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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

# Analysing migrants' ageing in place as embodied practices of embedding through time: 'Kilburn is not Kilburn any more'

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## Abstract

There is growing attention to how people navigate and make sense of particular places through the ageing process. Against this backdrop, there is increasing research on ageing in contexts of migration. Although much of this research focuses on retirement and return migration, comparatively less is known about migrants who remain in the destination society, especially in advanced old age. Drawing on qualitative data, we analyse the experiences of three groups of ageing migrants who have been less visible in research and policy (Caribbean, Irish, and Polish) and of those living in two U.K. sites (London and Yorkshire). Using the concept of embedding, we analyse migrants' identifications with and attachment to particular places over time. In so doing, we highlight not only how migrants negotiate dynamic local places through embodied ageing processes but also how these negotiations may be mediated by wider sociopolitical events including Brexit and the 'Windrush scandal'.

## KEYWORDS

ageing, Caribbean, embedding, Irish, migrants, place, Polish

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In the context of ageing societies, there is increasing attention on how people navigate and make sense of particular places through the ageing process (May, 2011; Rowles & Chaudhury, 2005; van Dijk, Cramm, van Exel, & Nieboer, 2015; Van Hees, Horstman, Jansen, & Ruwaard, 2018). Much of the literature on ageing in place focuses on native-born populations (May & Muir, 2015). Beyond the considerable body of work on retirement migration (e.g., King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; Oliver, 2012), there is limited, though increasing research, on how migrant populations navigate ageing in destination societies (Baldassar, Wilding, Boccagni, & Merla, 2017; Bolzman & Vagni, 2018; Buffel, 2017; Ciobanu, Fokkema, & Nedelcu, 2017; Oglak & Hussein, 2016; Oliver, Blythe, & Roe, 2018; Zontini, 2015). Meanwhile, the literature on migrant attachments and belonging in local places usually focuses on the experiences of recently arrived migrants (Trąbka, 2019). Nonetheless, despite developing research on migrant belonging in place,

the ways in which migrants connect and identify with particular places is still not well understood (Phillips & Robinson, 2015), especially in contexts of ageing (Sampaio, King, & Walsh, 2018). Moreover, there have been calls for more research on the diversity of ageing migrants and how ethnicity intersects with experiences of growing older in particular places (Buffel, 2017; Oliver et al., 2018).

We address those calls by analysing data from three different migrant groups (Caribbean, Irish, and Polish) who arrived in Britain as young people, in the 1940s–1960s, and are now entering advanced old age. Focusing on two distinct sites, a global city (London) and a mixed rural/urban landscape (Yorkshire), we examine participants' dynamic relationships to these places. Many have lived in their neighbourhoods for decades and, through processes of place-making and place-attachment, have been embedding (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015) over time and consider these neighbourhoods to be 'home'.

We examine how older age brings new challenges that can disrupt embedding, undermining feelings of belonging in particular

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places. With increasing frailty often associated with advanced age, navigating even familiar places may become difficult (Rowles & Chaudhury, 2005). Moreover, bereavement and diminishing support networks may impact on older people's sense of attachments in local places (May, 2011). Of course, places are constructed and dynamic; continually made and remade over time (Massey, 2005). Thus, as well as individual-level changes, there may be structural changes impacting on long-term residents, especially older people.

Moreover, for migrants, ageing may result in additional challenges. For those who arrived in Britain to work, ageing and retirement may raise questions about return to the country of origin (Ryan, 2004, 2007). But return is not necessarily easy as 'home places' also change over time and migrants may no longer feel a sense of belonging there—feeling 'out of place' (Cuba & Hummon, 1993). As the older generation 'back home' die off, migrants' closest relatives may be in the destination country, creating significant ties to particular places (Buffel, 2017). Although there is increasing research on return migration in later life (Hunter, 2011; Walsh, 2018; Zontini, 2015), our paper focuses on migrants who have not returned and instead remain in the destination society in advanced older age. Clearly, the transnational lens is important, and our participants had networks of family and friends in other countries; nonetheless, we want to understand their everyday negotiations of the local places where they currently reside. Of course, these local places are nested in wider sociostructural contexts (Massey, 2005). Immigration policies and wider social attitudes towards migrants may impact on experiences at the local level. Therefore, we consider how contextual factors, such as the 'Windrush scandal'<sup>1</sup> and Brexit,<sup>2</sup> may impact on the multiscale nature of embedding in place for older migrants. In this way, we seek to add new insights into migrants' experiences of ageing as 'embodied and emplaced' (Sampaio et al., 2018).

The next section situates our discussion within the literature on migration, belonging, place-making, and processes of embedding. After summarising the research project, we present our analysis of participants' active engagement with places through the ageing process paying special attention to changes, on multiple levels, over time. We conclude by highlighting our contribution to understanding migrants' embodied and emplaced experiences of embedding in place over time.

