Making Sense of Belonging: Translocal Subjectivity and Rootedness of Turkish-Born Women in Sweden

NJMR NORDIC JOURNAL OF MIGRATION RESEARCH

RESEARCH

MERVE TUNÇER

HUP HELSINKI UNIVERSITY PRESS

ABSTRACT

This article elaborates on how sense of belonging is constructed over the life course of individuals by mapping out the affective and material dimensions of belonging in a translocal context. Specifically, it focuses on Turkish-born women who migrated to Sweden in their early to mid-adulthood and have lived in Sweden for 40 years on average. It asks how they make sense of their belonging as they age in Sweden and aims to shed light on the complex and fluid nature of translocal subjectivities. The empirical material consists of 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with women aged 60 to 78. The analysis shows that belonging is informed by interconnected affective and material dimensions as individuals change and re-negotiate their situated life stories. The article concludes that belonging is temporally located over the life course and is constructed on a translocal scale which transcends national borders.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Merve Tunçer

Örebro University, Örebro, Sweden

merve.tuncer@oru.se

KEYWORDS:

belonging; translocality; translocal subjectivity; migrant women

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Tunçer, M. 2023. Making Sense of Belonging: Translocal Subjectivity and Rootedness of Turkish-Born Women in Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 13(2): 6, pp. 1–18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.535

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the complexities of belonging among older women who migrated to Sweden from Turkey, mostly in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It uses a translocal lens to investigate the nuances of their sense of belonging after spending almost 40 years in Sweden. As a 'grounded' version of transnationalism (Brickell & Datta 2011), translocality 'draws attention to multiplying forms of mobility without losing sight of the importance of localities in people's lives' (Oakes & Schein 2006: 1). Therefore, it provides a toolbox for understanding the complex manifestations of a sense of belonging that transcends nation-state borders and the pre-fixed categories such as ethnic communities, which inform essentialist points of views and stereotypes. In other words, translocality enables us to look deeper into mobile actors' situatedness from a more agency-oriented perspective by looking at their relations to people and places.

The article aims to offer a new perspective to the discourse of 'in between' experiences of older migrant women, which is often characterised by belonging *either* here *or* there, by looking into belonging from multiple scales (local, national, international) and life course stages. Thus, it intends to articulate more on temporality and translocality while staying sensitive to the situatedness of experiences that is influenced by different social positions such as gender, age and ethnicity. Understanding this fluid and temporal nature of belonging can open new arenas of discussion for identity, citizenship and nation borders.

The overall question examined in this article is: How do Turkish-born women construct their sense of belonging after almost 40 years in Sweden? The article further aims to answer the following specific questions: (a) How do they make sense of their belonging over their life course? (b) How do temporal, affective and material dimensions influence their sense of belonging?

Belonging is a key sociological concept because it is highly intertwined with the dynamic process of boundary formation and maintenance in contemporary societies (Crowley 1999; Yuval-Davis 2006). It is closely related to the questions of identity, culture and social norms, as well as to the social implications of these concepts. Boundaries are formed, re-constructed and maintained based on the perceived similarities and differences between social groups and they determine which group we 'belong to.' It is important to explore how *women* make sense of belonging, since their experiences differ somewhat from those of men (Calasanti & Slevin 2001) with regard to the power dynamics at play in a migration context. Moreover, looking into the experiences of older women throughout their life course can help us understand the heterogeneity among the group of 'older migrants' who often portrayed as burdensome and very 'different' from native populations (Machat-From 2017; Torres 2015).

In this article, belonging is used as a sensitising concept. It does not prescribe what one should see, but merely suggests a direction along which to look. It is used as an 'interpretive device' (Bowen 2006) to lay a foundation for analysing how migrant women experience belonging over their life course. It has not been used as a pre-defined concept, but rather as a guide in order to sensitise our understanding of belonging. Therefore, the article relies on an inductive and exploratory analysis in which migrant women's experiences are qualitatively analysed.

The empirical material of the article is based on interviews with 20 women from Turkey, aged 60 to 78 living in Sweden. In the following section, a brief review is presented of relevant previous research on migrant women and ageing migrants. The theory section introduces key concepts such as belonging, rootedness and translocality. Thereafter, in the 'Methods' section, the empirical material and the interviewed women are presented. The 'Findings' section is divided into two main dimensions along which belonging were manifested: material and affective. The 'Findings' are followed by a 'Discussion' where they are discussed in relation to the theoretical concepts. The article ends with a 'Conclusion' section.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON MIGRATION FROM TURKEY

Sweden was one of the European countries that recruited low-skilled labour from Turkey under bilateral agreements during the 1960s and 1970s (Akgündüz 1993). Many Turkish-born workers brought their partners, children and, in some cases members of their extended families to Sweden in the following years. In addition to this, Sweden received migration from Turkey in the years following the military coup in Turkey in September 1980 (Akgündüz 1993). Some migrated due to the political oppression and unrest in the country, while others sought asylum on the grounds of oppression of ethnic/religious minorities. Most of the interviewed women in this study came to Sweden under family reunification regulations, following their partners who had been recruited as workers.

Although there is extensive research on migration from Turkey to European countries (Abadan-Unat 2011; Avci 2006; Baser & Levin 2017; Ehrkamp & Studies 2005; Erder 2006; Fassmann & Içduygu 2013), and some research on women migrating from Turkey to Europe (Akpinar 2003; Dedeoglu 2014; Erel 2002; Inowlocki & Lutz 2000; Liversage 2009), sense of belonging often remains an overlooked aspect. A similar claim can be made about research on older migrants from Turkey; there is increasing research interest in older Turkish migrants (Buffel 2017; Liversage & Jakobsen 2016; Naldemirci 2013; Palaz 2020; Palmberger 2017). However, these studies have tended to focus on specific aspects of migrant experiences such as care, social capital, housing or class.

