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Editorial

Boundary Spanning and Reconstitution in Migration

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Abstract

The focus of this thematic issue is on migrants' experiences of belonging and non-belonging, and how communities are constructed in the destination country. It includes a group of international scholars across disciplines who are studying migration in a range of different contexts. Migration spans multiple disciplines and encompasses a variety of epistemological, ontological and methodological orientations. Despite such divergent approaches and positions however, there is consensus across the social sciences that understanding the dynamics of migration and mobilities is central to illuminating social relations within societies.

Keywords

belonging; community; identity; networks; non-belonging; place

Issue

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All forms of migration involve an attempt to enhance one's life in some way, whether this constitutes the choice to seek economic or employment opportunities, the drive to seek asylum or opting for a different lifestyle (Ahmed, 2015). Migration also necessitates motion across boundaries which can be geographical, political and cultural and, frequently, such boundaries are reconstructed in the migration destination (Ahmed, 2015). These boundaries can be symbolic, in flux, conditional and are reconstituted to signify belonging and non-belonging (Ahmed, 2015; Anthias, 2008; Cohen, 1985; Yuval-Davis, Kannabiran, & Vieten, 2006). Belonging can be understood as "the process of feeling or being a part of—rather than apart from" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 54). There are also temporal and spatial elements involved with belonging and again context is important. How and to what people construct belonging in a specific time and place illuminates how they see themselves in context, at both micro and macro levels (Ahmed, 2012, 2015; Marsh, Bradley, Love, Alexander, & Norham, 2007). Community can be framed as multifaceted representations of belonging (Ahmed, 2011, 2015; Delanty, 2003). Another way of understanding belonging is to conceive of it as "a sense of intimacy with the world" (Boym, 2001, p. 251). The im-

petus to address belonging (and non-belonging becomes more acute in the context of migration (Anthias, 2006), since we are not usually asked to define what we belong to unless we find ourselves in unusual circumstances (Amit, 2012).

Exploring how migrants search for, construct, imagine, symbolise, evoke and experience (or not) belonging and community in the host country provides the opportunity to consider what this represents from different perspectives in new contexts. Additionally, how people construct and experience belonging and community in migration sheds light on processes of social change and continuity from multiple vantage points (Ahmed, 2015). Boundaries characterise all forms of belonging and community whether related to place, networks or shared identity. Physical or geographical divides indicate who is of and from a place; for networks there are designated insiders and outliers; and with regard to identity, there are tangible and illusory characteristics which denote belonging and non-belonging (Ahmed, 2011, 2012, 2015). Yet although community is a well-known term, which is often "idealized" (Crow, 2002), it remains an ambiguous concept which is often called into question (Ahmed, 2015; Crow, 2002).

Community denotes security, warmth and cosiness (Bauman, 2001), things in common (Cohen, 1982) and solidarity (Crow, 2002). It is also subjective and contextual encompassing belonging and non-belonging, sameness and otherness and inclusion and exclusion (Clark, 2007). In spite of this, community's elusiveness makes it useful to "think with" (Ahmed & Fortier, 2003) in order to explore people's lived experiences of belonging and non-belonging through migration (Ahmed, 2011, 2012, 2015). In this way it can reveal the agency of individuals and groups in the context of social processes (Ahmed, 2015; Crow, 2002; Seeley, Sim, & Loosley, 1956) and illuminate how this is influenced by wider structural factors (Castles, 2010; Giddens, 1991; Sherlock, 2002).

Individuals and groups can belong to different types of community concurrently and these can also be shifting (Temple et al., 2005) and it is impossible to completely separate them since place, networks and identity overlap (Ahmed, 2015). Belonging to place represents an emotional and embodied connection to the world (May, 2013) and community as place denotes living in or feeling belonging to a locale in a specific geographical area (MacIver & Page, 1961; Murray, 2000). Network representations of community indicate being part of the social fabric (Anthias, 2008), relations of social bonding (Sherlock, 2002) or relational belongings (May, 2013) which are frequently symbolic for migrants (Ahmed, 2015; O'Reilly, 2000). Further, examining social relations and what people construct as shared (Amit & Rapport, 2002) in conjunction with processes of exclusion and inclusion (King, Warnes, & Williams, 1998; Rodriguez, Fernández-Mayoralas, & Rojo, 1998) illuminates experiences of migration. is useful to understand migration experiences. There are multiple identities which people can claim or be ascribed, and again, identity is significant in discussions of community and migration. (Anthias, 2008). In this sense, community does not need to be tied to place or relate to networks but can instead relate to individual and group identification and ascription (Milner, 1968).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Anya Ahmed is Professor of Social Science in the School of Health and Society at the University of Salford. She has a background in social policy and sociology. She has led numerous funded projects focusing on the needs and experiences of less heard and marginalised communities. She has conducted research on migration/mobilities in the UK, Spain, Uganda and New Zealand and has published widely in these fields.