

International retirement migrants and their sense of home: The case of Malta

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With environmental, economic and cultural implications, international retirement migration (IRM) adds to the already complicated migration landscape. IRM is no longer a rare event, especially in the Mediterranean, and its increasing occurrence raises questions about migrants' experiences and their impacts on destination areas. Focusing on international retirement migrants in Malta, this paper sets out to understand the way in which migrants live in host societies and construct their sense of home. Through the use of qualitative research, factors such as length of stay, self-identity, home in flux, and relationships with host societies are examined as key influences which contribute to a migrant's sense of home. It is concluded that while length of stay may be of importance, a holistic approach, which considers other influences, must be used when assessing migrants' sense of home.

Keywords: Retirement Migration, Sense of Home, Malta, Focus Group

Introduction

Currently at the forefront of the media, the Syrian refugee crisis demonstrates the highly political nature of migration. Issues concerning refugee quotas and border enforcement measures taken by the UK and the EU continue to dominate discussion, as was witnessed during the spring 2015 European elections. Anti-immigration groups have also emerged in Europe, as well as in the United States, as concern about illegal and undocumented migrants grows (Kuusisto-Arponen and Gilmartin, 2015). This shift in focus from internal to international migration, and from encouraged to unwelcomed migrants (Kuusisto-Arponen and Gilmartin, 2015), has recently reinforced the significance and impact of national borders (Williams, 2009). With the global north exercising greater migration control, migration studies must again consider geographies of exclusion, poverty and uneven development (King, 2011). Furthermore, the growing number of types of migrants and their differing legal statuses raises the question about how we define and conceptualise migration (King, 2011).

While Ravenstein's Laws of Migration and Lee's theories surrounding push and pull factors may still hold true today (Guinness, 2002), the imprecise reality of migration patterns undermine their linear models of migration. Instead, technological advances and globalisation have resulted in the 'mobilities paradigm', where the distinction between mobility and migration is becoming increasingly unclear (King, 2011). Furthermore, the cultural turn has recently shifted thinking about migration to include ideas surrounding

human agency and the experience of migration (King, 2011). Current theories on the gendered nature of migration, and climate change related migration, have also further broadened the scope through which migration can be studied (King, 2011).

However, despite current attention being given to precarious migrants, and their impacts, some migrations, such as retirement migrations, are still encouraged. It is argued that international retirement migration (IRM) has yet to reach its full potential (Zasada et al, 2010), and will further contribute to the already complicated migration landscape.

This paper focuses on international retirement migration, with the aim of understanding the way in which expatriate migrants live in host societies and construct their sense of home. Using Malta as a case study, this research set out to answer the question: to what extent is there a significant association between international retirement migrants' length of stay and their sense of home? To guide and focus the research a further three sub questions, were also addressed: (1) To what extent do concepts of self-identity, influence perceptions of home? (2) To what extent can the idea of home change and be influenced over the course of a person's life? (3) To what extent does the relationship between migrants and their host societies affect their sense of home? Beginning by examining the literature on IRM and theories surrounding sense of home, this paper then outlines the methods used for data collection. The second part of the paper provides analysis and discussion of the results, before conclusions are drawn for the above research questions.

Literature Review

Retirement Migration

Retirement migration is by no means a new phenomenon. Due to advancements in telecommunications and long distance travel, however, people now, more than ever before, have the opportunity to relocate to more agreeable environments for their retirement (Warnes et al, 1999). First witnessed in the 18th century (King et al, 2000), retirement migration reached significant levels in the 1960s, and now includes international destinations (Balkir and Kirkulak, 2009).

There are three types of retirement migration; seasonal, intra-national, and international (Innes, 2008). It is argued that IRM is a process comprised of multiple stages. For example, repeat holidays often lead to the purchase of a holiday home, which then facilitates seasonal migration (Williams and King, 2000), and this, in turn, acts as a stepping stone to permanent migration (Williams et al, 1997). Hence, it is no coincidence that IRM destinations tend to be tourist regions, as, for example, the climate that often attracts tourists is also favourable to retirees (Williams and King, 2000).

