Bringing anchoring and embedding together: theorising migrants' lives over-time

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Abstract

In this paper, we bring together two concepts that we have been developing separately over recent years, to challenge linear and simplistic notions of migrant integration, depict multi-dimensional processes of settling and changeability over time. The concept of embedding has been proposed to capture dynamism beyond the more static notion of Granovetter's embeddedness. The concept explores the contexts and contingencies of where and how migrants establish different degrees of attachment in different places and through different social relationships. Also the concept of anchoring has been developed to offer an antireductionist processual and multi-dimensional understanding of migrant adaptation and settling, highlighting the issues of security and stability. In this paper, using longitudinal research, we explore for the first time how bringing our two concepts together may offer additional insights and understandings of migrants' experiences of and responses to the uncertainties and complexities of contemporary society, exacerbated by Brexit.

Keywords: Anchoring, Embedding, Polish migrants, Brexit, Longitudinal research

Introduction

The concepts of anchoring and embedding have been grounded empirically and developed through researching European migrants in the UK since 2004. In this article, employing a life course perspective, we draw on longitudinal data collected through interviews with Polish migrants in two UK cities. Re-connecting with participants, over many years, has allowed us to collect rich data on dynamic attachments, belonging and processes of settling. These processes have been challenged by the Brexit referendum in 2016 and Britain's subsequent departure from the EU which has been described as an 'unsettling event' whereby geo-political shifts, at the macro level, can impact upon migration plans, on the micro level (Kilkey & Ryan, 2021).

In this paper, for the first time, we bring together our separate datasets and re-analyse our case studies through the lenses of both anchoring and embedding to consider how our concepts might be brought into conversation with each other to understand the complexities and processuality of attachment and settling processes especially through the potential impact of Brexit in terms of unanchoring and disembedding. Up to now both concepts have operated separately. However, with both concepts becoming

increasingly cited in the literature (e.g. Opara, 2018; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019; Heila Sha, 2020; Filipek & Polkowska, 2020; Lubbers et al., 2020; Sime et al., 2020, Trabka & Pustulka, 2020; Sotkasiira & Gawlewicz, 2021), the relation between them in others' work is not clear or authors cite these concepts interchangeably using anchoring and embedding if they were identical.

Our paper aims to make a particular contribution, firstly, by showing that the concepts, although complementary, have some significant differences and are not simply interchangeable. Secondly, we demonstrate how using these two concepts together provides additional insights because they offer different perspectives. In the face of recent proliferations of new concepts in migration studies, some just renaming already identified issues and phenomena, there is a risk that all these new concepts fragment the field and compete with each other. Hence, this paper shows how intellectual collaboration, bringing together two established concepts, can enrich our analytical toolbox and enable us to answer new research questions generated by unfolding socio-political events such as Brexit. The third aim is to use our concepts and longitudinal data together to analyse the complexity and dynamism of settling over time in the context of the aforementioned unsettling event.

The paper starts with a brief explanation of the theoretical underpinnings of both concepts and their key features, we then present the research contexts and methods. In the empirical part of the analysis, we demonstrate how the concepts can be used together through a series of case studies drawn from our longitudinal research with Polish migrants. In the concluding section we summarise the added value of bringing together the two concepts and how this approach might be beneficial to other researchers.

Theoretical underpinnings and main features of the concepts

Integration, a key concept related to migrant adaptation and settling in Europe, has been increasingly criticised by academic scholars in recent years (see Spencer & Charsley, 2021; Favell, 2022). It has been criticised as an insufficient tool to capture complexity and dynamics of settling processes among contemporary migrants (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2018).