An important aspect that has informed this previous research on Turkish-born migrants is the concept of *gurbet*[1] which also informs the analysis in this article. Gurbet refers to both an imagined place that is far from home, and a feeling of 'longing for belonging' (Ilcan 2002 in Naldemirci 2013). It is often characterised as being in one place and longing for another. This can be a material, geographic location or a feeling that is charged with emotions of alienation and longing. It is symbolically codified as a place that is 'not home.' Therefore, it is often culturally embedded within migration experiences. It has been used by the Turkish diaspora for many years in stories, songs and novels and therefore has also been operationalised in previous research on migrants (see Hristov 2015; Naldemirci 2013). In this sense, *gurbet* emerged as key to understanding what can be described as temporal belonging and belonging from afar, as will be presented in the theory chapter.

1 Turkish word of Arabic origin. According to the dictionary of the Turkish Language Institution (TDK) it means 'a place that is far from the place of birth.' It has also been used by various diasporic communities with Middle Eastern and Balkan origins.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON OLDER MIGRANT WOMEN

This article specifically focuses on women's experiences of belonging as they age and starts from the assumption that migrant women's experiences differ qualitatively from those of men. Previous studies on Turkish-born women in Europe show that they experience specific forms of disadvantages regarding acquiring education, occupational skills and the language of the country of settlement (Inowlocki & Lutz 2000; Liversage 2009; Sachs 1983). As Calasanti and Slevin (2001) point out, early studies on older women 'problematised' them as passive and dependent. This was later criticised by feminist scholars (Gibson 1996; Payne & Whittington 1976) who argued for a more agency-oriented perspective. In a similar vein, Torres (2015) points out that migration scholars were 'oblivious' to old age until recent decades, since they mainly focused on identity orientations and culture specific traits of ethnic minority groups who were labelled as *others*. This was a common pattern in research on migrant women as well: they have been studied from culturalist/essentialist perspectives. Especially in the case of migration from low-income countries to high-income/Western countries, migrant women's experiences were primarily studied through an ethnic lens, meaning that their experiences and feelings were reduced to cultural traits. Nevertheless, studies on ageing migrants (Ciobanu, Fokkema & Nedelcu 2017; Machat-From 2017; Walsh & Näre 2016) as well as migrant women (Akpınar 2003; Ghorashi 2010; Martínez-Conde et al. 2020; Ryan 2007; Rydzik & Anitha 2020) have become more diverse in the last decades.

Most literature on the sense of belonging among older migrants is framed in relation to the experiences of 'ageing in between,' as in having two countries, two languages and consequently, 'two lives' (Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt 1999). These 'in between' experiences are often conceptualised as transnational or dual belonging (Vertovec 2004). This article hopes to contribute to the existing literature on women's experiences of sense of belonging using a translocal lens as a starting point for discussion that is both non-linear and multi-scalar (comprising the local, national and international scales). In doing so, it suggests a framework that goes beyond these 'in-between' understandings of migrants' experiences.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

BELONGING AND ROOTEDNESS

As mentioned in the introduction, belonging is understood in this article as a sensitising concept. With roots in grounded theory (Bowen 2006), sensitising concepts are useful tools for analysing empirical materials in an inductive manner, since they provide a starting point to build and guide the analysis. They offer 'ways of seeing, organising and understanding experience' (Charmaz 2003: 259), which is crucial to this study since it relies on the narratives and life course experiences of the interviewed women. In this way, belonging can be understood in relation to the affective and relational experiences of migration.

Although the article does not rely on a fixed definition of belonging, it is inspired by previous researchers who conceptualised belonging as a process. It is not understood as a fixed and stable *status* (being), but rather as a contingent, dynamic, multi-scalar and temporal *process* (becoming) (see Antonsich 2010; hooks 2009; May 2017; Probyn 2015). In other words, belonging is understood as a non-linear process that changes over time as individuals are continuously influenced by different places and relations.

Migrants are active agents who perform, reflect, create and negotiate their experiences, including belonging. Belonging is thus seen as performative (Bell 1999) or as 'doing belonging' (Skrbiš, Baldassar & Poynting 2007), and this performativity becomes explicit when belonging shifts due to place and time. Belonging is *performed* by individuals who strategically highlight or tone down certain aspects of their affective and material relations to space over their own life course. This dynamic and temporal understanding of belonging overcomes the dual/in-between approaches to migrants' experiences as being either 'here' or 'there' (such as transnational belonging), while also providing space to think about belonging in terms of non-material and de-territorialised dimensions such as emotions, social ties and imaginary places. Transnational belonging (Klok et al. 2017; Naujoks 2010) does not deterritorialise migrants' everyday lives, but instead reproduces a dual and fixed form of migrant belonging. It assumes a constant contact between two national borders, which generates an in-between belonging that is 'rooted' in cultural (ethnic) backgrounds or countries of origin.

This understanding of rootedness – as a stable relation between belonging and territory – has been questioned (Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992), as one's sense of rootedness is informed by and derived from multiple sources. Family and kinship ties, shared ethical and moral values, familiarity, time and attachment to place constitute these sources over the life course of an individual. They create a certain situatedness that grows from both old and newly cultivated roots that shape one's sense of belonging. Individuals form their rootedness by materially and emotionally investing in their relationships with places and people, even if they are physically elsewhere (Racles 2018). As I argue in the following section, the translocal lens provides a multi-scalar and non-linear framework for analysing migrant experiences without narrowing down these possible dimensions.