IRM is an outcome of various factors, but the main influences have been increased longevity and reduction in retirement age. The duration of retirement has increased to 20-25 years, and older people are healthier and more physically able than ever before (Williams and King, 2000). This, combined with the growth in international travel for employment and tourism (resulting in an increased knowledge of foreign places), as well as increased life

earnings, has facilitated IRM (Williams et al, 1997). Personal choices and motivations for participating in IRM vary, but the main influences tend to be climate, lower cost of living and improved lifestyle (Innes, 2008). Increased access to amenities and a slower pace of life are also important factors (Warnes et al, 1999). Furthermore, the ease and lower cost of international travel means that retirement migrants can maintain their social networks from afar, as well as make frequent visits to family and friends (Warnes and Williams, 2007). The advancements in communications technology, such as Facetime and Skype, also make staying in contact with friends and family easier and more life-like (Banks, 2009).

Migrants do face challenges abroad, for example language barriers, local bureaucracy and lower standards of healthcare, but these issues do not appear to hinder IRM (Warnes et al., 1999). It should be noted, however, that whilst IRM is no longer exclusive to the rich, it is still dominated by older people from the middle and upper classes. IRM is commonly undertaken by couples, who can finance their move by selling their house and who normally have one private pension between them (Casado-Díaz et al, 2004).

There has been little or no resistance to IRM, especially in Europe, as it often brings economic benefits, for example, through visiting-friends-and-relatives tourism (Warnes and Williams, 2007). There are environmental concerns, however, as IRM can contribute to groundwater depletion and expedite the expansion of impermeable surfaces through the construction of leisure and sports facilities (Zasada et al, 2010).

Malta as a retirement destination

Malta was under British rule until 1964 and was used as a strategic position for the British and other European militaries during the Second World War (Warnes et al, 1999). As a result, Malta has now become a popular destination for retirement migrants, as many people have had repeat visits to the country through the military, work or intermarriage family relations (Innes, 2008). Furthermore, not far from Mainland Europe, travelling home to visit friends and family is straightforward and relatively inexpensive. The majority of local people are friendly and welcoming, and there is little to no language barrier as most people speak English (Innes, 2008). The Maltese climate, as well as the reduced living costs and taxes, also attract retirement migrants.

However, retirement migrants do face challenges in Malta. For example, environmental degradation, through litter and dumping, and poor planning regulations mean that many of Malta's beautiful landscapes are at risk. Likewise, socio-political issues, many resulting from the influx of migrants from North Africa, and strains on local medical and nursing services affect retirement migrants (Innes, 2008). Nevertheless, numerous expat groups, such as the British Residents Association (BRA), do their best to make retirement migrants feel at home in Malta. For example, the BRA provide advice and assistance with visas, legal protection, pensions, and healthcare services (Innes, 2008).

Sense of Home

Geographies of home, in both the material and symbolic sense, pass from the domestic to global scale (Blunt and Varley, 2004). It should be noted, though, that 'home' is a value-laden notion, whose meaning changes over space and time (Ralph, 2009). As such, the following definitions will be used for the purpose of this paper. Pocock and McIntosh (2013) distinguish 'residence' as *where* a person lives, and 'home' as the *way* in which a person lives. Similarly, Fox O'Mahony (2013:156) defines home as the "relationship between person (occupier/consumer of housing) and property (physical structure)". It can therefore be argued that a person's concept of home is often an ongoing, multi-layered process (Wiles, 2008). This is especially true for migrants, whose idea of home is usually conceptualised as they are forced to negotiate between old and new homes (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011). However, for both the "geographically promiscuous *and* geographically monogamous" home is generally constructed through various "social processes and relationships to both humans and non-humans" (Gustafson, 2001:185).

Fox O'Mahony (2013) argues that there are five ways in which home can be described: home as a financial investment; as a physical structure; as a territory; as self-identity; and as a cultural or social signifier. For example, she claims that people establish a sense of home through things such as homeownership, the physical shelter of housing, feelings of security, memories attached to a physical location, or through shared cultural experiences (Fox O'Mahony, 2013). Homeownership is perceived to be one of the most important factors as it plays a significant role in creating a sense of security, belonging and personal identity (Mallett, 2004). Similar to this, Wiles (2008) argues that home can be expressed spatially, temporally, socially and symbolically. A house, neighbourhood, city or region account for the spatial aspects of home, whilst activities and habits construct the temporal attributes of home. Social relations and community involvement account for the social aspects of home, and emotional commitment and memories constitute the symbolic characteristics of home (Wiles, 2008).