## 1.1 | Dynamics of belonging in place over time

Geographical mobility—leaving a familiar place to relocate to somewhere new—may result in a profound sense of 'displacement' or feeling 'out of place' (Cuba & Hummon, 1993, p. 550). In their classic research from the U.S. context, Cuba and Hummon argued that 'individuals routinely construct place identities – interpretations of self that engender a sense of being at home' (Cuba & Hummon, 1993, p. 547) and this is especially important in overcoming feelings of being 'out of place'.

The ways in which migrants establish new relationships and forge a sense of belonging in new places is of ongoing research interest (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015). May and Muir define belonging as 'creating a sense of identification with one's relational, material and

cultural surroundings' (May & Muir, 2015, 1.1). These processes are widely recognised as being especially important for migrants as a way of tackling 'the alienation, isolation, and difference experienced by newcomers, helping to cement new identities and sustain and empower marginalised communities' (Phillips & Robinson, 2015, p. 414).

Adopting a spatial lens focuses attention on the characteristics of particular places, including local neighbourhoods, where migrants live (Sampaio et al., 2018). Although the national context is important, everyday lives are lived 'through the local and more intimate spaces of the city – the home, the neighbourhood, the market, the park, a range of institutional spaces – and through embodied experiences of difference' (Phillips & Robinson, 2015:413). Trąbka (2019) observes that migrants become familiar with new places of residence through a sense of 'mastery' of the area—getting to know one's way around particular streets and feeling familiar and confident about navigating one's neighbourhood. Developing attachments to particular places takes time (Buffel, 2017; Ryan, 2018; Trąbka, 2019). An emerging sense of connectedness to a place can reflect and also reinforce aspects of self-identity 'interweaving "sense of self" and "sense of belonging in place"' (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013, p. 175).

Of course, perceptions and experiences of places are not shared by all residents. The same neighbourhood may be perceived differently by long-term residents and newcomers (Buffel & Phillipson, 2019). Varied identifications of place 'emerge at the intersection of race, class, and ethnicity' (Hickman & Mai, 2015, p. 422). Additionally, Phillips and Robinson suggest that conceptualising place as constructed and experienced through the intersectional lens of migrant status and age enables us to 'glimpse the likely complexity of place-based identities, engagements, experiences, community attachments, and belonging' (2015, p. 410).

Moreover, the local places, where migrants reside, are not fixed and static but need to be understood 'as subjective and practised – as created and re-created by users and their interactions' (Phillips & Robinson, 2015, p. 410). Places have both physical and symbolic attributes (Phillips & Robinson, 2015). The structural materialities of place, as well as symbolic meanings, are constantly changing over time, shaped in part by population movements and histories of migration (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). Hence, the complexities of belonging, attachments and identifications need to be studied as ongoing processes which are never fully completed. People's needs and circumstances change over the life-course, as do their connectedness to dynamic places (Kilkey & Ryan, 2020). Such processes can be described through the dynamics of embedding (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015).

Unlike the more widely used concept of *embeddedness*, which suggests a static, achieved state, *embedding* acknowledges the need for continual effort, negotiation and adaptation over time. But that is not to suggest that all migrants may be embedding in the same way or to the same extent. The notion of *differentiated embedding* (Ryan, 2018) helps to understand different opportunities, obstacles, and strategies. Thus, despite the agency of migrants in attempting to gain familiarity and belonging in new places, it is also important to note that some places may enable migrant belongings, whereas other

places may be marked by hostility (Buffel, 2017; Hickman & Mai, 2015) and hinder migrants' opportunities for embedding. Hence, embedding, by forging a sense of connectedness in place, not only takes time but also opportunities (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015). It should be acknowledged, therefore, that embedding in a particular place of residence is not inevitable. Indeed, some migrants may never develop this level of self-identification in a place and may continue to feel alienated (Trąbka, 2019). Moreover, as discussed below, embedding may be reversed over time. Changing personal circumstances, as well as wider sociopolitical contextual factors, such as Brexit or the Windrush scandal, may undermine belonging and attachment in particular places, resulting in processes of disembedding (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015). Thus, processes of embedding in place remain complex, contingent, and dynamic through the life course.

In addressing these issues, the article seeks to make a particular contribution to the literature on migration and ageing in place. Although much research has focused on how recently arrived migrants navigate new places (Trąbka, 2019), we focus on older migrants who have been long-term residents in particular locales for many decades. Writing over 25 years ago, Cuba and Hummon (1993) argued that age matters in understanding place attachment. Asserting that the link between place attachment and life course is not well understood, Cuba and Hummon called for more research on how people construct and reconstruct a coherent sense of self, with respect to place, as they get older. In recent years there has been some research which helps to inform our understanding of this dynamism (e.g., Buffel, 2017; May & Muir, 2015; Oliver et al., 2018).

According to May and Muir, it is necessary to understand belonging in place in terms of 'the quality of individual and group attachments to the surrounding world: to people, places, and 'generation' (2015, 1.1). The addition of 'generation' is important, and this is a topic we explore in later sections of this article. Like May and Muir, we are also interested in how belonging was narrated by our participants. We examine how aspects of their identities may come in and out of focus at particular times and in particular places through their everyday experiences (Phoenix & Brannen, 2014). We argue that embeddedness in place cannot be taken for granted as an achieved state. Over time, especially in older age, long-term resident migrants may gradually develop a disidentification with place, a feeling of being 'out of place', resulting in disembedding. Hence, we seek to understand migrants' ageing as embodied and emplaced experiences with implications for belonging and identifications even in familiar places.