TRANSLOCAL SUBJECTIVITY

Translocality emerged as an umbrella term to overcome the limitations of transnationalism and offer a more 'grounded' version of it (Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013). It is mainly concerned with the dynamics of mobility, migration and socio-spatial interconnectedness, and describes mobilities and multiple forms of spatial connectedness beyond nation-state borders (Grillo & Riccio 2004; Ma 2002). It pays attention to the situatedness of the mobile actors in a non-linear, temporal way to capture their diverse experiences in different times and locations. Looking at belonging through a translocal lens has the potential to unpack the 'interconnections between mobility and locality, routes and roots, as well as transnational and local attachments' (Buffel 2017: 13). Migrants' sense of belonging is thus not bound to a fixed material space or to some ethnic norms but is rather understood in a shifting and interacting sense.

The idea of translocal subjectivity draws upon Appadurai's (1996) framework, in which he argues that communities become extended via mobility because the 'localised' experiences are 'internationalised' and generate new identities and meanings. Conradson and McKay (2007) discuss translocal subjectivity in relation to the 'felt' dimensions of mobility and affective relations to place. All the interactions that occur in different localities are interconnected, as they shape the translocal subject and create a more nuanced sense of belonging. For instance, 'belonging from afar' (Fields 2011; May 2017) tells us about the possible temporal locations where a sense of belonging is constructed. Personal histories, feelings of nostalgia and emotional

attachments to places are maintained by the translocal subjects as they continue to imagine, talk and speculate about places. Spaces are re-imagined, reproduced and new meaning are attached to them over the life course.

METHODS

The article is based on interviews with 20 women, aged 60 to 78 years, who migrated to Sweden from Turkey mostly in the 1970s and 1980s. All were born in Turkey and migrated to Sweden in their early to mid-adulthood. The interviews were performed during 2020 and 2021. The recruitment of interviewees was done via multiple online and offline resources: Turkish cultural organisations, a religious organisation and several Facebook groups for the Turkish diaspora were used to share the call for participation in the study. In addition, a snowballing method was used to reach out to women. Seven out of 20 interviews were performed face to face, five using video-chat applications, and eight by phone. Video and phone interviews were performed in the cases where face to face interviews were not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions. This posed a challenge at the initial phases of recruitment and interviews as older populations often have significantly lower access rates to internet technologies, which is referred as the digital divide (McDonough 2016). Therefore, it is plausible to assume that this limited the recruitment process since the study partially relied on online recruitment channels.

The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with interview guidelines covering themes like care, health, work, family and everyday experiences of old age, gender and migrancy. The interview questions were open ended and gave the interviewees room to narrate their answers. The interviews were carried out in Turkish and lasted approximately two hours. Here it is important to reflect on my position as the researcher, as I, myself am a Turkish-born women who is living in Sweden. I performed these interviews as a young woman who speaks Turkish as a native language as part of my PhD thesis. This, of course, enabled a space of familiarity into the narratives of interviewees and allowed me to be an 'insider' since most of the interviewees also migrated to Sweden as young women. Needless to say, there were cases where I was not able to maintain a space of familiarity; the experiences of women who were forcefully displaced diverged significantly from mine and other interviewees. Therefore, I tried to stay alert and sensitive to my possible 'insider' and 'outsider' positions.

Although the interviews did not follow a specific methodological format, they were inspired by narrative and life course interviews and aimed to elucidate the interviewed women's lived experiences by paying close attention to their life stages. As Riessman (2008) argues, narratives help us understand how people make sense of past and present events as they follow interviewees' personal histories in a story-telling format. Therefore, narrative interviews are based on 'situated stories' (Polkinghorne 1988: 11 in Juberg, Midjo & Fauske 2020: 4), and this provides an opportunity to see how stories are told and retold under the influence of place, time and relations. In a similar vein, qualitative life course interviews follow individuals' situated stories in the form of life reviews or life stories. However, they often follow a stricter timeline including childhood and adolescent experiences and/or adopt a longitudinal methodology where follow-up interviews are performed for a certain period. In seeking for a well-structured interview flow, the interviews in this study combined characteristics from

both methodologies. The themes of the interviews (aforementioned) often followed a timeline but were formulated in an open-ended way to enable room for brief side-tracks and allow the women to narrate their experiences.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and in full. After the transcription, a thematic analysis was applied to the material to search for and identify the themes that emerged. As Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) argue, thematic analysis does not rely on pre-determined concepts but rather seeks to identify ideas and concepts that are embedded in the data. Thus, the process of identifying belonging as a theme in the material was inductive. The repeated patterns from the interviews showed that belonging emerged as a category of analysis. Experiences of ageing as a migrant women revolved around experiences of feeling 'at home,' feeling in 'gurbet' and longing for multiple places and people, while creating new forms of attachments and connections.

In addition, the fact that the interviewed women had lived in Sweden for 40 to 50 years enabled them to talk about their experiences of belonging from a life course perspective. The analysis has been done with an interpretive approach focusing on the life stories that the interviewed women told as they re-constructed and reflected on their past. As Atkinson (1998) argues, these kinds of life stories are central to gerontological studies, as they show us the role of stories across the life course, and function as a life review that includes deep reflection with the potential to show us what is or is not meaningful.