Pocock and McIntosh (2013) categorise home as either meaningful, blurred or re-negotiated. Meaningful homes are those which reflect a desired way of life, blurred homes are those that demonstrate silent resistance to social or cultural expectations, and re-negotiated homes are those where a sense of belonging and self-identity has been created. They also suggest that some people feel most at home while on the move, and that concepts of home are constantly in flux, as they change over the course of a person's lifetime. For example, the birth house is seen as the formative dwelling place and, consequently, a place of origin and return (Mallett, 2004), whereas distant places offer opportunities for personal growth (Gustafson, 2001). Gustafson (2001) therefore argues that if a person has roots at home, routes that lead away from the home can then be explored. For example, if the contents of one's home are easily transportable, then the home can be re-established elsewhere. However, it is also suggested that long-term residence works in opposition to this, as place attachments and sense of home grow over time (Cuba and Hummon, 1993a).

Lastly, it should be noted that not all constructs of home are seen to be positive. For example, one should consider gendered aspects of home (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011). Men often consider home to be a signifier of status, whereas women are more likely to view home as a haven (Mallett, 2004). Feminist writings about home also highlight the fact that women are often the maintainers of the home (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011), as well as occasionally being trapped in a home by domestic abuse (Pocock and McIntosh, 2013). These different, yet similar, attempts to classify how humans experience home demonstrate that home cannot be conceptualised as singular, and, in the same fashion, neither can migrant identities (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011). Nevertheless, one aspect remains constant; migrants must construct their homes elsewhere, and the factors which contribute to this process continue to be of interest.

Methods

Data collection took place over one week in January 2015 and permitted the collection of qualitative data through the use of a focus group and interview. The focus group method was selected as it allows for in-depth discussion to take place between participants (Bryman, 2012) and any differences or consensus between participants' views can be made clear, resulting in rich data (Thomas, 2013). Focus groups also give insight into how and why participants think the way they do, not just what they think (Kitzinger, 1995). However, it must be taken into consideration that some participants may not be eager to participate and their voices may be drowned out by more dominant speakers. Furthermore, it must be noted that participants choose to engage in a focus groups, and assumptions must not be made about those who *might have* attended (Parker and Tritter, 2006). The focus group questions were piloted to ensure that the responses gathered would generate relevant data. The interview was conducted to supplement the focus group, as the participant did not meet all the focus group criteria, but was still considered to be a valuable respondent. A semi-structured interview approach was selected to ensure a pre-determined list of issues was covered, at the same time allowing for follow-up questions and discussion to take place (Thomas, 2013).

The research involved six focus group respondents and one interviewee. Participants for this study were accessed through expat groups in Malta. Although numerous groups were contacted, only one group responded positively thus resulting in the small sample size of this research. To protect the identities of the participants the name of the expat group to which they belong is not divulged. To participate in the study, participants for the focus group had to have permanently relocated to Malta for retirement, could not be of Maltese origin, but could be of any age. The focus group discussion was centred on three main topics; home in flux, self-identity and relation with the host society, and it took place over a period of one hour and fifteen minutes. The single interviewee was of Maltese origin, however did not identify with her nationality and considered herself 'foreign'. She left Malta at a young age and only recently returned for retirement. She was therefore interviewed

separately to avoid skewing the focus group responses. The interview covered the same three topics and was ten minutes in duration.

All participants received information sheets about the research, signed consent forms and completed a demographic information questionnaire. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity all participants have been identified by a letter between A and G. Both the focus group and interview were recorded and later transcribed. An interpretative approach was employed for data analysis, allowing for themes constructed by the participants to emerge (Thomas, 2013). The transcriptions were triple-blind coded using a constant comparison method, and the main themes were then mapped using a network analysis. Following the initial analysis participant validation of themes was sought out, but no responses were received.