In recent work, different researchers have either explicitly challenged the notion of 'integration' based on analytical and empirical sociological observations (e.g. Favel, 2022; Ryan & Mulholland, 2015; Ryan, 2018; Korteweg, 2017; Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2018; Schinkel 2018; Saharso, 2019; Rytter, 2019), or sought to adapt it, for instance to the circumstances of intra-EU mobility (Lessard-Phillips, 2017; Barbulescu & Beaudonnet, 2014). Our aim in this paper, however, is not to develop another critique of integration but rather to focus on how bringing our two concepts together offers an alternative perspective and provides insights into complex and dynamic processes of adaptation, belonging, attachments and settling in contexts of uncertainty and wider socio-political changes. Far from being a one-off event, migration is a dynamic process which unfolds in changing social contexts and through changing lives. Beyond a simple dichotomy of continual mobility, on the one hand, and permanent settlement on the other hand, it is necessary to understand the complexity, messiness, multi-dimensionality and diversity of migration experiences and changing processes over time. Migration can be understood not only as the process of adjusting to the receiving society but also the process of

learning that is developing new practices, competences and skills, and continuous adaptation to dynamic changes (White & Grabowska, 2019). We aim to understand these dynamic processes both empirically, through our use of longitudinal methods, and analytically through our concepts of anchoring and embedding.

Both, anchoring (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2013, 2016) and embedding (Mulholland & Ryan, 2022; Ryan & Mulholland, 2015) aim to capture the processuality and multi-dimensionality of migrants' belongings, social connections and attachments. In a similar vein, in recent years, moving beyond the rather oversimplistic and normative notion of 'integration', there has been a proliferation of concepts presented by migration scholars as a way of understanding migration as a process of adaptation and settling in destination societies such as belonging (Fortier, 2000), attachment (Grzymala-Moszczynska & Trabka, 2014; Trabka, 2019), emplacement (Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2016), grounded lives (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017) or liquid integration (Skrobanek & Jobst, 2019).[1]

Below we outline the origins of anchoring and embedding and their main features. Despite the apparent similarities, we discuss the difference which makes both concepts complementary so their combined application brings synergistic value.

The concept of embedding (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015) draws on Granovetter's (1985) notion of embeddedness which highlights that individuals' attempts at purposive economic behaviour are embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of relations. Although embeddedness is used widely in migration studies because 'features of social embeddedness are among the most influential factors for migrant settlement, onward movement and return' (Korinek et al., 2005: 794), it has been criticised as a vague and 'fuzzy' concept, lacking in precision and clarity (Hess, 2004). There have been calls for a clearer understanding of the qualities of embeddedness and the multidimensional nature of ties, as well as more research on the dynamism of this process over time (Hite, 2003).

In response, the concept of 'embedding' (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015) has been advanced to explore how migrants navigate societal contexts as active agents, in relationships with others, but framed by specific socio-economic and political structures. Hence, embedding pays particular attention to institutional settings such as the labour market, as well as immigration regimes, and spatial contexts such as local neighbourhoods (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015). In other words, to understand processes of embedding, it is necessary to ask the question '*what are the specific contexts in which migrants are attempting to embed*'? Moreover, rather than a static, achieved state, such as Granovetter's embeddedness, by contrast, embedding has been conceptualised as a dynamic process—continually negotiated and re-negotiated over time (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015). Thus, embedding helps to understand how people negotiate attachments and sense of belonging as dynamic, temporal, spatial, structural and relational processes. However, while acknowledging agency, embedding may involve tacit dimensions as, over time, migrants may develop attachments in particular contexts without actually planning to do so (Mulholland & Ryan, 2022). In addition to being dynamic, the notion of differentiated embedding (Ryan, 2018) presents it as graduated and multi-layered. It involves different degrees of attachment and depths of trust and reciprocity across various sectors. For example,

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[1] For a fuller discussion see Spencer and Charsley (2021).

a migrant may develop deep embedding in local networks through family and friends, while simultaneously experiencing shallow embedding in the labour market through precarious employment. Moreover, embedding is not guaranteed. Some migrants may encounter obstacles that prevent their embedding, such as immigration restrictions. Furthermore, embedding may be reversed, in some circumstances, if migrants' attachments are severed leading to a process of dis-embedding. Thus, embedding has been defined as 'dynamic and contingent social practices through which migrants develop, maintain or withdraw relations and attachments both in and across time and space. Rather than an achieved, static state, embedding is inherently processual. Moreover, it is multi-speed, multi-depth and multi-directional, such that migrants may experience differentiated embedding, and indeed disembedding, in particular aspects of their lives, e.g. citizenship status, employment, housing, local networks and transnational connections, etc.' (Mulholland & Ryan, 2022: 5).