## 1.2 | The study

Data were collected as part of the Sustainable Care project.<sup>3</sup> Our study included two rounds of interviews, between July 2018 and September 2019, with ageing migrants born in the Caribbean, Ireland, and Poland. Interviews were undertaken across various locations in London and Yorkshire. Within this qualitative study, it is not our intention to undertake a comparative analysis of these

two regions. Instead, we draw on these contexts to consider the diversity of experience of participants. The overall research aim was to understand how older migrants, especially in advanced old age, navigated ageing and care in place. We had supplementary questions about the use of new technologies, transnational relations, and access to care services.<sup>4</sup> All those topics will be addressed in other papers. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on ageing in place.

In the first round (July 2018–March 2019), we interviewed 45 participants between the ages of 65 and 92 (see Table 1). Importantly, 60% of our interviewees were aged 80 and over, so our sample was significantly older than customary in migration research. Most participants were recruited through NGOs working with specific migrant communities.<sup>5</sup> For the second round (July–September 2019), we conducted walking interviews with a subsample of nine participants (marked with \* in Table 1). We accompanied participants on a walk in their neighbourhood; the route and duration were determined by them. Interviews were recorded while walking, then continued while seated in a quiet location. This method allowed us to probe deeper into our participants' experiences of their own localities.

Working with such aged participants raises particular ethical issues. In addition to stringent ethical processes within our university, the four members of the research team received DBS<sup>6</sup> checks for working with participants categorised on the basis of their age as 'vulnerable'. We also took practical steps like ensuring information and consent forms were in large font. Throughout the research process we benefitted from the advice and support of NGOs working within the local areas and with expertise on the needs of older residents. This support enabled us to signpost participants to additional sources of support, where appropriate. We are mindful of not reinforcing negative images of older people as 'vulnerable' (Ciobanu et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2018), nonetheless, because of their advanced age, it is unsurprising that many participants had complex health issues and limited physical mobility. Indeed, their health, and the need for regular medical treatment, were often factors in their decisions to remain in the United Kingdom and not return to their country of origin.<sup>7</sup>

All interviews were fully transcribed and coded in NVivo12. Thematic analysis was informed by our research questions as well as new themes emerging from the data. Given the diversity of participants, we adopted an intersectional lens to analyse their complex and dynamic relationships in and with their places of residence. Migration researchers have been urged to go beyond a narrow ethnic lens (Dahinden, 2016; Glick-Schiller & Çağlar, 2009). There have been calls for more comparative research (Phoenix & Brannen, 2014; Ryan, 2019) and for more intersectional perspectives to understand how ethnicity, class, gender, and other characteristics interconnect, inform, and shape each other (Anthias, 2016; Erel & Reynolds, 2018). Class and ethnicity intersected in varied ways with some participants being quite comfortable and owning their homes, while others were just about managing on limited resources. In the following sections, we focus on how age and ethnicity intersected in dynamic ways within particular places over time.

**TABLE 1** Participant characteristics

| Participant <sup>a</sup>     | Gender | Age, 1st interview | First arrival in UK | Location  |
|------------------------------|--------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| <b>Caribbean<sup>b</sup></b> |        |                    |                     |           |
| Charles                      | Male   | 78                 | 1960                | Yorkshire |
| Eunice                       | Female | 87                 | 1950s               | London    |
| Felix                        | Male   | 78                 | 1962                | Yorkshire |
| Gabriel                      | Male   | 86                 | 1955                | Yorkshire |
| Hannah                       | Female | 78                 | 1965                | London    |
| Henrietta                    | Female | 79                 | 1962                | Yorkshire |
| Henry                        | Male   | 88                 | 1957                | London    |
| Howard                       | Male   | 82                 | 1956                | London    |
| Iris                         | Female | 86                 | 1956                | Yorkshire |
| Lalima                       | Female | 77                 | 1969                | London    |
| Lilian                       | Female | 82                 | 1979                | London    |
| Lohendra*                    | Male   | 82                 | 1956                | London    |
| Marjorie*                    | Female | 78                 | 1960                | London    |
| Melaine                      | Female | 85                 | 1957                | Yorkshire |
| Millicent*                   | Female | 83                 | 1956                | Yorkshire |
| Phyllis                      | Female | 86                 | 1957                | London    |
| Samantha                     | Female | 65                 | 1968                | Yorkshire |
| Weldon*                      | Male   | 84                 | 1962                | Yorkshire |
| Yolanda                      | Female | 80                 | 1960                | London    |
| <b>Irish</b>                 |        |                    |                     |           |
| Aine*                        | Female | 82                 | 1953                | Yorkshire |
| Barry                        | Male   | 92                 | 1949                | London    |
| Betsy                        | Female | 82                 | 1958                | London    |
| Bridget                      | Female | 82                 | 1954                | London    |
| Cathleen                     | Female | 90                 | 1942                | London    |
| Geraldine*                   | Female | 77                 | 1954                | Yorkshire |
| Maeve                        | Female | 90                 | 1956                | London    |
| Mainie                       | Female | 72                 | 1968                | London    |
| Mairead                      | Female | 83                 | 1953                | Yorkshire |
| Matthew                      | Male   | 78                 | 1957                | London    |
| Miriam                       | Female | 79                 | 1950s               | London    |
| Mona                         | Female | 82                 | 1955                | Yorkshire |
| Ronan*                       | Male   | 77                 | 1958                | Yorkshire |
| <b>Polish</b>                |        |                    |                     |           |
| Agnieszka*                   | Female | 80                 | 1948                | London    |
| Artur                        | Male   | 65                 | 2004                | Yorkshire |
| Beata                        | Female | 72                 | 1946                | London    |
| Elwira*                      | Female | 77                 | 1961                | London    |
| Ewelina                      | Female | 89                 | 1946                | London    |
| Gabriela                     | Female | 77                 | 1963                | Yorkshire |
| Izabela                      | Female | 82                 | 1977                | Yorkshire |
| Jadwiga                      | Female | 74                 | 1965                | London    |
| Jakub                        | Male   | 89                 | 1946                | London    |
| Jerzy                        | Male   | 83                 | 1950                | Yorkshire |
| Jozef                        | Male   | 81                 | 1946                | London    |