Results

Due to the small sample size of 7, the results below should be taken as indicative. About half of the participants in this study lived in Sliema and its surrounding areas, and the remaining participants were dispersed throughout the island’s main cities. Due to the high population density in Malta, retirement migrants must often rent property and thus become integrated into Maltese society (Casado-Díaz et al, 2004). The results from the demographic information questionnaires are displayed below in Table 1. It can be seen that there is a range of ages, as well as nationalities, but the gender ratio is skewed in favour of women.

Participant	Gender	Age Group (Years)	Nationality	Length of Stay In Malta (Years)
A	Female	61-65	British	2.5
B	Male	56-60	British	4
C	Female	61-65	Irish/American	7
D	Female	71-75	Belgian	2
E	Male	56-60	British/South African	2.5
F	Female	51-55	Danish	8
G	Female	-	<i>Maltese</i>	4

Table 1: Demographic Information and Length of Stay

Table 2 displays ten codes that emerged from the data, as well as their definitions. They are categorised under three headings, each one relating to one of the (sub) research questions. The codes relate to factors that construct a migrant’s sense of home, which eventually results in the designation of one or more residences as a home. For example, a person’s connection to their family might outweigh their connection to their nationality. Or, a person’s history of migration for work, and their familiarity with more than one place, may result in a choice to establish more than one residence as a home. Figure 1 then displays the codes in a network analysis. It is important to notice that some of the codes have both

positive and negative associations. For example, one can have a positive connection to their nationality and/or formative years, encouraging them to consider their place of origin as home, or their association with their nationality and/or formative years can be negative, making it easier to establish a home elsewhere.

Of these ten codes, six are primary codes and four are secondary codes (Table 2). This was determined by observing the frequency of each code, in this case which codes were directly mentioned by more than half of the participants. By organising them in this manner it can be seen which factors have the strongest effect on the participants' sense of home. In this case, family, familiarity, choice, multi-home, Maltese relations and integration have the most influence.

A set of primary and secondary codes can also be constructed for each participant. The primary codes are most relevant, and are therefore displayed alone (Table 3). Table 3 also includes each participant's length of stay in Malta, as well as the place(s) they have designated as their home.

Code	Definition
Self-Identity	
Nationality	Attachment to a person's place of birth or country of origin
Formative Years	Connection or emotional attachment to the place in which a person's formative years occurred
*Family	Present connections with family members who reside elsewhere, as well as memories of family members who resided, or may be buried, elsewhere
Home in Flux	
*Familiarity	Level of familiarity with local surroundings, which accounts for length of stay as well as similarities to a previous residence
*Choice	The ability, or lack thereof, to choose when and where to live, including, for example, being required to relocate for employment
*Multi-Home	The ability to establish more than one home, through, for example, maintaining more than one residence or transporting personal belongings to a new residence
Host Societies	
Compromise	Sacrificing aspects of one locality to reside in another
Sense of Belonging	The extent to which a person feels they belong, including aspects such as social relations and community involvement
*Maltese Relationships	The relationship with the local population
*Integration	The level of integration into local society, including factors such as language, community events, local issues, etc.

Table 2: List of Codes and their Definitions (* indicates a primary code. The remaining codes are secondary)

