Migration, ageing and social inclusion: A case study of Turkish older migrants in the UK

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Background: Social exclusion

Older people

Six domains of later-life exclusion*
1. Neighbourhood and community;
2. Services, amenities and mobility;
3. Social relations;
4. Material and financial resources;
5. Socio-cultural aspects;
6. Civic participation.

+ Migrants

• Pre-migration (drivers & motivations)
• Migration process (ordeal)
• Post migration stressors
• Attachment & displacement

Commutative disadvantages?

Migrant older people are getting some research recognition … but

- The majority of migration research focuses on working-age migrants
- The majority of ageing research does not specifically addresses older migrants
  - With few exceptions; sometimes mixing ethnicity with migration
- Very few statistics are available on migrant older people in Europe, let alone with a focus on social exclusion domains
- In 2015, 11% of foreign born, compared to 18% of the total UK population, were aged 65+
Migration & Ageing

• Notions of “double” and “triple” jeopardy theories
  • Largely been criticized because of their failure to capture the heterogeneity and inequalities within ethnic groups
  • Problematization and labelling of older migrants as a homogenised social category Human and social capital accumulation (positive returns)
  • Relates to migration and life course trajectories

• Otherness – ethnic & racial markers
  • How groups are perceived and how they perceive ‘other’ groups
A Case Study: Turkish Migrants in London

- At least 500,000 Turkish born in the UK - the majority live in the capital, London
- There was no specific UK immigration route ((e.g. guestworker in Germany) but a general appetite for ‘low skilled’ immigrants
  - Most migration decisions were spontaneous and actively initiated at the individual level
  - Some differences however, esp. Cypriot Turks and Kurds
- The majority of First-generation Turkish migrants to the UK were directly or indirectly recruited into low-paying jobs
  - in most cases to work within Turkish speaking communities, working as tailors or in shops
- Majority of main land Turks arrived in the 70s, except Turks and Alevi in the 90s (mainly as refugees)
The Research

- Life history interviews with 66 older Turkish migrants, aged 65 years or more
  - Collected in 2012-2013; intentionally avoiding using a formal process of interviewing, composing the discussion as ‘a chat about your life’
- 30 interviews with community workers and care workers supporting Turkish older people
- All interviews were conducted in Turkish language, professionally translated, transcribed and analysed thematically
- 34 women and 32 men and had a mean age of 72.3 years
- Majority arrived to seek paid work (n=28) or accompanying family (n=13), with a large group of 24 arrived as refugees.

Analytical Framework

• Analysis framework based on Fraser’s (2007) trilogy of social justice: resources, recognition and representation
• Social inclusion is considered as a core component of social justice
• Fraser’s original analysis focused on the re/distribution of economic resources, I focus on social networks as a key resource in migrants’ life course.
• For recognition, I discuss the cultural visibility and social status of this particular group of migrants
• Fraser (2007) focused on social and political participation and access to justice; here, I include participation within and outside the ‘community’
Social networks as a resource: the migratory decision and beyond

My husband had a business in Istanbul. But he went bankrupt and we were stuck in a difficult situation. I had heard from my friend that the tailors earn good money in London. My friend suggested to come here and to work here. And I took my little daughter and came to London. Next day I began to work in a garment workshop. I did not have to speak English because everyone there spoke Turkish. My friend had arranged a room for us. I worked hard and in tough conditions but without any formalities.

(Evren, 72 old Turkish woman)
Migration and Recognition at Old Age

- Recognition as a ‘migrant’ and as an ‘older person’
  - A ‘selective’ pool of experiences - Many relating to ‘bad stories’ in the media re mistreatment of older people ... little acceptance of ‘outside’ support
  - A ‘selective’ pool of experiences

- Maintained care exchange within the same social networks
  - Recognised others’ needs and being recognised by others but within their closest networks; High risk of isolation and social exclusion at old age

- Political recognition for some groups (Alevi and Kurds)
Recognition within the close social network

They [son and daughter in law who are paid through personal budgets] don’t give me any respect as a person, I feel very alone in my home. They never take me out, I am always at home in front of TV.

(Frieda 83 years Turkish woman)
Migration and Representation at Old Age

• Migrants’ public representation is both problematic and oversimplified
• Little attention to ‘older’ migrants, almost never in a positive way
• A portray of negative health and social experiences and higher rates of isolation and unmet needs
• Fluid comparison between the representation of older people across border (Turkey and the UK) but also across time
  • In many cases based on ‘constructed’ rather than ‘real’ experience
Some made a clear effort: A note on gender

• Lütfi (66 years old man) was one of the most active participants despite his poor command of the English language

• Arrived alone 30 years ago, worked informally, then brought his wife and children

• Had a gym membership through his local council and swam regularly

• Clearly happy to grow older in the UK – the role of grown up children

‘this is my ‘homeland’ now, here is my wife and children and I am happy here’
Ageing as a stage of the migrants’ life course

- Ageing was a process that came about in relative ‘silence’
  - Not considered or planned for at younger age; sudden onset of disease; withdrawal of ‘work’; a ‘shock’ for some
- For many, especially men, the local culture/community centre was a place to fill in this void
  - Not gender neutral
- Transnational belonging
  - Facilitated through satellite TV, cross-country communications etc.
Social networks and social inclusion

• Social networks for older migrants is a significant resource
  • Shaped and strengthened over the migrants’ life trajectories
  • Supported the migratory act itself
  • Redistributed resources within a newly formulated ‘identity’ of self within a new community in the host country

• Created some adverse effects – relative and absolute isolation from wider society

• This particular resource did not provide a basic component in their experience of social inclusion in the host country
Recognition

• Elective identity and belonging
  • Either socially or politically
  • How they are recognise others and perceive others to recognise them
• Divergence between actual and preferred place of ageing
  • Levels of isolation and social inclusion/exclusion
• Advantages and disadvantages of community/cultural centres
• Notions of diaspora
Participation

- Representation and social participation shaped by the continued connections within certain social networks
- Some made an effort of wider participation
  - Gender and political alliance
  - The role of off-spring (bridging across)
Discussion points

• Limitation of the study (lack of generalisability)
• Intersectionality of migrants’ background and life course trajectories
• The importance of social networks across all stages of life
  Limited opportunities to acquire broader sets of transferable skills
    • Unintentional isolation bubbles
• Wider implications
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