(Continues)

**TABLE 1** (Continued)

| Participant <sup>a</sup> | Gender | Age, 1st interview | First arrival in UK | Location  |
|--------------------------|--------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| Mandek                   | Male   | 89                 | 1947                | Yorkshire |
| Tekla                    | Female | 77                 | 1968                | Yorkshire |

<sup>a</sup>To ensure anonymity, all participants were given culturally appropriate pseudonyms.

<sup>b</sup>Because some of our Caribbean-born participants were of Indian background and Hindu religion, we are not labelling this category as 'African-Caribbean'.

### 1.3 | Embedding in new places

Although the primary focus of this paper is on ageing and how participants navigate particular places as they reach advanced older life, we are mindful of their complex intersectional identities. Most participants arrived in the 1940s–1960s, through different migration routes, largely differentiated by nationality: from Ireland as labour migrants, from the Caribbean as British subjects, many Polish interviewees were WW2 refugees; a few arriving through marriage visas. Upon arrival, most participants encountered new localities as strange, unfamiliar and often hostile. Participants from the Caribbean and Ireland, in particular, recounted incidents of discrimination, especially in relation to employment and housing. Many of these participants described seeing the infamous signs 'No Blacks, No Irish', especially in boarding housing in the 1950s–1960s. Henry from Jamaica recalled: 'you remember, no Irish and no dog and no Blacks'. Similarly, Ronan, an Irishman now living in Yorkshire, recounted his shock at first seeing these signs in London, his original destination: 'you walk past a house and you might see 'vacancies' but "no Blacks, no dogs, no Irish". That was shocking ... terrible, hurtful.' Hannah, originally from Guyana, recalled: 'There was a lot of racism ... Accommodation was horrible, you couldn't get accommodation. You have doors slammed in your faces: "No coloured".'

Our Polish participants were not immune from discrimination. Mandek, a Pole who arrived in Britain in 1947 and trained as a coal miner, explained that during the post-war period, there was considerable hostility towards Polish workers: 'obviously they wouldn't take any Poles or foreigners'. So Polish men like Mandek were assigned the lowest-paid jobs that nobody else wanted (Miles & Kay, 1994). Jozef, who arrived from Poland as a refugee after WWII, recounted that 'we were quite openly called "bloody foreigners"'.

Our Black participants described numerous incidents of racist abuse in the street. Marjorie, from Jamaica, remembered people shouting: "Get back, you blackie, to your country" and two fingers would go up.' Howard, from Guyana, described a racially motivated physical assault in London in the 1960s when he was left with several fractured ribs. However, like many participants from the Caribbean, Howard suggested that racism had changed over time: 'you get racism ... all the time ... But thankfully, now it's not as bad as it used to be'.

Iris, an 86-year-old woman in Yorkshire, originally from Jamaica, suggested that although certain forms of racism had changed, it may also be that she developed strategies for dealing with it: 'I think we just go about our business and don't take notice of all these things that happen. You just become part of the place and you know what some people are. Some are quite nice and others not, but I think that

happen everywhere'. Iris's use of the phrase '*become part of the place*' is quite suggestive of processes of embedding over time. It is interesting to consider what strategies people adopted to cope with hostility and begin to feel 'part of the place'.

As noted earlier, 'place-making' by migrants is important in tackling isolation and alienation (Phillips & Robinson, 2015) and forging a sense of familiarity and identification in local places (Rishbeth & Powell, 2013). Over time, many engaged in place-making through ethnic associations. Because we recruited through community associations, it is unsurprising that most participants were involved in ethnic groups—Irish tea dances, Polish cultural groups, and Caribbean community associations—as well as churches and faith groups.

