Teresa felt that she is needed in her adopted country given her role as carer for her grandchildren. At the same time, she was also tempted to spend her old age with her brother in the country of provenance, a desire that was accentuated by envisioning the end of life. I now turn to three examples of older ladies who share an active participation in the leisure centre for aging Italians. Lucia was 84 years old and had migrated

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[1] Arguing that the conversation between the researcher and participants is historically contingent, it is important to take into account the socio-cultural context in which this study took place, such as in the UK pre the outcome of the Brexit referendum (May 2016).

from Lazio in 1950 when she was 18years old. When the interview was conducted, Lucia was an older widow and she articulated her sense of belonging as follows:

'I have always been happy to have migrated. I felt a bit sad to leave my family when I was young, but now my home is here in the UK. Here, I have my two children. My three grandchildren are British. So, I feel I belong here.'

In retrospectively interpreting the process of her migration, Lucia showed a certain degree of happiness for the choice she made at a younger age. Lucia articulates her sense of belonging with the place she inhabits in later life due to the proximity of her family members. This provided her with a feeling of social embeddedness, such as a sense of 'rootedness', fostered by family ties. To manifest place attachment with and identification to the country of settlement, Lucia adopted the concept of 'home'. Likewise, a 'sense of home' due to social relations and family ties was a crucial foundation for the sense of belonging seen in the participant named Carolina, who was an older widow aged 82 from Campania. She had migrated to the UK as a labour migrant. When I asked about her attachment to places, she answered:

'You know how many years we are here? I moved here in 1957. The amount of time that I spent in the UK is longer than that I spent in Italy. Of course, my sense of home is in the UK. My children are here, my grandchildren, too. And I feel English, yes, because in Italy the Italians are not polite, they do not respect the queue when you are in the shops, while here there is more order.'

From Carolina's point of view, a natural consequence of the time spent abroad is there construction of a 'sense of home' in later life in the context of migration. Therefore, her sense of identity is not bound to the place where she was born, but to the one to which she migrated. By reporting small details of everyday life, she revealed that she identified more with English everyday practices rather than Italian ones. It seems that her sense of 'being in place' (Rowles, 2017) has been shaped by identification with the practices of her adopted homeland. In this example, a personal place identification is due to a comparison amongst cultures that older migrants are exposed to – a theme I explore in detail in the second thematic pillar. Moreover, this example adds to the previous point that the length of time spent in the context of migration, contributes to building a feeling of social embeddedness. In speaking on behalf of many in the same situation, Carolina suggests that it has to be taken for granted that aging Italian migrants feel at home in the context of migration. Miranda, an older widow in her 80s, confirmed these assumptions. Originally from Liguria, she moved to Newcastle in 1957 with her Italian husband, and when I asked her about a sense of attachment to places, she said:

'Before, I felt a foreigner here. When I went to Italy on holiday, I felt a foreigner there, too. But now, I feel at home here. It has been more than 60 years that I've lived here. Every time I travel abroad I can't wait to come back, to meet my family and friends.'

Miranda's negotiation of identity has been questioned during her previous stages of life, as she felt like a foreigner in both places. Nonetheless, she stated with a certain degree of confidence that, in later life, she identifies with the place she now inhabits. These three examples are representative of those who have established a positive relationship with the places they inhabit in later life, as they pointed out at a 'sense of home' in the context of migration. Therefore, identification with the context of migration can be considered the achievement of a new status in later life, promoting positive aging. However, the heterogeneity within this group of aging migrants, pertains to contrasting viewpoints in this respect. Despite sharing a degree of happiness in having migrated from Italy, family ties, length of residence, and the ability to socialize with other Italian migrants,

some of the participants I worked with did not share the sense of 'being in place' described above. Instead, they questioned their sense of belonging to the context of migration, as illustrated in the following example. Filomena, aged 84, from Campania, moved to Newcastle after the Second World War, and has lived alone since her husband passed away and she rarely received guests in her house. She says:

"I'm happy to be in the UK. When I compare myself to my sister in Italy, she is always busy in the countryside, with many relatives around. I say to myself 'From walking in the countryside, I walk on carpets now.' And I enjoy a cup of tea, as a proper British lady. Unfortunately, never mind what you do to have friends, you will always be a foreigner here. When I was younger, everybody in the neighbourhood used to knock at this door. 'Filomena, please can you mend this, can you fix that?'. Well, you grow older and you don't have the same energy and I also lost an eye. When I walk around, people don't care for me. Before, they said 'hello' to me. Now, as I'm not useful anymore to them, they don't come here for a cup of tea. So, I said, I have lost an eye, but why don't they see me, now? That's why I think: You are always a foreigner here."

