

Caring (in) Diaspora

Aging and caring experiences of older Turkish migrants in a Swedish context

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Abstract

This thesis investigates Turkish migrants' aging experiences and their understandings about care by concentrating on the accounts of a group of first-generation Turkish immigrants who settled in Sweden in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The aim is to explore how older immigrants' lives have been marked by the experience of migration and re-establishment in another country, how the impact of having once lost caring relations affected their decisions and desires about care in old age. This study examines some common patterns about aging in a host country, ideals of care in old age, encounters with medical institutions, interpretations of formal care facilities, and identity and community construction processes. Rather than generalizing and categorizing cultural, ethnic, or even religious expectations in the case of elderly care, it seeks to grasp the complexity of the migrants' ideals of care and caring relations by focusing on the positions they take in diaspora space. This study is based on ethnographic research which extended over two years (2011–2013). The empirical material consisted of observations and semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 older Turkish people, 10 women and 10 men, who live in Sweden.

By focusing on medical care stories, the study highlights the importance of looking at previous experiences of being cared about and cared for in the deliberation of future care needs and expectations. By elucidating how older Turkish people understand formal care facilities such as home-help services and elderly care homes, the study underlines ambivalent attitudes towards these options. This ambivalence is anchored in ways of perceiving “the Swedish” as modern but uncaring as well as in their understandings of family members as caring others. The study also shows how the Turkish family is imagined and done through three emotions: *merhamet* (compassion/pity), *vefa* (loyalty/ faithfulness), and *şefkat* (concern/affection). Emotionalization of the family is not about reinforcing, but, rather, about negotiating the filial duty towards older parents. Of note is also that these emotions circulate inside and outside the family and that a caring diasporic community is imagined.

By exploring older Turkish migrants' experiences and understandings, this study contributes to the growing research field of care for people with a migration background. It critically assesses older Turkish immigrants' aging experiences, and their understandings about care options, not through cultural differences that are supposed to be unchanging and homogeneous, but based on the positions that they take in diaspora space. This study contributes by showing that, in order to understand the possible expectations of older migrants when it comes to decisions about and needs for care, it is crucial to consider their experience of having lived and aged in diaspora space. Designing, deliberating on, and deconstructing particular ideals of care become possible only if we take these experiential, mnemonic, and relational meaning-making processes into account.

Key words: Care, aging, diaspora, Turkish migration, emotions, family.