The theme of belonging has been explored by connecting and interpreting different aspects of the interview themes. The actual word 'belonging' was not mentioned in any of the questions. However, the interviewed women were asked where they consider 'home' to be, and in what place they feel 'at ease.' They were asked about their opinions and feelings on both Turkey and Sweden in different stages in their life, their citizenship status, the decision-making process in relation to migration and other important life events. Most answers about belonging emerged when the interviewees were talking about important life events such as their marriage, the birth of their children and their work experience. They talked about their roots, their emotional attachments and importance of familiar surroundings, and these topics were used in the analysis as the primary informative materials to investigate belonging.

Ethical approval has been granted to conduct the study by The Swedish Ethical Review Authority prior to the data collection, since the interviews include sensitive information about ethnicity and health, as well as personal information about the participants. Consent was obtained in writing or verbally, depending on the interview format. All the names used in the article are pseudonyms and some personal information has been excluded to protect their anonymity.

PROFILE OF THE INTERVIEWED WOMEN

Nine of the 20 interviewees lived in large cities, while the rest lived in medium-sized or small cities. Three had a university degree, and two had no formal education prior to migrating. The rest of the women had either a middle school or high school diploma. Eleven of the women continued their education in Sweden, mostly at SFI[2] schools

2 Short for *Svenska för Invandrare* (Swedish for Immigrants): a Swedish language course provided by local municipalities targeting newly arrived migrants.

where in addition to studying Swedish, they learned about available jobs or further educational opportunities in their cities. Most of them started working in low-income jobs (such as factory workers or cleaners) upon arrival but switched to higher-income jobs (such as nurses, teachers, office workers) and subsequently retired.

Four of the interviewed women moved to Sweden for political reasons; two were asylum seekers and the other two moved because of the political unrest after the military coup in 1980 in Turkey. However, most of the interviewees moved within the framework of family reunification laws, following their husbands or parents who had found jobs in Sweden, often as industrial workers. Some women got married in Turkey with the intention of moving to Sweden after meeting their future husbands who were looking for a woman to marry from their hometown.

Ten of the women were married or were living with their partners at the time of the interviews. The rest were single (four were widowed and six were divorced). Among the women who were living with their partners, two had Swedish-born partners, while the rest had Turkish-born partners. All but one of the interviewees had children. Seven of the interviewees were living with their adult children. These children were either single or were recently divorced/separated from their partners and had therefore moved back in with their parents. Among the women with children, all but one had grandchildren. These diverse backgrounds of participants have been taken into consideration in the analysis process.

FINDINGS

The findings indicated two main interconnected dimensions of belonging for the interviewed women: (1) affective and (2) material. Affective dimensions were based on the significance of family/kinship ties, shared values, non-belonging and feelings of *gurbet* while material dimensions consisted of specific localities, material rootedness and mobility.

AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS

The affective dimensions of belonging constitute the 'felt' dimensions of mobility. Findings from the interviews revealed that the interviewed women's old and new ties simultaneously informed each other, as the women's emotional attachment to places and people shifted over time, showing the temporality of belonging. For many, Sweden *became* home over the years through the women's relations to places and people.

FAMILY AND KINSHIP TIES

Family and kinship ties came up as a significant aspect of belonging in most of the interviews. When they were asked to elaborate on their decision to stay in Sweden, having children in Sweden came to the forefront as the key determinant for staying. Here, it is important to note that most of them had their first child in Sweden. Their answers had two parts: First, many women stated that it was 'too late to return' after their children were born here, and especially after they began attending day-care. Second, as they grew older, they increasingly wanted to be close to their children and grandchildren.

When the children started at day-care, they learned to speak Swedish, and the mothers thought their children would have to go through a 'second integration process' if they move back to Turkey. The women considered their kids to be more 'Swedish' than they were:

> I was telling my husband that we need to go back to Turkey before the kids start school. He was a bit indecisive; one day he'd say yes, one day no! Meanwhile, the kids started school. How can you return now? You can't! I couldn't! Then [...] they grew up here. We could never go back at that point. Yes, I mean, Turkey is my home country, but theirs is Sweden. (Yesim, small city, 73)

Aydan, who moved to Sweden after the 1980 coup had a similar reason for staying:

> I lived for such a long time with the hope of returning. Most Turks think like that [...]. But now it has become my home. [...]. After I got a divorce, I was alone here with my two sons. The oldest was 12 years old. That was when I asked them if they wanted to return to Turkey. I still remember it very clearly. My oldest said 'Mom, if you want to go back, you can, it's your country, but my country is here (Sweden), and I want to live here'. When he said that, I decided to stay here and we never talked about returning. (Aydan, large city, 65)

This explicit discussion between Aydan and her son about return migration was a defining moment in her decision to stay. She talked about how Sweden *became* her home through her children. Halide had a similar conversation with her son when he started school. She stated that she was already feeling 'very close' to Swedish society herself and wanted to stay. But the first time the decision was 'verbalised' was during a conversation with her son about 'feeling Swedish':

> I decided to stay when my son asked me if he can call himself Swedish. He asked me one day if I would be sad if he started introducing himself as 'Swedish.' I said, 'of course you can!'[...] I said, 'you should say whatever you feel like.' Then I thought to myself [...] I mean, I already felt very close to this place, but this was the first time I said it out loud. (Halide, large city, 60)

However, children and grandchildren are not the only determinants; relationships with the stay-behind family also play a key role. Many interviewed women expressed feelings of detachment towards Turkey after the death of their parents:

> What does it matter, Turkey, after you lose your parents? Everyone in my family is here. I can visit Turkey whenever I want but I want to live close to my children. (Neziha, medium-sized city, 67)

As can be seen from Neziha's answer, her weakening ties with stay-behind family in Turkey contribute to her willingness to stay in Sweden. Most women stated that their emotional attachment to Turkey decreased after the death of their parents, which also reduced the frequency of travels as Yesim pointed out: 'there is nothing connecting me there' (Yesim, 73). The deaths minimised the women's mobility as many of them did not really see a reason to travel to Turkey if not to visit family.

