

Anya Ahmed (2015). *Retiring to Spain. Women's Narratives of Nostalgia, Belonging and Community*. Bristol: Policy Press, 208 pp. ISBN 978 1 44731 330 4 (hardback)

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The market for books concerning the topic international retirement migration (IRM) or lifestyle migration is growing these years, and Anya Ahmed's work on retired, British women's narratives concerning their migration to Spain is a very interesting new study in this line. Ahmed is focusing on *community* and *belonging*, and what makes this book most interesting to read is the thorough theoretical context of the work, especially regarding the narrative inspiration in the analytical approach. This, in turn, also results in interesting interpretations of the different situations and positions represented by the 17 women interviewed.

Using plot theory and the analytical terms *quest* or *voyage and return*, Ahmed investigates and interprets the variety of motivations for migration, and different degrees of satisfaction with the new life abroad, related to a plethora of reasons. The study is in essence qualitative, because the narrative nostalgia of each interviewee forms a basis for analyses and interpretations. Ahmed shows that although the women encompass individual biographies, their migration also bifurcates into two typologies. The first type involves the ones who see their migration

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as a “quest” and, hence, are satisfied with their lives abroad. The other type represents the ones who did not find the life satisfaction they sought for, and hence whose stories are marked by “voyage and return.” With the term “nostalgia,” Ahmed emphasises that all migrations are led by a desire for community and belonging, and a desire to link time and space. This is achieved either through an attempt to live in a space similar to their past, representing what was experienced as lost in the United Kingdom; or in another spatial present, providing a positionality that is considered better than the one available in their homeland.

Ahmed herself puts it this way (p. 51): “I premise that women’s quest for belonging and community through retirement migration can be understood as both spanning and reconstituting boundaries in relation to place(s) and networks, shaped by their multiple and overlapping social locations or positionalities across space and time through nostalgia.”

In order for the retirement migration to be successful, Ahmed’s interviewees needed to be able to express a coherent experience of community and belonging in their new lives regarding several issues. Ahmed treats these issues in the book chapters, with focus on age, gender, class, ethnicity, (national) identity, sociability and images of the different spaces in their lives; the new living environment and to what degree this represents a better quality of life than the old one in the United Kingdom. The cultural impact of family relations is discussed in several chapters. Ambiguities are presented, especially those experienced by many female migrants regarding living at a distance from family members or even having taken the decision to part from their old parents, adult children or grandchildren. It becomes clear that family represents a challenging common cultural norm connected to women as caretakers and kin keepers. As the other chapters in the book, the ones about family relations and intergenerational solidarity are richly informed by relevant theories. Ahmed shows how the interviewed women reconcile and reconceptualise their personal “grandmother-narratives,” integrating norms about intimacy, love and caring in congruence with parallel norms of non-interference and individuality. At the same time, many of the personal grandmother-narratives are interpreted on their own terms, so variations are revealed.

This book is very inspiring and refreshing because of the rich theoretical input and the narrative approach, which is not common in much IRM literature (However, see Woube 2014). Another issue, which is not so often mentioned in many works on IRM, is ill health as a motivating cause for migration and its consequences for the migrant's further life in the new country – as well as for a possible return migration. In this book, this issue is also not touched upon as such – though it is mentioned explicitly that at least three of the women interviewed moved to Spain due to their husbands' ill health. I mention this because health is a very common motivation for migration for retirees, and it is an important factor for both quality of life and prospects of health services and care needs while living abroad or living transnational lives. Therefore, the topic of health needs to be taken into more serious consideration by host countries, home countries, health service providers, environmentalists, house constructors and by researchers. We once and again find this topic in our empirical material, however, most often it is not being proposed an issue of much attention.

Regarding literature of IRM and lifestyle migration, I will recommend reading this book, especially because of the inspiring linguistic and narrative analyses, drawing on relevant and new theories.

Reference

- Woube, A. (2014). *Finding One's Place. An Ethnological Study of Belonging among Swedish Migrants on the Costa del Sol in Spain*. PhD Dissertation. Uppsala: Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, Uppsala University.