Inspired by the metaphor of Bauman (1997) and the work by Little and his collaborators (2002) the concept of anchoring has been proposed (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2013, 2016) in response to limitations of the notion of integration and the need to link notions such as identity, adaptation and settlement. Even though new theories of integration are increasingly complex and multidimensional, they usually do not include identity in a sufficient way. As a consequence, the processes of migrant adaptation and settling experienced by migrants are accompanied by relatively little exploration on identity transformations despite some indications that identity can play a role of tool to stabilise and 'anchor' migrants during their adaptation to a new society (Schwartz et al., 2006). The concept of anchoring brings to the fore the issues of safety and stability, the notion of integration does not pay sufficient attention to, despite the fact they represent basic needs and their significance being confirmed by recent studies (e.g. Bakker et al., 2014; Cheung & Phillimore, 2013), with the rare exceptions as in the work of Ager and Strang (2008).

Anchoring has been defined as the process of establishing significant footholds which allow migrants to acquire relative socio-psychological stability and security (defined as a feeling of being safe and not exposed to chaos and danger), and thus to function effectively in a new life environment (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Brzozowska, 2017). Anchors are specific points of reference and support which might be analytically distinguished, including not only new but also the established ones that might be simultaneously maintained by migrants, for example, in their countries of origin. These specific points which might be analytically pinned down provide an especially useful tool for analysis. The notion of anchoring offers a multi-dimensional understanding of migrant anchors of different kind, depth and strength and provides a new comprehensive way of capturing dynamics and complexity of adaptation, belonging and settling processes in the context of changing mobilities and increasingly fluid societies. Anchoring emphasizes, on the one hand, human agency and the cognitive and emotional aspects of establishing footholds and, on the other hand, inequalities and structural constraints in establishing a sense of stability and safety. Its value lies in the fact that it acknowledges simultaneity (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004) in different spaces, including transnational and virtual, multilayerness and unevenness (including social, cultural, cognitive, emotional, material, spiritual, institutional anchors) as well as the processuality and flexibility of anchoring,

re-anchoring and the reverse processes of un-anchoring which proved to be particularly relevant in the context of Brexit uncertainties.

Both embedding and anchoring underline that migrant attachments and belonging are multi-dimensional with different layers of connections (e.g. some deep, some shallow) in different domains such as spatial, material, institutional or relational. Moreover, through their focus on dynamic processes, both concepts avoid a simple linear assumption that migrants will eventually settle. Indeed, both concepts allow for processes of reversal and withdrawal. Anchors may be severed or pulled up and moved somewhere else resulting in dis-embedding and re-embedding in another location, including return to the origin country or relocation to another country.

On the surface it may appear that both concepts are similar and, indeed, in the literature they are often cited interchangeably or presented as similar (see e.g. Guma & Jones, 2019; Franceschelli, 2020). However, there are subtle differences in the two concepts that may complement each other. Hence, combining anchoring and embedding can provide a more systematic analysis of complex, nuanced and multi-layered and multi-directional processes of settling, unsettling and resettling.

The differences between the concepts are in part related to their disciplinary backgrounds. Anchoring, informed by both sociology and psychology, highlights the needs for stability and security as well as migrant agency in attempts to fulfil these needs and stresses internal anchoring (e.g. cognitive and spiritual) in addition to other dimensions. It may be particularly useful to understand initial stages when migrants establish footholds in the destination society, variety of specific anchors and changes in them. Embedding, drawing on its roots in sociology, especially economic sociology, focuses more on relationality within specific systems and structures. While acknowledging individual agency, embedding analyses the ways in which migrants develop strategies, such as social networks, to help navigate the contingencies of specific structures, such as the labour market. Hence, linking both conceptual frameworks, we can argue that anchors are footholds which are used by migrants for establishing their sense of stability and security (anchoring) allowing the processes of embedding in a given context. As demonstrated in the case studies below, bringing together insights from those aspects of anchoring, highlighting safety and stability, with the relational, structural dimensions of embedding can provide a more holistic analysis of complex and dynamic processes.