SHARED VALUES AND NON-BELONGING

The interviews showed that the sharing moral/ideological values with the society in a locality constituted a significant aspect of belonging. For instance, some of the interviewed women migrated to Sweden as asylum seekers when they were young adults and realised that their personal values were more in line with Swedish society than Turkish society, and they therefore felt *at home* in Sweden. Halide, who sought asylum in Sweden after the 1980 coup recalls her first memories of feeling 'at home' in Sweden:

> I took part in the 1st of May demonstrations in my city in the early years. My son was in his stroller, and we attended the march together. Ay! I said, 'This is like a wedding! A celebration!' (laughs) [...] I was so surprised. A feeling of joy overwhelmed me. I felt so close to Sweden at that moment! (Halide, 60, large city)

As a woman who was involuntarily displaced, Halide frequently talked about the importance of human rights and freedom in Sweden, and how this was an important factor in her decision to stay, because, like most of the interviewees, she did not originally plan to remain in Sweden for a long time. She was one of the few interviewed women who explicitly used the word 'belonging' during the interview, and she explained that she feels like she belongs in Sweden because of the moral and ideological views she shares with the society. A similar opinion was expressed by Aysel:

> I felt a sort of freedom here. I was strong before too [...] yes [...] but I became even stronger in Sweden. This place made my identity *more visible*. [...] I *made* a place for myself here. I also love Turkey, but my home is here.]...]. Don't see yourself as a migrant! See yourself as a person, a human being. Be proud of who you are. Be proud of your country, but be proud of here too, because this place provided you with humanity! (Aysel, medium-sized city, 71)

Aysel's answer illustrates how home making informs sense of belonging to a place through similarity and adaptation. But not all interviewees felt this way. During the interviews, some women talked about feelings of non-belonging, especially in relation to anti-immigrant sentiments and discourses. The category 'foreigner' was ambivalent for many interviewees. Some referred to themselves as foreigners, while others only considered a specific group of migrants (refugees) to be foreigners, and therefore, did not view themselves as belonging to this category. In many cases, those who referred to themselves as foreigners made a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' foreigners:

> If you try, people won't see you as a parasitic foreigner, they will see you as a foreigner who is trying to do something. And then they will accept you. Otherwise, you become a 'damn foreigner' in their eyes. (Halide, large city, 60)

> When you speak their language, eat their food, and live in their neighbourhoods, you can *negotiate* with them [...]. There are some Turks [...] they insist so much on their own rules. In my opinion, they're the ones who are at fault. We need to adapt a bit, negotiate a bit. If you insist on your identity, like 'Oohh I'mTurkish, I'm Muslim' [...] then they become hostile. (Piraye, large city, 67)

This conditional acceptance by Swedish society, as expressed in both answers, was justified in their eyes, as they viewed themselves as agents who can negotiate, adapt and change their conditions. There are many aspects of this boundary making and maintenance process to unpack (especially regarding class and gender), but this discussion is outside the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it is important to note that some interviewees expressed feelings of non-acceptance or non-belonging due to how they were perceived by Swedish society. For example, Hatice (large city, 61) stated: 'You're a foreigner in this country if you have a black head.[3] That's it!' Similarly, Sibel said:

> I'm a Swedish citizen but what good do you think it does me? The only plus side is that I don't have to get visas everywhere because I have a Swedish passport now. But apart from that, we're black heads. It's so obvious from our names that we're foreigners. (Sibel, medium-sized city, 66)

Although Sibel talked about the 'obvious markers' of her foreignness such as her name or hair colour, she cultivated her sense of belonging through her family ties, similar to other interviewees. As she was describing her feelings, she explained that the feelings of 'foreignness' went away for her once she realised that her whole family was here with her in Sweden, and that the only times she felt she did not belong in Sweden was when she received occasional reminders from 'others.' Thus, she talked about 'still' and 'sometimes' feeling like a migrant, depending on these encounters with 'others' which are the concrete reflections of today's political climate of anti-immigration discourses. These encounters with others were daily reminders of non-belonging to the category of 'Swedishness' while Sibel, among others, kept her familial ties as the main source of belonging to Sweden.

GURBET

When the women talked about the affective dimensions of belonging, feelings of *gurbet* became prominent in relation to their past experiences. Not all of them talked about *gurbet*, but the ones who did talked about 'feeling in gurbet' during the years immediately after they migrated. Sweden was *gurbet* until they started to feel 'at home.' During this process of home making, the women maintained close ties and emotional attachments to Turkey, which can be categorised as 'belonging from afar' (Fields 2011; May 2017). They continued to feel a sense of belonging regarding Turkey through their memories and emotions. However, the feelings of longing connected with being in *gurbet* subsided over time, and Sweden stopped being *gurbet*. In other words, the perception of *gurbet* as an imaginary place that is entangled with feelings of longing dissolved after they developed a sense of belonging to Sweden. For instance, Neziha referred to it as a former period of her life that had 'passed':

> Not now, but when I was young, you know, when I was *in gurbet*, I missed Turkey a lot. But then, that ended too, of course [...] It ends when you have children. (Neziha, medium-sized city, 67)

Her answer reflected the temporal and contingent aspect of belonging. Sweden was no longer *gurbet* after she had her children there.