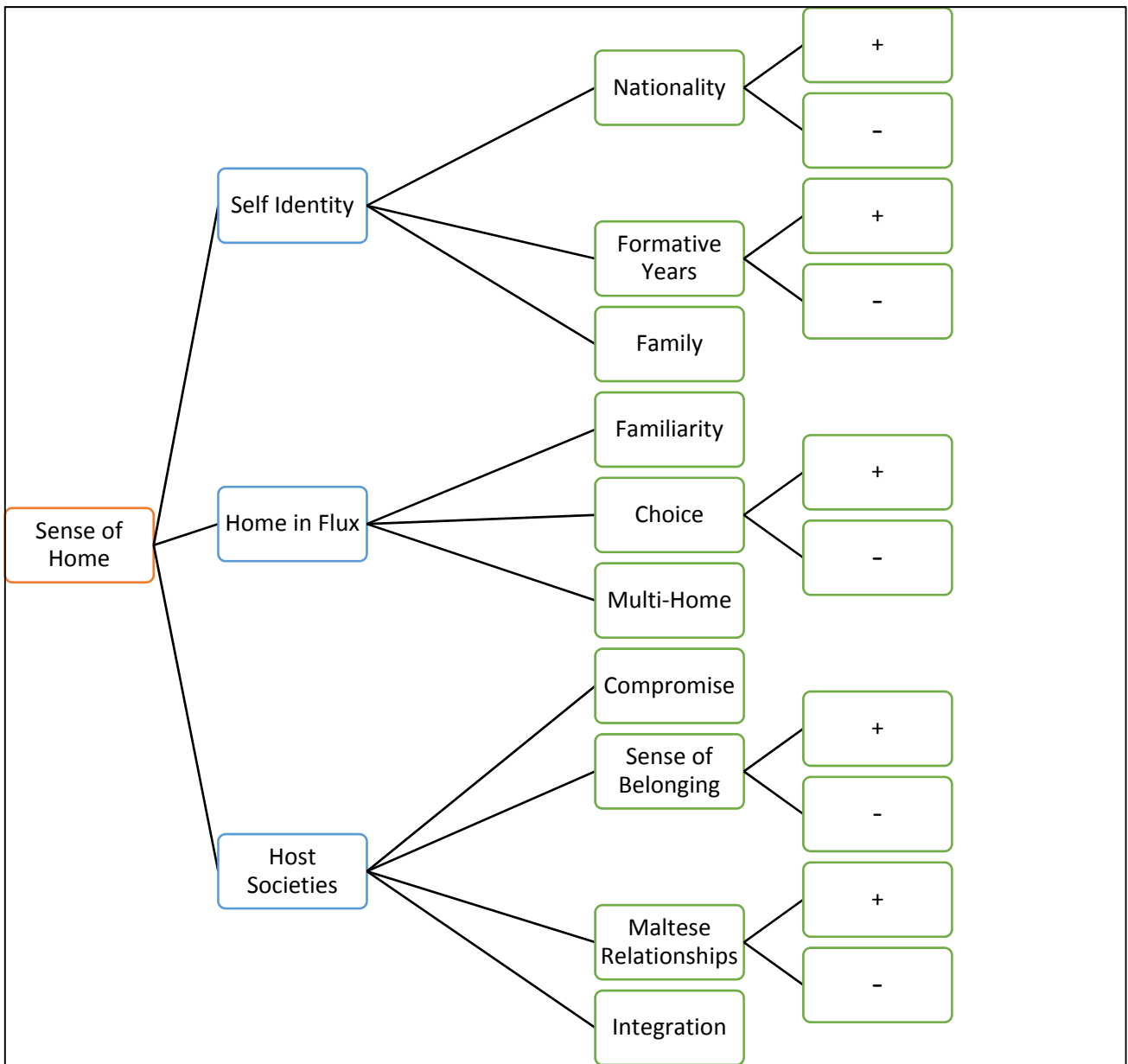


Figure 1: Network Analysis of Codes: The boxes outlined in green depict the 10 main themes found in the data, and the boxes outlined in blue represent which sub-question they relate to. The boxes containing the positive or negative signs indicate that the code emerged with both positive and negative associations. The remaining codes emerged as neutral.

Participant : Length of Stay in Malta	Primary Codes	Home(s) Stated by Participant
D : 2 years	Choice Familiarity Sense of Belonging Integration	Malta
A : 2.5 years	Family Familiarity Multi-Home Sense of Belonging	Malta, France, Florida
E : 2.5 years	Multi-Home Choice Familiarity Formative Years Family	Malta, France
B : 4 years	Multi-Home Compromise Familiarity Choice	Malta, England
G : 4 years	Multi-Home Family Choice	Malta, England
C : 7 years	Family Integration Choice Nationality	Malta
F : 8 years	Familiarity Choice Multi-Home Maltese Relationships	Malta, Denmark

Table 3: Participant's Primary Codes and Length of Stay

Every participant identified Malta as home, but not all participants viewed Malta as their only home. Furthermore, it is clear that the factors which influence a person's sense of home differed between participants. This can be seen by the participants' quotations in Table 4. For example, participant B stressed the point that he could create his home anywhere due to the fact that he can take his personal belongings with him. He also emphasized that fact that individuals must make compromises when migrating, and this affects to what extent a person can classify their new residence as a home. Familiarity was also an important factor because he previously lived in England for 20 years. So, even though he identified Malta as his home, and did not wish to return to England, he still considered England to be a home.