Filomena's happiness in later life derived from her transition from a rural to a worldly lifestyle (symbolized by the change from walking on 'the land' in her youth, to 'the carpet') referring to migration as the accomplishment of an aspirational identity (Basu & Coleman, 2008). Hence, her sense of attachment to the place she inhabits is shaped by upwards social mobility, such as the passage from one social class to another (Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, & Payne, 1980; Richardson, 1977; Savage, 2015). Consequently, she articulates her identity as being 'a British lady'. By this, in the first instance, it appears that Filomena does not replicate the social representation of the bucolic trope of the 'rural idyll' (Burholt, Scharf, &Walsh, 2013; Walsh, O'Shea, Scharf, & Murray, 2012). However, this emerges when she reveals her expectation of older age, by comparing herself to her sister's aging, as shaped by the places in which they are growing older ('she is always surrounded by relatives'). Hence, social visits to each other's homes is part of the features commonly associated with rural settings (Walsh et al., 2012). Therefore, the lack of social visits was interpreted as another side of transformation after migration, namely the vulnerability experienced as an aging migrant, according to her own perspective. Filomena's skills as a seamstress enabled her to cultivate social relationships within the local area and have guests visiting her house. However, she reported that more recently she felt ignored by people in her neighbourhoods and has experienced loneliness. This shaped her sense of belonging in later life, as she felt she was a 'stranger', despite having done her best to create social bonds when she was younger. Therefore, the sense of a shrinking social network in later life, due to physical decline, maybe linked to the experience of aging in the context of migration ('you will be always a foreigner here'). Consequently, disability in later life (the loss of her eye) became associated with the new condition of being socially invisible. Filomena's feeling of invisibility can be interpreted through the notion of 'autobiographical insideness' (Rowles, 1983), such as the awareness of places (amongst others, recognizing people, and being recognized by them) as defining a sense of belonging in later life. Rowles (1983) argued that this feeling, shaping the relationship established with places, influences the process of self-definition and identity amongst older adults. In this example, the lack of autobiographical insideness led Filomena to reflect upon her condition of aging in the context of migration, in a period of loss and deprivation, by articulating that she did not belong to it. Whether or not the feeling of being ignored is determined by a different ethnic identity, the key aspect of this finding is that the participant considered that her place of provenance contributed to her vulnerability in later life. Thus, this example demonstrates how attachment and identification with places inhabited in the context of migration, contribute negatively to Filomena's wellbeing. This argument leads into the next thematic pillar that illustrates

how some older migrants re-define their identities as these become interwoven with characteristics of the place inhabited.

How a sense of identification with the context of migration shapes notion of aging

Maria was born in Naples and moved to the UK aged 21. Now aged 94, she lives alone since her husband passed away, and she does not attend the Club. Touching upon her sense of belonging she told me:

'My sense of belonging, well, it is difficult to make a clear distinction. I renounced my citizenship to marry an English man, but I always felt like an Italian living abroad. Like all the British, I became very reserved. I'm friendly, but a very quiet person, very calm. I had a calm and good life here and I was expecting to have a quiet life when aging. Now, I cannot walk out doors. I spend my time in this house alone. But I reflect, I think, I read a lot. So, I don't need many people around. I chose to be here. I have stopped in Newcastle and that's where I will die. Only a person who comes from Napoli can understand what it means to miss that sea. But you know, this feeling does not help you. You have to detach from that memory, you have to stop comparing, otherwise you don't live well.'