3 Black-head (*svartskalle*) is a pejorative term used in Europe to depict migrants who generally have Middle Eastern background. It refers to the darker shades of their hair.

MATERIAL DIMENSIONS

Material dimensions are the physical and concrete aspects of belonging. The interviewed women talked about specific physical locations which informed their sense of belonging, referring to their neighbourhoods, houses and physical mobility between multiple places.

LOCALITIES

The specific localities in which the interviewed women lived were an important dimension of their sense of belonging, because feelings of 'being at home' were linked to their neighbourhoods and the houses/apartments they lived in. For instance, Piraye, who lived in a large Swedish city, spoke of the city as her 'home' during the interview. She explained that she has lived on the same street so long, that she knows every detail, every shop owner. Her daily routine consists of going for a walk in her neighbourhood, chit chatting with some neighbours and drinking tea at the cafe on her street. She talked about how the familiarity of the physical space and the small daily exchange with neighbours makes her feel 'at home.' Similarly, another interviewee, Halide talked about the material familiarity in relation to her memories of place:

> I see this place as my home [...] probably because I know this place so well. I spent my whole adult life here. I know every corner of this neighbourhood. I know all the football fields, the parks, the schools. I have so many memories of taking my son to football practice after school each week. (Halide, large city, 60)

Her answer illustrates how home making and belonging are interconnected with people, places and time. As she gains familiarity with her surroundings and creates memories of the place over the years, she feels more at home in Sweden.

Cigdem's experience of feeling at home is different from Halide's, but it too illustrates a connection to a specific locality. Cigdem was one of the labour migrants who moved to Sweden in the 1970s and since then have lived in one of the ethnically segregated areas in a large city. She moved to a neighbourhood inhabited by people from her village in Turkey and has lived in the same apartment building with some of her relatives ever since: 'I don't really miss Turkey because our community here is full of our own people (referring to people from her village in Turkey)' (Cigdem, large city, 68). Due to this community, she felt 'at home' in Sweden.

MATERIAL ROOTEDNESS

The analysis showed that the interviewed women's relations to material space were closely tied to having or maintaining 'roots.' Building affective connections through materiality was a common way to maintain ties among the women. In some cases, rootedness was achieved through mundane practices in everyday life. Watching Turkish TV channels, celebrating holidays with family, cooking Turkish food, and following the news from Turkey are concrete, material practices of commemorating their roots.

As aforementioned, for many women rootedness was achieved over time by establishing new ties in Sweden, that is, by having children. However, in some cases, the interviewed women viewed having property (i.e. a house/apartment) as a form of

rootedness. Those who could afford to do so, bought summer houses, mainly on the Mediterranean coast, and some kept the houses they had inherited from their parents to use when visiting Turkey. Pinar, who migrated to Sweden in 1969 after her parents were recruited as labour migrants, had recently bought a summer house in Turkey. She explained her reason as follows:

> I never wanted to go back to Turkey [...] all my family was here [...] but I bought the summer house to bond my kids to Turkey. So, they won't forget their *roots*. I thought that if they have a house there, eventually they will visit, at least sometimes [...] If there is no house (in Turkey), the ties would break off completely. I wanted them to keep their ties. (Pinar, medium-sized city, 64)

As the quote illustrates, for Pinar, buying a house was a strategic decision to keep her children connected to their 'roots.' This was, of course, a privileged position since many other interviewees talked about the constraints regarding mobility due to lack of economic resources.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that the affective and material dimensions of belonging are interwoven to the fabric of translocal subjectivity. For most of the interviewed women, their sense of belonging was not dependant on transnational mobility as the intensity and nature of their mobility was not stable over the years and was heavily dependent on the available resources. Nevertheless, the interviewed women restored, negotiated and reconstructed their ties between different places as the years passed. What was common in both domains was the temporal, multi-scalar and non-linear aspects of belonging.

As previously discussed, a core aspect of translocal subjectivity is the temporal dimension. First, in the findings, feelings of *gurbet* came to fore as a niche concept to pinpoint temporal belonging. The women talked about the temporality of *gurbet* by addressing how it 'passes away' or 'still comes' depending on their situated experiences. Second, belonging was manifested along with non-belonging in many cases. Many women talked about 'sometimes' feeling like a migrant/foreigner in Sweden due to occasional reminders from 'others.'

From a theoretical point, the interviewed women's practices of home making and belonging showed the limits of previous debates on roots versus routes and belonging here or there and therefore, is in line with critiques towards this dichotomy (Beck 2006; Christensen & Jensen 2011). When translocal subjects are seen as agents who can perform, negotiate and make sense of their belonging, a new space is opened to talk about what women *did* with their roots and which routes they *chose* to go. Sense of belonging is not fixed to a territory or to an ethnic/cultural identity, but is rather *done* (Skrbiš, Baldassar & Poynting 2007) over the life course of individuals.

This line of thought is closely related to Probyn's (2015) emphasis on the desire to belong and how these desires to *become* are played out in everyday circumstances. Everyday interactions are crucial to situate stories. Through these interactions, whether in ethnically segregated areas or not, the interviewed women constantly took different positions which informed their belonging. Some felt comfort in the

familiarity of their 'own people' and the familiarity of that specific locality, while some felt heavily constrained and oppressed by the same characteristic. Similarly, some found comfort in the perceived shared values with Swedish society while others felt othered. Thus, they negotiated and temporally positioned their sense of belongings on a daily basis.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the interviewed women's sense of belonging is constructed on a translocal scale, where simultaneous situatedness across different localities informs individuals' material and affective relations to place. In this study we get a glimpse of how the women negotiate their conditions and perform belonging in a non-linear, temporal and multi-scalar way. However, it is important to emphasise that the findings are limited since they rely on only 20 interviews. Moreover, the interviewed women were not specifically asked about belonging in the interviews. In future research, it would be interesting to study belonging through an intersectional lens by incorporating different social positions (e.g. class and sexuality). In addition, studies with larger numbers of participants would be interesting to discern the common patterns and differences that inform rootedness and belonging.