Beata, a 72-year-old Polish woman, arrived in Britain as a child immediately after WWII. She initially experienced hostility and felt unwelcome: 'I was miserable. Because I was foreign, I had an accent'. Because of hostile reactions, she became uncomfortable speaking Polish in public places. But she found a way to express her Polishness through her active role in a Polish cultural group in London. Similarly, many Irish participants described how they had engaged in place-making through seeking out Irish dancehalls, community associations or churches. Ronan, introduced earlier, had spoken about being hurt by anti-Irish notices he encountered upon arrival in Britain. Over the decades, he engaged in place-making, married Geraldine, also Irish, and settled down in Yorkshire. He and Geraldine regularly attend an Irish tea-dance. Ronan described how he enjoys going there because it's 'nice to be able to talk to somebody about Ireland'.

For many participants religion was also important, and, in several cases, religious practice overlapped with expressions of ethnicity. A few of our Caribbean participants were of Indian background and practised Hinduism. Lohendra (82) attended temple weekly and was active in the local Hindu community. He expressed the significance of his faith: 'that's important to me in two ways ... reminds me about my culture ... it's also almost a social thing.' This quote succinctly describes the role that religious associations may play for participants: connecting people to their cultural background, heritage, and sense of identity; and providing a localised social space for companionship.

Importantly, all participants had worked and lived in diverse environments and established relations with colleagues and neighbours from varied ethnic groups, including white English people, who became friends. Moreover, most participants had ethnic diversity in their extended families through intermarriage. Gabriel, originally from Jamaica explained: 'all my kids are mixed race ... the country is mixed.'

Hence, through active processes of place-making, including building relationships with other ethnic groups, participants had

overcome feelings of unfamiliarity and managed hostility to begin embedding in place. However, embedding, unlike the rather static, achieved notion of embeddedness, highlights dynamism and the need for continual effort over time (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015). How does ageing, especially advanced old age, shape the strategies that migrants adopt to continue embedding in local places?

## 1.4 | Changing relationality in place in older age

Embedding is strongly associated with relationality and networks of family and friends (Ryan, 2018). Many participants had strong local networks, built up over many years in particular neighbourhoods, including extended family networks that provided practical and emotional support. Betsy, an 82-year-old Irish widow, lived with her daughter and grandchildren in London. As well as providing her with practical support like cooking, shopping and cleaning, living with her family gave Betsy considerable happiness and companionship, especially since the death of her husband.

However, although many had extended families living close-by, most participants lived alone or with a partner. Phyllis (86), originally from Barbados, had a large family living in London. This proximity of family was crucial in creating a sense of home: 'London is home. With the children being born here, the grandchildren, the great grandchildren ... it is home. Yes, the family makes it home'. As noted elsewhere in the literature, local family ties, especially children and grandchildren, are often a reason why migrants do not return to their origin country in later life (Buffel, 2017). Nonetheless, the proximity of family did not necessarily mitigate loneliness. Phyllis lived alone. Her daughters worked full time and had their own families to care for. Although they contacted her regularly and visited at weekends, Phyllis spent most of her days alone and identified her biggest challenge as loneliness:

there was one time there was a lot of friends coming in and out, and I would go and visit them. But now it's not the same. As you get older, your friends they die out or they, like myself, are all too old to travel. So, that's part of getting older, I suppose.

Given the age profile of our participants, it is unsurprising that many were widowed. Their narratives revealed how loss of a partner had significantly changed their relationships and sense of belonging in place. Tekla, a Polish widow in Yorkshire, described how, for older people living alone, their house could begin to feel empty: 'I have a house. I'd like somebody to come and stay to feel it is a family house and not just a shell.' The experiences of Phyllis and Tekla suggest the dynamism of networks through the life-course. With advanced age, friendship networks can shrink (May & Muir, 2015), caused by factors including death: 'people of my age, my friends, have died ... so, there's very few people left at my age group' (Jakub, 89, Polish, London).

That is not to imply passivity. For example, Tekla recounted actively rebuilding her networks and social life after her husband's death: 'I have to organise my social life in [town], coffee shop, social

club.' Now she goes out every day to 'kill time', visiting the local charity shops, café and playing bingo, 'and then when I come home I say, "right, I've been somewhere, I've done something," and I'm all right then.' Thus, Tekla could be described as making efforts to continue embedding in her town despite changing personal circumstances.