Research contexts and methods

In this paper we bring together two bodies of data collected separately in London (20 interviews) and the greater Birmingham area (40 interviews) by the authors over many years. Both datasets include longitudinal elements collected through follow up interviews with participants. Both studies received ethical approval from the authors' institutions and comply with the relevant social science ethical guidelines (e.g. regarding informed consent received every time, the secure storage of the personal data, the usage of pseudonyms instead of actual names and the avoidance of identifiable information in the vignettes included in this paper). In each case, we interviewed Polish-born migrants in the years prior to the Brexit referendum and later followed up to see how the referendum impacted on participants' attitudes, sense of belonging and future plans. Aleksandra used face to face and telephone interviews to reconnect with her participants in

2017–2019 after initial interviews in 2014. Louise used asynchronic interviews (Meho, 2006; Burns, 2010) to reconnect with her participants in the months immediately following the referendum in summer of 2016, two years after her original, face-to-face interviews.

Follow up exchanges with participants were especially useful in generating longitudinal data from the pre- and post-referendum period. It was possible to gauge how interviewees' attitudes and sense of belonging had changed over time. In this paper we focus on six case studies—the vignettes of Agnieszka, Izabela and Mateusz (from Louise's London study), and Jan, Maria and Paulina (from Aleksandra's Birmingham study). We have selected these cases to illustrate examples of substantially different anchors and processes of embedding.

Although we were both interviewing Polish-born migrants, and exploring similar issues of belonging, identity and attachments both locally and transnationally, these are two datasets collected in different places by different researchers not originally designed to be combined or compared. Nevertheless, as argued elsewhere (Erel & Ryan, 2019; Ryan et al., 2016), bringing together qualitative datasets collected by different researchers can be a useful way of expanding a corpus of data and generating new insights and as a form of triangulation (Denzin, 2006). This is especially relevant when the original research questions were similar and participants share specific characteristics, such as migrant status and nationality (Kilkey & Ryan, 2021).

This joint paper has developed over four years and proved somewhat perplexing to write due to challenges we initially encountered in bringing together our two concepts that were already comprehensively developed and well established in the literature. Additionally, the different locations of the authors with occasional meetings in person, during a few international conferences, slowed progress. After becoming familiar with each other's data, we spent many hours discussing our rich case studies and exploring how to bring the different sets of data together into a coherent and succinct paper. Although familiar with each other's concepts, we needed to consider how best to bring these two mature concepts into conversation with each other to show the added value of using them together. We had invested considerable intellectual effort in our respective concepts and were wary of seeming to suggest any limitations or deficiencies in them. Thus, combining them for this paper was a slow and delicate process that required time and trust. We wanted to show that our concepts can stand alone but also that bringing them into conversation can provide additional insights, especially inspired by their different intellectual roots and approaches. We presented our initial drafts at several workshops and conferences, receiving encouraging and valuable feedback that helped to advance our thinking.

Bringing anchoring and embedding together to analyse empirical data
Spatially dispersed anchors and multi-level embedding
As noted earlier, anchors cannot be taken for granted and the passage of time is no guarantee of migrants' embedding in the destination society. Agnieszka was originally interviewed in 2006 (Ryan et al., 2008) when employed as a care worker. In that first interview, Agnieszka explained that she had experienced depression and felt very isolated in London. Although her Polish boyfriend was with her in London, she felt that

he did not understand her mental health issues. Her closest ties were back in Poland: '*in such situation when I need someone close, I rather call Poland. I often speak to my mum, I have very good contacts with my cousin and with my friends*'. Agnieszka had very sparse networks in London and, given her mental health issues, found psychological security in long-standing, trusted relationships back in Poland. These ties with her mother, cousin and friends can be described as anchors that sustained her emotional embedding in Poland. By contrast, because of the relative absence of anchors in London, it is hardly surprising that Agnieszka appeared to be embedding only at a shallow level. Her job seemed to be her major anchor in the UK and only motivation for staying in the city. She was uncertain about the duration of her stay: '*the most frequent answer, mine and my boyfriend's, is that we want to stay here for few years in London*' (Agnieszka, 2006).