This study has shown that sense of belonging cannot be solely understood as a fixed and stable sense that is informed by two different territories. Belonging is constituted in interconnections between places and people over time and therefore transcends national borders. Staying alert to this ongoing negotiation of belonging carries the potential to address uneven power relations among different social positions and the daily interactions that reproduce the material and affective dimensions of belonging.

ETHICS AND CONSENT

This research has been approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Etikprövningsmyndigheten) under diary number 2020-00518. In addition, verbal or written consent has been obtained from all interviewees prior to the interviews.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the interviewees for sharing their stories with me. Also, special thanks go to my thesis supervisors Helen Peterson and Jenny Alsarve for their valuable and insightful comments at all stages of this article.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 754285.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

Merve Tunçer
Örebro University, Örebro, Sweden

REFERENCES

Abadan-Unat, N. 2011. *Turks in Europe: From guest worker to transnational citizen*. Berghahn Books.

Akgündüz, A. 1993. Labour migration from Turkey to Western Europe (1960–1974): An analytical review. *Capital & Class*, 17: 153–194. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/030981689305100107

Akpinar, A. 2003. The honour/shame complex revisited: Violence against women in the migration context. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 26: 425–442. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2003.08.001

Antonsich, M. 2010. Searching for belonging – An analytical framework. *Geography Compass*, 4: 644–659. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00317.x

Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.

Atkinson, R. 1998. *The life story interview*. Sage. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986205

Avci, G. 2006. Comparing integration policies and outcomes: Turks in the Netherlands and Germany. *Turkish Studies*, 7: 67–84. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14683840500520592

Baser, B and **Levin, PT.** 2017. *Migration from Turkey to Sweden: Integration, belonging and transnational community*. Bloomsbury Publishing. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350987180

Beck, U. 2006. *The cosmopolitan vision*. Polity.

Bell, V. 1999. Performativity and belonging: An introduction. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16: 1–10. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/02632769922050511

Bowen, GA. 2006. Grounded theory and sensitizing concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5: 12–23. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500304

Brickell, K and **Datta, A.** 2011. *Translocal geographies*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Buffel, T. 2017. Ageing migrants and the creation of home: Mobility and the maintenance of transnational ties. *Population, Space and Place*, 23: 1994. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1994

Calasanti, TM and **Slevin, KF.** 2001. *Gender, social inequalities, and aging*. Rowman Altamira.

Charmaz, K. 2003. Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods. In: Denzin, NK and Lincoln, YS (eds.), *Strategies for Qualitative Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp. 249–291.

Christensen, AD and **Jensen, S.** 2011. Roots and routes. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 1(3): 146. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2478/v10202-011-0013-1

Ciobanu, RO, Fokkema, T and **Nedelcu, M.** 2017. Ageing as a migrant: Vulnerabilities, agency and policy implications. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(2): 164–181. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1238903

Conradson, D and **McKay, D.** 2007. Translocal subjectivities: Mobility, connection, emotion. *Mobilities*, 2: 167–174. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/17450100701381524

Crowley, J. 1999. The Politics of Belonging: Some Theoretical Considerations. In: Geddes, A and Favell, A (eds.), *The Politics of Belonging: Migrants and Minorities in Contemporary Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Dedeoglu, S. 2014. *Migrants, work and social integration: Women's labour in the Turkish ethnic economy*. Springer. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137371126

Ehrkamp, PJJOE and **Studies, M.** 2005. Placing identities: Transnational practices and local attachments of Turkish immigrants in Germany. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31: 345–364. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183042000339963

Erder, S. 2006. *Refah toplumunda getto*. İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi.

Erel, U. 2002. Reconceptualizing Motherhood: Experiences of Migrant Women from Turkey Living in Germany. In: Bryceson, D and Vuorela, U (eds.), *Transnational Family: New European Frontiers and Global Networks*. London.

Fassmann, H and **Içduygu, AJER.** 2013. Turks in Europe: Migration flows, migrant stocks and demographic structure. *European Review*, 21: 349–361. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798713000318

Fereday, J and **Muir-Cochrane, E.** 2006. Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5: 80–92. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107

Fields, D. 2011. Emotional refuge? Dynamics of place and belonging among formerly homeless individuals with mental illness. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 4: 258–267. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2010.09.002

Ghorashi, H. 2010. From absolute invisibility to extreme visibility: Emancipation trajectory of migrant women in the Netherlands. *Feminist Review*, 94: 75–92. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2009.38

Gibson, D. 1996. Broken down by age and gender: "The Problem of Old Women" redefined. *Gender and Society*, 10: 433–448. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/089124396010004005

Greiner, C and **Sakdapolrak, PJGC.** 2013. Translocality: Concepts, applications and emerging research perspectives. *Geography Compass*, 7: 373–384. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12048

Grillo, R and **Riccio, BJP.** 2004. Translocal development: Italy–Senegal. *Population Space and Place*, 10: 99–111. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.321

Gupta, A and **Ferguson, JJCA.** 1992. Beyond "culture": Space, identity, and the politics of difference. *Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference*, 7: 6–23. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1992.7.1.02a00020

Hooks, B. 2009. *Belonging: A culture of place*. Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203888018

Hristov, P. 2015. The Balkan gurbet: Traditional patterns and new trends. In: Vermeulen, H, Baldwin-Edwards, M and van Boeschoten, R (eds.), *Migration in the Southern Balkans*. Cham: Springer. pp. 31–46.