Participant C, by contrast, identified Malta as her only home. Although she valued her nationality, she claimed that she had no interest in returning to Ireland and the factors

which influenced her sense of home most were family and integration. She expressed the fact that she had established ‘wonderful’ relations with the Maltese people and culture, citing her experiences with the local grocery store and their delivery system as an example. Furthermore, although she did not live near her family, she claimed she still had a strong connection with them, due to advances in technology such as Skype, so this physical distance did not affect her sense of home in Malta.

Participant D expressed similar attitudes, stressing the fact that choice was very important to her. She conveyed no obligation to consider her background or previous places of residence, and very strongly pointed out that she actively chooses where and when to live.

Participant E was the only participant who directly made mention of his length of stay. However, he emphasized the strongest the idea of having more than one home, suggesting that this influences his sense of home most. He claimed that he had spent most of his life trying to escape his formative years, and in doing so had created numerous homes for himself elsewhere. He included Malta as a home, but could equally feel at home in France.

Participant	Quotations	Related Codes
Participant A	<p>“I can honestly say I have better friends here on this island than I do in England. When I say better, more, not better, but more, because I worked in England, and I didn’t have the time I think to develop those relationships”</p> <p>“As I grow older, safety is important as a woman. So when I go to London now, and I’m walking the subways, there is certain times that I would go down to the subways, but after 7oclock at night, I won’t, because I worry, and if you’re walking home late at 10 or 11 o’clock from the station, you’re listening to the footfall behind you, to know whether or not you are being followed, and whether that is a light foot or a heavy foot. So I think here, I have never felt concerned at all for security.”</p> <p>“If my children were to stay in London or the UK, and have their home there, with children, I’m sure we would spend more time there and I feel sure that we would have another home in England...But I don’t think I would go back to live my old age in England”</p>	<p>Sense of Belonging Familiarity Family Multi-Home</p>

Participant B	<p>“We brought two 40-foot high cube containers and another 20 foot from England...we brought our whole home with us...everything!”</p> <p>“Everywhere you live is a compromise...and as long as you are on the right side of your personal compromise then that is fine.”</p> <p>“I think the UK has changed incredibly, and I wouldn’t want to go back and live there. But would I want to give up a home there? Going through this thought now, I’m not sure I do actually, and I don’t know why”</p>	Multi-Home Compromise Familiarity
Participant C	<p>“I came here with four suitcases of clothes and my cat, and that’s all I brought”</p> <p>“I wouldn’t go back to Ireland, it’s far to wet...I’m affected by weather”</p> <p>“Because I’m on my own, and if something’s very heavy, then they deliver it, if I buy more than 3 or 4 bottles.... I can’t carry 4 bottles of wine ...”</p>	Integration Choice
Participant D	<p>“I wouldn’t go back to Belgium... Belgium is really the place I was born, I studied, and I left”</p> <p>“Travelling with three children you have to make a home, wherever you are, even in Saudi Arabia... I try to fit in it and see the nice side of it and forget the other one...”</p> <p>“We cannot change Malta, we are not Maltese... I think Malta is changing slowly but surely...”</p>	Choice Integration