However, efforts to maintain existing friendship networks or indeed creating new ties, depended largely upon good health and the capacity to get out and about. A strong theme running through our data was the ongoing efforts required to remain active. Moreover, the ability to do so was often shaped by particular material characteristics of places in which people lived and the necessary economic resources to navigate those places. With declining health and mobility, participants described the efforts required to negotiate places that were once easy and familiar. Several participants mentioned the importance of driving and being able to afford a car. Samantha (65), in Yorkshire, originally from Jamaica, had a range of complex health issues including arthritis and asthma which impacted her mobility. Relying on her car, Samantha dreaded to think about how she would manage without it: 'It's my independence'. However, several older participants were no longer able to drive. Mona, an 82-year-old Irish woman in Yorkshire, spoke about problems with her knees: 'I do have a walking stick, because I'm not going to risk falling'. Although unable to drive anymore, Mona was determined to get around: 'I'm a great bus woman'. She travelled by bus into the city-centre at least twice a week to meet friends for coffee or just window-shop.

Weather and topography could be place-specific factors. Henrietta, a 79-year-old Jamaican-born woman, lived in a particularly hilly area in Yorkshire, noted the additional efforts required to navigate her neighbourhood in winter: 'when the snow [comes] ... we cannot come up and they can't come down, so you get stuck in the middle of the road. But still I move about because I can go two ways instead of coming down'.

Although some participants made enormous efforts to get out every day to socialise with friends and attend community associations, for others material obstacles hampered their efforts to remain mobile. Wider changes to infrastructure can have major implications for navigating place and this was especially the case for our participants in more suburban or rural areas. Mandek and Gabriela, a Polish couple living in Yorkshire, explained that recent changes in bus routes had significantly impacted Mandek's (78) ability to get into town. By contrast, although London is well served by public transport, it was not always accessible to older users, especially those with mobility-limiting conditions. Jadwiga (74, Polish, London) had difficulty walking and was unable to use the nearby tube station because it had no lift access.

As people get older their lives may become more local. Thus, the amenities available in their local neighbourhood may become more important than in earlier stages of their lives when they were more mobile. Most London participants lived in areas well served with shops, cafés, pharmacies, and other amenities. This was not necessarily the case in small towns and villages in Yorkshire. Thus, the materiality of local places matters enormously as people get older, become less mobile and may not have the resources to pay for taxis.

This can result in reduced contact with local groups and associations, causing social isolation and loneliness. As older people no longer feel like active or valued members of a local neighbourhood (Buffel & Phillipson, 2019), their sense of belonging in that place can diminish (May & Muir, 2015). This process can be understood as a form of disembedding from a local neighbourhood. Therefore, through ageing, bereavement and shrinking networks, people's embedding in place can change. Moreover, as Massey (2005) reminds us, places are also dynamic and continually made and remade over time through changing populations, as well as wider structural changes.

## 1.5 | Changing places

Maeve and Matthew, an Irish couple, had lived in the same street in London for 50 years. Whereas in the past the neighbours owned their homes, now houses were mostly rented out in flats: 'The people changed the place because the majority of the people in our street, in most of the streets around, are not responsible for the houses ... Because they're rented ... It makes a big difference' (Matthew). As a result, Maeve and Matthew felt their street was less friendly and less neighbourly.

Elwira's neighbourhood also changed but for different reasons. Originally from Poland, Elwira and her husband, Jakub, owned a house in a quiet street in London. However, during the walking interview, she indicated how the area had transformed dramatically in recent years. This transformation involved both socio-economic and generational shifts as the neighbourhood had attracted a large inflow of young, affluent families. As we walked around, we observed the number of amenities targeting young families. As an elderly couple, Elwira and Jakub felt there was little in the neighbourhood to meet their needs. Other participants felt more positively about their changing neighbourhoods. For example, Aine, an Irish woman in Yorkshire, appreciated the influx of young families because local services and shops could be sustained as a result. As Buffel and Phillipson (2019) note, neighbourhood change, such as gentrification, may undermine place attachment for long term residents, especially older people, but may also introduce some benefits such as improved services.

The changing population of a neighbourhood was especially apparent in Marjorie's story. Originally from Jamaica, she lived in a suburban area of London and owned a house with a nice garden on a quiet street. Marjorie recounted, however, that the neighbourhood had changed considerably in recent years and she felt that her ethnicity had become a marker of difference so that she no longer fitted in the area. As we observed when we walked around with her, the area had a large South Asian population, reflected in the local shops including clothing stores and food markets. As Hickman and Mai (2015) observed, changing demographics can be a factor in how older people perceive neighbourhoods. Long term residents can begin to feel like strangers as neighbourhoods change around them.

Furthermore, as May and Muir (2015) highlighted, it is all too easy to simplify older residents' sense of belonging in place through a lens of 'race' and racism. Older residents, including migrants of any ethnicity, may begin to feel displaced from their local neighbourhood when

the demography of that place changes. As the only African-Caribbean woman in a street that had become largely South Asian, Marjorie felt 'out of place'. As noted earlier, places can be imbued with markers of ethnic identity. Particular neighbourhoods can be associated with ethnic clubs, shops, pubs, and places of worship that underline a sense of home, belonging and local attachments, especially for migrants. Like Marjorie, several participants remarked on processes of transformation that changed the ethnic identity of some neighbourhoods. Barry, a 92-year-old Irishman in London, noted how Cricklewood was changing: 'there aren't as many Irish around here as there used to be. The older generation now are all passing away and their children move off and move out. They don't stay.'