Ilcan, S. 2002. *Longing in belonging: The cultural politics of settlement*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Inowlocki, L and **Lutz, H.** 2000. Hard labour: The 'biographical work' of a Turkish migrant woman in Germany. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 7: 301–319. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/135050680000700305

Juberg, A, Midjo, T and **Fauske, H.** 2020. Motherhood in context – Life course interviews with young mothers in contact with child welfare. *Social Sciences*, 9: 236. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9120236

Klok, J, et al. 2017. Transnational aging among older Turkish and Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands: Determinants of transnational behavior and transnational belonging. *Transnational Social Review*, 7: 25–40. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/21931674.2016.1277656

Liversage, A. 2009. Life below a 'Language Threshold'?: Stories of Turkish marriage migrant women in Denmark. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 16: 229–247. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506809105307

Liversage, A and **Jakobsen, V.** 2016. Unskilled, foreign, and old: A life course perspective on immigrant poverty. *GeroPsych: The Journal of Gerontopsychology and Geriatric Psychiatry*, 29: 93–103. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1024/1662-9647/a000146

Ma, EK-W. 2002. Translocal spatiality. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5: 131–152. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877902005002568

Machat-From, L. 2017. Identity, old(er) age and migrancy: A social constructionist lens. (PhD) dissertation, Linköping University Electronic Press.

Malkki, LJCA. 1992. National geographic: The rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees. *Cultural Anthropology*, 7: 24–44. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1992.7.1.02a00030

Martínez-Conde, CÁ, et al. 2020. Memories of the struggles for the rights of immigrant women in Barcelona. *Critical Social Policy*, 40: 215–233. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018319895499

May, V. 2017. Belonging from afar: Nostalgia, time and memory. *The Sociological Review*, 65: 401–415. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12402

Mcdonough, CC. 2016. The effect of ageism on the digital divide among older adults. *Journal of Gerontology & Geriatric Medicine*, 2: 008. DOI: https://doi.org/10.24966/GGM-8662/100008

Naldemirci, Ö. 2013. *Caring (in) Diaspora: Aging and caring experiences of older Turkish migrants in a Swedish context*. Göteborg.

Naujoks, DJDS. 2010. Diasporic identities – Reflections on transnational belonging. *Diaspora Studies*, 3: 1–21. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/09763457-00301001

Oakes, T and **Schein, L.** 2006. Translocal China: An Introduction. In: *Translocal China.* London: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203029398

Palaz, FS. 2020. The social networks and engagements of older Turkish migrants in Germany. *Open Journal for Sociological Studies*, 4: 79–92. DOI: https://doi.org/10.32591/coas.ojss.0402.03079p

Palmberger, M. 2017. Social ties and embeddedness in old age: Older Turkish labour migrants in Vienna. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43: 235–249. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1238907

Payne, B and **Whittington, F.** 1976. Older women: An examination of popular stereotypes and research evidence. *Social Problems*, 23(4): 488–504. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/799858

Polkinghorne, DE. 1988. *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Portes, A, Guarnizo, LE and **Landolt, P.** 1999. The study of transnationalism: Pitfalls and promise of an emergent research field. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22: 217–237. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/014198799329468

Probyn, E. 2015. *Outside belongings*. Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315865805

Racles, A. 2018. Walking with Lina in Zamora: Reflections on Roma's home-making engagements from a translocality perspective. *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 4: 86–108. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v4i2.386

Riessman, CK. 2008. *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. SAGE Publications.

Ryan, L. 2007. Migrant women, social networks and motherhood: The experiences of Irish nurses in Britain. *Sociology*, 41: 295–312. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038507074975

Rydzik, A and **Anitha, S.** 2020. Conceptualising the agency of migrant women workers: Resilience, reworking and resistance. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34: 883–899. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017019881939

Sachs, L. 1983. *Evil eye or bacteria: Turkish migrant women and Swedish health care*. Doctoral thesis, monograph, Department of Social Anthropology [Socialantropologiska inst.], Stockholms Universitet.

Skrbiš, Z, Baldassar, L and **Poynting, S.** 2007. Introduction – Negotiating belonging: Migration and generations. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 28: 261–269. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/07256860701429691

Torres, S. 2015. Expanding the gerontological imagination on ethnicity: Conceptual and theoretical perspectives. *Ageing and Society*, 35: 935–960. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X14001330

Vertovec, S. 2004. Migrant transnationalism and modes of transformation. *The International Migration Review*, 38: 970–1001. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00226.x

Walsh, K and **Näre, L.** (eds.) 2016. *Transnational migration and home in older age*. London: Routledge. pp. 139–153. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315713564

Yuval-Davis, N. 2006. Belonging and the politics of belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40: 197–214. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Tunçer, M. 2023. Making Sense of Belonging: Translocal Subjectivity and Rootedness of Turkish-Born Women in Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 13(2): 6, pp. 1–18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.535

Submitted: 01 December 2021
Accepted: 26 September 2022
Published: 07 June 2023

Nordic Journal of Migration Research is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press.

HUP HELSINKI UNIVERSITY PRESS
NMR NORDIC MIGRATION RESEARCH
VERTAISARVIOITU KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD PEER-REVIEWED www.tsv.fi/tunnus