Participant E	<p>“I don’t feel that I have been here long enough to feel that this is home home”</p> <p>“I like hanging out in Malta, and in France and England, for example, so it’s a matter of choice, so which pulls against some of the other things like my kids are in the UK so I’d liked to be here and in the UK simultaneously so, they’ve grown up now and getting on with their lives and I wouldn’t be seeing terribly much more of them if I was, but it does pull, some of these things pull against each other.”</p> <p>“When you get to the later stages in your life, familiarity and ease really do matter. I mean if every day is a bloody uphill battle you got to fight for every last thing, it’s tiring and it’s depressing...”</p>	<p>Familiarity Multi-Home Family Choice</p>
Participant F	<p>“We try to make it our home, and within our four walls, it is probably perfect”</p> <p>“Friends become your extended family”</p> <p>“I embrace everywhere I am”</p>	<p>Choice Maltese Relationships Multi-Home</p>
Participant G	<p>“Where as when you retire, there’s nothing, you know you are nobody because you haven’t got a company behind you. You have to start from scratch, and I didn’t want to go to a country where neither of us knew what we were going to face. So coming to Malta, even though I had always said never wanted to come back here, as we got older, seemed to be the option for us...”</p> <p>“I do believe we can make a home where ever we are”</p>	<p>Familiarity Multi-Home Choice</p>

Table 4: Participant Quotations

Discussion

Length of Stay

It is argued that long-term residence increases an individual’s sense of home as “emotional ties to locales grow in strength over time” (Cuba and Hummon, 1993b:550). However, it can be observed in Table 3 that although there appears to be some relation between a participant’s length of stay and sense of home, there is no direct association. For

example, of the two participants who considered Malta to be their only home, one has resided in Malta for seven years and the other for only two. Similarly, participant F, who has resided in Malta for the longest period of time, does not classify Malta as her only home, suggesting length of stay is not the only, nor the most important, factor in constructing a person's sense of home. This is congruent with research conducted by Cuba and Hummon (1993b), which found that migrant identities and histories must also be taken into consideration. For example, participant D spent most of her adult life as a 'trailing spouse', so she very quickly became equipped with the ability to re-establish her home elsewhere. Additionally, because she holds no attachment to her home country, her migrant history and self-identity allow her to construct her home in any residence. By contrast, participant E expressed that his place attachment to France does not allow him to fully settle in Malta, and he believes he has not resided in Malta long enough to form the necessary relationships to create a sense of being at home.

Furthermore, Banks (2009) suggests that length of stay may not be the most important factor, as retirement migration is technically reversible. Or, as Bozic (2006) suggests, due to limited responsibilities and restrictions, retirement migrants often choose to have more than one residence, thus sharing their time between multiple homes. For example, participants E and A equally consider Malta and France their homes, but because they are considered young retirees, they may eventually have to choose one home over the other due to decreased mobility in old age.

Self-Identity

As can be seen in Figure 1, nationality, formative years, and family are the themes that emerged when discussing how a person's identity affects their sense of home. Attitudes surrounding family were positive, suggesting that a residence can easily be classified as a home in the presence of family. This is congruent with Wiles' (2008) theory about socially constructed homes, where the presence of known groups of people increase a person's sense of home. Furthermore, it was agreed among the participants that modern technology allows for them to live abroad, but remain in contact with their families through conveniences such as Skype, FaceTime, or Email. Banks (2009) observed similar themes in his research surrounding grandparents, arguing that modern technology allows retirees to live further apart from their families, for longer periods of time, while still maintaining their relationships. However, Participant A expressed her concern about living far away from her children, as the possibility of grandchildren increases. It is possible that in the event grandchildren arrive, her sense of home in Malta will be weakened by her need to be closer to her family.

Nationality and formative years were discussed with both positive and negative associations. For example, participant E's unpleasant memories of his formative years have forced him to create his home elsewhere, with no intention of returning to his place of origin. It can be argued that participant E experiences home as a territory, with the need to feel secure and in control, as well as home as self-identity, where emotional responses are

triggered by memories attached to the physical structure of a house (Fox O'Mahony, 2013). However, others, such as participant B, expressed that their place of origin will always be considered a home, therefore not allowing them to fully settle elsewhere. Gustafson (2008) argues that most international migrants will maintain some form of connection with their country of origin, through memories, belongings or reproducing practices and cultural norms. This was evident in this study, as participants spoke about reproducing meals and holiday traditions from their home country. Nevertheless, the above findings reinforce Ralph and Staeheli's (2011) theory that migrant identities are constantly renegotiated as connections are made between new and old residences.