Maria's negotiation of belonging included her national identity ('an Italian abroad'). However, she stated that she had become 'British' after migration, defining a sense of affiliation with what she considers to be British manners ('quiet, reserved'). This case reveals that the identities of aging migrants are interwoven with the identities of the places in which they are aging. Hence, Maria's case highlights how the meanings associated with the chosen place to move to, at a younger age, might have had an influence on the expectations of the everyday experiences of aging. As Torres (2015) suggested, the process of migration itself could alter the conception of aging amongst older migrants, having had an influence on what it means to experience positive aging. In this respect, Maria emphasized that a 'calm and stable life' is what she expected in later life. Like the previous example, Maria reported a lack of social connectedness. However, Maria differs from Filomena, due to the fact that her potential isolation and loneliness did not undermine her sense of well-being, as she did not define her condition of aging as problematic ('I don't need many people around'). Nonetheless, this does not necessarily mean that she felt that she belonged to the context in which she was growing old as a migrant. Maria's sense of wellbeing in later life was due to her sense of identification with places, even in envisioning the end of life ('that's where I will die'). This is in line with studies about the relationship between place attachment and a positive interpretation of aging, which enables a sense of 'being in place' (Rowles, 2017). Thus, the definition of aging in a positive way, may be shaped by a sense of identification to the place inhabited after migration. To grasp this point better, consider the example of Sir John[2]. Sir John is a 73-year-old man from Tuscany, who had migrated to the UK in the 1960s. He articulates a sense of identifying with both Italy and England, and when asked about the best place to age, he said:

'I always thought about going back to Italy, one day, but my English wife doesn't speak Italian. It was not fair to interrupt our children's education, so we stayed all my working life. Now, I'm retired, I can go back forever, but I feel happier aging here. It's nice to go to Italy for a few weeks, but some of my old friends spend the whole day outside the bar, with their chairs. Yes, they have got the blue sky, but they don't do anything else. Here, I feel active. I am socially engaged with multiple communities: the Italians, the Men's Club in my local neighbourhood, we have a public lecture every month. We

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[2] The pseudonym used – chosen by the participant during the research encounter – is not meant to represent a connotation of class.

continue to learn. That's the problem, you cannot adapt any longer to the mentality of people there. If I had enough money, I would do six months here and six there, but I can't afford it.'

Using the typology of older migrants defined by King et al. (2017), Sir John can be considered an older migrant who faced the dilemma of whether to 'return to the country of origin'. Many life events have occurred that anchor him to his host country, demonstrating how these are never merely individual choices. However, this example also shows that in identifying the best place in which to grow older, the notion of aging itself has been shaped by the process of migration. This is visible in the comparison of aging in different ways and the everyday practices embedded in places ('they have the blue sky' vs. 'we are active, continuing learning'). Being socially engaged with multiple networks, Sir John's sense of wellbeing is related to the social environment that enable him to remain active in learning and in the social sphere, as a determinant for aging in a positive manner. These aspects would be missing, he feels, in his country of origin. Thus, the meaning of positive aging may have been altered both by the process of migration and the identification with place. Hence, both Maria and Sir John, by referring to migration as a metaphor for transformation, re-define their identities as these become interwoven with the characteristics of the places in which they grow older. However, this paper argues that both the social aspects of the environment and the formal practices of identification intersect with the conceptualization of aging. This will become clearer within the next and final thematic pillar.

Identification with places: social and political

As illustrated above, Sir John is an example of an older adult who felt socially engaged in the context of migration. However, when I asked him to articulate his sense of belonging to the places inhabited, he said:

'I feel a citizen of this country. Actually, I feel dual, both Italian and English. I feel a mix of both. But I do not have proof, as I haven't got two passports, but I feel I belong here, as well as in Italy. When I am in Italy, I feel Italian, not a foreigner. When I am here, I feel English, my children are English, and so are my grandchildren. Here, I only regret never asking for citizenship. So, I cannot vote in the political elections at a national level, only the local. They asked me about 20 years ago, but I didn't think it was important at that time. Now it is.'

Sir John highlighted his strong sense of attachment to the country of migration, and his sense of identification with it; despite this, the same cannot be said in terms of his negotiation of belonging. Hence, Sir John defined his sense of belonging as being socially constructed by the primary group of socialization (his English family), and he remarked on his hybrid identity using the expression 'feeling a mix of both'. However, despite his subjective sense of belonging, he maintained only his Italian citizenship. Therefore, Sir John's example illustrates the juxtaposition between a personal negotiation of belonging and the state's definition of who is entitled to be a full British citizen. Whilst in the previous examples, a sense of being 'othered' was determined by informal practices of belonging, as mediated by the interpretation of external social influences (such as the social relations outside the immediate family context for Filomena), Sir John expressed the role of the formal practice of demarking belonging. In other words, the subjective sense of identification with places was challenged by the reality of citizenship, as he could not vote on a national level due to not formally belonging to the UK. As such, he illustrated how political involvement and citizenship play a significant role in the social construction of identity amongst some aging migrants in later life. This is because the desire to be actively engaged in public affairs, made visible by the expression of political choice in this case, can change during a person's life. For Sir John, what was not important in the early stage of migration became essential in later life. Therefore, a sense of identification with places