Nowhere was this transformation more pronounced than in Kilburn, North London, an area with long historical associations to the Irish community (Hickman & Mai, 2015), which has changed beyond recognition. As it becomes more diverse, Irish shops, pubs, and cultural associations are no longer prevalent. For some older Irish migrants, this led to a sense of disembedding. Cathleen, a 90-year-old widow, lived in Kilburn since 1942 when she arrived aged 14 from Ireland. Although she had lived in the area for over 70 years, it now felt different mainly because her old networks were no longer there: 'Kilburn has ... it's not Kilburn anymore ... Well, everybody was very friendly years ago ... My sister lived here and my other sister lived in the East End ... they're all gone.'

Cathleen lived alone in a tower block and felt no connection to her neighbours and no sense of community anymore, highlighted by a recent incident. During the weekend prior to our interview, the lift in her tower block was out of order:

I sat outside for nearly a half hour last Saturday with the trolley ... to see if I could see someone to take me up to the fourth floor and nobody came ... I asked one, a young boy, I said, 'are you going in my lift?' And he said no. And that was it ... there's nobody to help you here.

Her story, as well as other narratives presented earlier, underline the dynamism of places, as well as the changing needs of older people. Thus, a sense of belonging in place, even for long term residents, cannot be taken for granted but needs to be understood as contingent and dynamic embedding. For migrants, in particular, who had engaged in placing-making practices to counter initial hostility, changing neighbourhoods may undermine their much sought-after sense of belonging in place provoking a sense of disembedding. Of course, embedding in place can also be undermined by wider structural processes.

## 1.6 | Place and politics of (dis)embedding: Brexit and Windrush

During our fieldwork, two immigration issues were prominent in the British media: Brexit and the Windrush scandal. Participants' reactions



tended to be mediated by their ethnicity. Concerns about Brexit were most prevalent among Polish participants: 'when I hear the word Brexit, I want to scream! What the hell? What a mess! Why did they start all that?' (Ewelina, 89). Several Polish participants raised particular concerns about changing immigration regimes and the consequences for care. Agnieszka (80, London, Polish) had previously employed a Polish carer for her mother in London. She was now worried that Brexit would mean that such care arrangements would not be possible: 'I do not know what's going to happen for these carers that come and go, because they will let you come if you earn £30,000,<sup>8</sup> but these carers, they do not earn that sort of money.' Similarly, Beata (72, Polish, London) had also employed a Polish care worker: 'When my mother was in a very bad way and was bedridden for many years, we finally found her .... a lady to come in, to live in with her, from Poland. So I could possibly do that if I'm really on my own and I needed (care). But I don't know what Brexit will do'.

As noted elsewhere, Brexit provoked anti-immigrant sentiment and led to increased incidents of xenophobia, especially against Polish migrants (Rzepnikowska, 2019). Artur, from Poland, living in a council estate in a Yorkshire town, described a recent incident in which eggs were thrown at his house in what he perceived as a targeted attack. Brexit also provoked some long-term residents to reflect on their citizenship status. Jadwiga who arrived from Poland in the 1960s, under the Communist regime, explained: 'you had to pay to Poland quite a lot of money to renounce the Polish nationality to get my British passport'. However, now, because of Brexit, she was considering to reapply for a Polish passport to retain European citizenship.

Citizen status was also relevant to many Caribbean-born interviewees and especially came into focus around the Windrush scandal. Caribbean migrants coming to Britain in the 1950s arrived as British subjects and in many cases considered themselves to be British: 'we were all British when we came here, as far as we were concerned' (Henry). However, over the decades, changing immigration regimes undermined their status as they had to apply for British citizenship. As Samantha eloquently stated: 'I was born British ... I had to pay money to become a British citizen'. Many participants described the rather haphazard ways in which they discovered the changing immigration requirements. Millicent remembered someone coming to the African-Caribbean community centre to inform people of the need to change passports. Henry recalled that someone had spoken at his Pentecostal church but, he noted, it would be easy for people to miss out on the information. Thus, it was a 'genuine mistake' that some people had not regularised their status and now were 'really hard done by' (Henry). Although no participant was personally affected by the Windrush deportations, several expressed strong views. Iris was angry about the deportation of Jamaicans from Britain: 'it hurts us as though it's me ... You see injustice and it affects us ... it's my brother or my sister'. Samantha criticised shifting immigration priorities: 'They invited us to come and clean up this place, and once it were clean up you just toss people out.'

That is not to suggest that only recent political events can unsettle long-term migrants. As noted by several participants, racism had never gone away but had become more subtle over the decades. For

Irish migrants, hostility had often been experienced in relation to the so-called 'troubles' in Northern Ireland and the IRA bombing campaign in Britain (Hickman & Ryan, 2020). Mainie recalled: 'when the bombs were going in London you couldn't open your mouth in the buses; you had to keep quiet'. She remembered a particular incident at work, following an IRA bomb, when colleagues made remarks to her and 'you were made to feel as though you had some sort of link with the IRA'. For some Irish participants, like Matthew and Maeve, Brexit and the uncertainties about the Northern Irish peace process provoked concerns that politically motivated violence could erupt once again.