Home in Flux

Three codes emerged when discussing how a person's concept of home can change; familiarity, choice and multi-home. All of the participants referred to the idea of familiarity, agreeing that Malta has become a more international place and therefore they can acquire items they are accustomed to. This combined with the fact that the local people are welcoming, and most speak English, results in Malta being similar to the places from which the participants migrated. This heightened sense of familiarity allows the migrants to construct their homes with less resistance, thus positively contributing to their sense of home.

Another important factor to most participants was choice. Participant B stressed the idea that his choice, or lack thereof, in determining where to live has always played a major role in how he constructs his home. Having to previously migrate for employment reasons, he explained that retiring to Malta was a personal choice and therefore he was more likely to establish a stronger sense of home. Participant D also emphasized the idea that it is a personal choice whether or not an individual makes a place a home, which is similar to Fox O'Mahony's (2013) idea about physical structures providing a place for a home to grow. Furthermore, participant D spoke briefly about the gendered ways in which she experienced home. Following her husband's employment from one location to the next, the burden of recreating the family home fell onto her. So, her recent decision to retire in Malta and create her own home, has been more fulfilling, thus increasing her sense of home.

One of the most important themes that emerged, however, was this idea of multi-home. As can be seen in Table 3, just two of the seven participants classify Malta as their only home. The remaining participants emphasized that a person can have multiple homes; each catering for different needs. For example, participant E equally considers France and Malta his home, as his home in France allows him to enjoy the outdoors, whereas his home in Malta fulfils his desire to live in a city. Furthermore, all of the participants stressed the idea that their homes are mobile, and can be transported with them wherever they migrate, as they can move personal belongings. It is argued that these objects migrants choose to take with them also create a buffer from outside cultures (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011).

However, while these themes are featured in other research, they are not presented as a significant factor in constructing one's sense of home. For example, Ralph and Staeheli

(2011) discuss the possibility of home being plural or functioning in an accordion fashion, with migrants moving between secondary homes in the periphery and a core home in the centre. There is little evidence, however, suggesting that a person can have a multi-home existence, *equally* considering more than one residence a home.

Host Societies

The four remaining themes that emerged demonstrate how the participants' relationship with Malta affects their sense of home. Whilst most participants did acknowledge the difficulties of living in Malta, they all agreed that a compromise was established resulting in them remaining in Malta. For example, the pleasant weather and ample amenities allowed them to look past the negative aspects, such as the pollution or slow development. Participants A and D also expressed that they have already witnessed positive change in Malta, and have hope for the future. Still, it can be argued that their level of integration is not as high as it could be, as they both also expressed the idea that it is up to the Maltese people to provoke change, not themselves, although this can also be argued to be a sign of respect as they may not wish to insert themselves where they feel they do not belong. Similarly, some found it difficult to form relationships outside of expatriate groups, while others stated that their involvement in the local community has increased their sense of belonging and therefore made it easier to feel at home. Still, it could be argued that these types of relationships are a result of time, and can therefore take longer to strengthen a person's sense of home (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011).

Conclusion

Although the sample size in this case study is not representative, based on the evidence collected it can be concluded that length of stay contributes to a migrant's sense of home to some extent, though there is no direct association. A more holistic approach must be taken when assessing a migrant's sense of home, as it is constructed on an individual basis. This study also suggests that self-identity plays a major role in constructing a person's sense of home, yet at the same time each migration also effects a person's identity. It was also determined that the idea of home does in fact change over a lifetime, as different stages of life, for example birth, marriage, employment requirements and retirement, require different homes. Likewise, components of every migration destination will affect a person's sense of home, through familiarities or undesirable conditions, but compromises are eventually established. Finally, one must consider the implications of globalisation. As the world becomes ever more connected, future migrants may begin to experience a global, instead of local, sense of place (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011).

Author Profile

Alexandra Hamilton has just graduated with a first class honours degree in Geography and Education Studies from Oxford Brookes University. This research was carried out as part of a group project in Malta, during a second year geography field trip, and was formally written up in her third year.

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