is an on-going process that changes over time, mediated by external social influences, and articulated by formal and informal practices of belonging. To bring this section to a close, I consider the case of Romina illustrating how formal and informal practices of identity inform on the sense of self amongst aging migrants. Romina from Liguria, was 75 when I interviewed her. She moved to the UK in her 20s, to be with her English husband, who had passed away several years before. Romina told me that she had to renounce her Italian citizenship, as this was the norm for foreigners marrying English citizens before 1973. She explained that her husband was attached to Italy. This topic generated a significant narrative about the sense of attachment toward the same place. She told me:

"*He was much attached to Italy, although he was English. He wanted his heart to be there. So we left it [the urn with his ashes] in the sea, exactly how he wanted. I am Italian but I spent all my life here, well, I'm not sure I'm happy in this place. Why am I here? My daughter lives in France. I don't have many friends. Yes, I go to the Club, but once a week for few hours, then? I spend all my days indoors. The first time I saw Sunderland Cemetery, where I also could be buried, I said 'My God, I don't want to be in that cemetery!' I always asked my husband about taking back Italian citizenship, but we never did. Recently, I had a dispute with my neighbours, and I said: 'This is the right time, I will sell everything and go back to my country!' But then I said, 'I no longer have Italian citizenship, so where am I going?' I will always blame my husband for that. I can only go back after life, like him.*"

This extract draws attention to the participant' sense of attachment to places in envisioning the end of life. This was introduced as she talked about her husband's construction of affective bonds with Italy during their marriage, illustrated by the fact that his last wish was to have his ashes spread in the sea in Italy. This made Romina envision her own end of life, and she manifested her very low sense of attachment to the place where she lives, revealing herself to be in the process of thinking about moving elsewhere. She explained that her link to the place to which she had migrated was, firstly, her husband, and secondly her family. However, without her husband and daughter, she had lost the reasons to be in Newcastle and she felt no sense of belonging to it. Romina can be considered an older migrant whom King et al. (2017) would place in the category of being 'left behind by migration', referring to the parents of those young people who migrated elsewhere. And yet, the previous literature in this regard considers these people as 'not being older migrants as such', so Romina may be an example of older migrants who still remains in the shadows within social gerontology at the intersection of migration. More importantly, these findings identify the factors that intersect with the choice of aging in the country of migration, improving understanding of the alternatives that retired migrants have as they age in foreign countries. As Romina's example shows, her doubts about the best place in which to grow older came to the fore in reference to everyday life tensions and her lack of a social network. Experiencing loneliness, frustration, and a lack of motivation to be the host country, accentuated her sense of belonging to an Italian identity. This participant, in envisioning her end of life, reconsidered her attachment to the country of provenance. She was thinking of aging elsewhere, and had identified her original home town as the place where to relocate. However, the fact of no longer having Italian citizenship affected her sense of well-being, as she was unable to choose whether to move from one place to another. Thus, the possibility of being mobile in later life can be limited by the political frameworks in place at the time of original migration. Whether or not citizenship is an actual limitation on aging migrants' mobility, it was still perceived as such from a participant's perspective, as the case of Romina revealed. Nonetheless, limits to mobility between countries rests within the interpretation of the politics of migration. This might represent an issue amongst aging migrants in determined historical contexts.

Conclusion

Older migrants reflecting on aging through attachment to and identification with places