Thus, it is apparent that wider sociopolitical events, even if they do not personally impact on migrants, can create a sense of uncertainty, unease and even injustice. Our data also show how sociopolitical events can frame individual experiences in local places in ways that may undermine a sense of belonging. Therefore, it is important to note that belonging is experienced at multiscale levels; not just in the nation-state, region, or city but also in local neighbourhoods. Moreover, events may be perceived differently by particular ethnic or national groups especially in relation to their sense of security and immigration status. For older migrants who have lived much of their adult lives in the destination society, changing political policies, immigration regimes, and antimigrant hostility can seem particularly unsettling and undermine processes of embedding. As Samantha observed: 'I don't think I'm accepted but I'm here.'

## 2 | CONCLUSION

In this article, we have used embedding to analyse migrants' continued negotiations of place through the ageing process. In so doing, we have sought to answer calls for more research on the intersection of ageing and other markers of diverse identities (Oliver et al., 2018) and the embodied and emplaced experiences of ageing migrants (Phillips & Robinson, 2015; Sampaio et al., 2018).

Drawing on rich qualitative data from different migrant groups now in advanced old age, our article illustrates the ongoing efforts and negotiations of place-making over time. Upon arrival in the post-war era, our participants encountered new places as unfamiliar and unwelcoming. Ethnicity was usually the key marker of difference and even a site of discrimination. Over time, through the life-course, our participants developed strategies and drew upon networks including faith and ethnic associations, to create a sense of belonging. It would be misleading, however, to assume that once this level of belonging had been achieved it could be taken for granted. The concept of embedding (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015) highlights the dynamism of belonging and attachments in place, through the life course. As discussed in this paper, as well as requiring ongoing effort over time, embedding may be constrained by material obstacles, relational changes and broader sociopolitical contexts.

Against the backdrop of dynamism within places, including demographic changes, the ethnicity of our participants can mark them out as different, provoking a perception of no longer fitting into once

familiar neighbourhoods. Using an intersectional lens has enabled us to consider the complex ways in which age and ethnicity impact upon embodied and emplaced experiences of difference. Nonetheless, while being mindful of ethnicity, it is also important to acknowledge that most of our participants were long-term residents who had lived in particular neighbourhoods for decades. Some of their experiences of and reactions to demographic and generational change share similarities with those of white English long-term residents (see Hickman & Mai, 2015) and thus echo the call by May and Muir (2015) to look beyond a narrow lens of 'racism' to understand how older people may react to changing neighbourhood demographics.

In this article, we have focused primarily on the embodied experiences of older people within their local neighbourhoods. Of course, we acknowledge that participants had connections elsewhere, including transnationally, but that is beyond the scope of the current article. Obviously, our sample is skewed towards older migrants who did not return to origin countries. While there is considerable research on retirement and return migration, we have focused instead on those who, for varied reasons, have decided to stay. However, staying put did not mean simply maintaining the status quo or carrying on exactly as before. All participants were navigating dynamic circumstances in terms of their health, relationships, material contexts and local environments.

We also recognise the multiscale nature of place as local neighbourhoods are nested within cities, regions, and nation-states (Sampaio et al., 2018) and hence are framed by wider sociostructural forces. Using the examples of Brexit and the Windrush scandal, we have shown that even for migrants who have secured British citizenship, feelings of belonging in place may be quite precarious and can be undermined by anti-immigration policies and associated hostility in wider society. Therefore, we contribute to understanding older migrants as active agents in place-making, while also paying attention to changing materialities and symbolic meanings of places through time as well as wider political processes that provoke unsettling events (Kilkey & Ryan, 2020). Our analysis illustrates the dynamism of embedding and the ongoing efforts required to forge belonging and place-attachment through the life course.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The so-called Windrush scandal emerged in 2018 as long-term British residents, mainly Caribbean-born, were targeted by immigration officials as 'over-stayers' because they did not have British citizenship. Having arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, as British subjects, their status changed as origin countries gained independence.
- <sup>2</sup> Although the referendum took place in 2016, the political debates about Britain's future relationship with the EU were ongoing throughout the period of our fieldwork.
- <sup>3</sup> Sustainable Care: connecting people and systems programme, ERSC Grant reference: ES/P009255/1, 2017-21, Principal Investigator Sue Yeandle, University of Sheffield.
- <sup>4</sup> We are aware that health care may be of crucial importance in shaping migrants' experiences in older age, but that topic is beyond the scope of this article and will be discussed in other papers.
- <sup>5</sup> For more information on our methodology, see our forthcoming paper.
- <sup>6</sup> Disclosing and Barring Services.
- <sup>7</sup> The issue of return/nonreturn is complex and beyond the scope of this paper. Clearly our sample is skewed towards those who had stayed in the United Kingdom. We will explore this topic in more detail in another paper.
- <sup>8</sup> At the time of interviews this was the proposed income ceiling for the new points based immigration system.

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