This paper constitutes an empirical contribution to the debate at the intersection between aging and migration, and within it, to the affective bonds with places from the perspective of older Italians in Newcastle upon Tyne. Firstly, by drawing attention to aging migrants as a substantial component of the older population, this paper aims to raise awareness of the heterogeneity of older age. Secondly, by challenging the assumption of migrants' cultural homogeneity, it addresses the theme of 'diversity within' the group of aging migrants, by arguing that this is determined by the relationships established with places in later life. Finally, this paper aims to contribute to intellectual knowledge on aging in the context of migration, by showing how the identification with places inhabited is an essential condition for a positive aging experience for older migrants. This paper has shown that the heterogeneity within the group of older Italian migrants pertains to the sense of attachment to and identification with places inhabited. A complex nuance of a sense of identification with places was shown and how this plays out at social, community and national level. Hence, by introducing a range of contrasting examples, I demonstrated how older Italian migrants relate in different ways to their individual attachment to places and identification with these. Drawing on the findings, identification with places inhabited after migration can be shaped by social ties and also arise from the impact of the politics of migration on the sense of self that changes over time at different life stages. Whilst a high level of attachment shapes identification with places and the experience of aging in a positive manner, a low attachment to places inhabited causes discomfort, generated by the expectation of aging differently or a desire to age (or being buried) elsewhere. Therefore, attachment to places and sense of identification with these, are important conditions to determine a positive aging experience in the context of migration. Thus, by highlighting the heterogeneity of attachment and identification to places, the results challenged the stereotypical assumptions in social gerontology according to which 'all elderly immigrants are the same' (Torres, 2006, p. 1352). This diversity is important to take into account, as it is ultimately an essential condition for a sense of 'being in place' (Rowles, 2017) also amongst older migrants. This study stresses the importance of social aspects of the environment in the context of migration as crucial determinants for aging migrants' sense of belonging to places inhabited. This paper has shown how the articulation of identity is socially constructed in interaction between people, shaped by several factors interdependent with each other. The identification with the context of migration is given by the extent to which one feels accepted by the local context. As such, this study demonstrates how participants' sense of embeddedness within places inhabited has been reinforced through social aspects of the local environment (e.g., social groups, communities, neighbourhood). The importance of a network of supportive relationships, acting as a practical resource in later life has been highlighted (Walsh et al., 2012; Walsh & O'shea, 2008), as well as the vital role of community setting in providing a feeling of social embeddedness amongst older migrants (Caglar, 2006; Fortier, 2006; Palmberger, 2017). The findings of this study add to the existing knowledge that social embeddedness provides place attachment and fosters a sense of identification with places inhabited, enabling older migrants to experience positive aging. Moreover, findings illustrated the points of view of those who questioned their sense of belonging in the context of migration, despite manifesting attachment to inhabited places. Hence, these examples reveal the complexity of aging in the context of migration, when a sense of identification with these places is never fully achieved in older age. These participants perceive themselves to be 'othered' in older age, evoking the double jeopardy' trope, such as the disadvantages of being both an older adult and a person with a different ethnicity in the context of migration (Fennell, Phillipson, & Evers, 1988; King et al., 2017; Phillipson, 2015; Torres, 2013). In addition, these examples reiterate the mainstream trend in social gerontology which frames older people with images of disengagement and withdrawal from society (Fennell et al., 1988), as well as fragility, illness and disability (Ayis, Gooberman-Hill, Bowling, & Ebrahim, 2006). Thus, it confirms the risk of exposure to several disadvantages in aging migrant populations, such as social exclusion (i.e.

Scharf et al., 2005) and loneliness (i.e. Victor et al., 2012). The sense of vulnerability that older Italian migrants experience was concerned with their expectations of aging, in the comparison between growing older in different environments. In some cases, this sense of difference has also been created by the politics of migration, which shaped their sense of identification with places. Some older Italians in Newcastle strongly identified with the context of migration, but were not acknowledged by formal citizenship (which implied some rights, such as the right to vote). The sense of identity due to formal practices of belonging might be accentuated by the challenging political context in Britain following Brexit. Thus, a sense of identification to places inhabited from a migrant perspective, requires further research attention as, so far, it remains neglected at policy level. Ultimately, affective bonds from an older migrants' perspective reveal the meaning of aging in the context of migration. By arguing that attachment is an essential condition for a 'sense of being in place' this paper has drawn attention to what constitutes a positive experience of aging. Hence, those who expressed a sense of well-being in aging in places inhabited after migration had identities shaped on the presumed characteristics of the place or everyday life practices embedded in places. These older migrants re-define their identities, as these become interwoven with the characteristics of the places in which they grow older. Thus, these results might challenge the ways in which older migrants are conceptualized in gerontological scholarship, and the conception of aging in a positive manner. In this sense, this paper highlights the need for intervention to support and reinforce identification with places inhabited, for the wellbeing of older migrants. In conclusion, attachment to and identification with places in later life from an aging migrant point of view is worthy of research to enhance diversity within the group of aging migrants; contribute to define positive experiences of aging; provide a better understanding of aging in the context of migration, and might suggest possibilities for expanding the gerontological imagination of the study of older age.

Acknowledgements

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