When re-contacted, eight years later, Agnieszka was still living in London. During that time she had changed jobs frequently and with each move seemed to be getting closer to her dream job in psychology, while pursuing a course of study in counselling. She had married her Polish boyfriend and they had a school-age son. Unlike the first interview, Agnieszka now appeared to be more deeply embedding in London; economically, through her job, relationally, by establishing her family and structurally through both her son's schooling and her studies that would give accreditation, a secure foothold, to enable profession embedding. Nonetheless, throughout the interview she narrated a clear sense of uncertainty about her future: '*I'm not really settled here*' (Agnieszka, 2014).

Agnieszka explained her 'dilemma' of wanting to return to Poland but also knowing she would miss London. She continued embedding in deep caring relationships with relatives, especially her mother, in Poland; hence her family continued to be an anchor that kept her emotionally tied to Poland. But economically, her job and her future career opportunities were anchors that enabled her embedding in the British labour market. Agnieszka's narrative clearly illustrates differentiated embedding across various dimensions and the associated emotional struggle of feeling torn between two places and competing priorities.

Brexit amplified Agnieszka's differentiated embedding. When re-contacted in 2016, she commented:

> *My plans would not change at all but my family was affected by the result of referendum. Even my 9 years old son born in the UK, under influence of his dad who doesn't feel welcomed in the UK now, wants to move to Poland… I am not sure if I will be interested in getting British citizenship. I would like to have British Passport but at the moment it is too expensive for me. When I will get better job I will consider it (Agnieszka 2016).*

Hence, the ambiguity suggested in previous interviews is underlined here following the Brexit referendum. Both her husband and son seemed keen to return to Poland. This can be understood as a form of dis-embedding triggered by the referendum and an unsettling of migrants' sense of acceptance and belonging in British society (Kilkey & Ryan, 2021). However, while Agnieszka wanted to stay, she appeared ambivalent about paying for a British passport. She appeared to be deferring a decision. A British

passport can operate to give migrants a foothold in the country and hence facilitate deeper embedding through secured immigration status. But it seems that Agnieszka is reluctant to make that commitment, just yet, perhaps reflecting her enduring anchors in Poland.

Experiences of participants like Agnieszka reveal the embodied, emotional experiences of migrants straddling multiple places (Yeoh & Ramdas, 2014; Svašek, 2008; Davidson & Bondi, 2004). The conceptual framework of anchors is useful to understand the need for psychological security, especially in contexts of mobility, uncertainty and unfamiliarity. Differentiated embedding helps to understand the ways in which migrants navigate socio-economic structures and relationships and the contingencies that may curtail their agency which they try to regain through establishing anchors. Bringing anchoring and embedding into conversation, thus helps to enrich our analytical toolkit so as to better understand the interplay of structure and agency.

Shallow embedding in the UK and anchoring in transnational networks and spaces

The story of Jan manifests that anchoring can cross geographical, administrative, political and socio-cultural borders and go beyond place-based anchors located in the country of residence and the country of origin.

After technical studies in Poland, Jan was headhunted in 2008 to work as a specialist in the UK. The job offered, alongside the accommodation arranged by his new employer, constituted first the solid anchors which gave him an opportunity to immerse quickly in the British culture with his local flat mates. Although his housing situation changed when his partner joined him with their young child, he worked for years with the same employer and made fast progress in financial terms so he was deeply embedding professionally and economically in the UK. While interviewed in 2014, Jan revealed that in addition to his regular job, he started buying properties for investment which he redecorated and planned to set up his own company. His embedding in terms of job, assets, investment plans and financial situation highly featured in Jan's narrative.

While preferring contacts with Britons at the beginning of his stay in the UK, over years Jan began developing closer relations with other Poles in England and embedding in social networks of similar professionals of Polish origin. Meanwhile his anchors in Poland did not change much over the years based on visiting his parents and siblings as well as maintaining loose contacts with 'old' friends. However, Jan seemed to become focused on his new friendships in the UK with the Poles from his business networks. Jan did not think about residency in the UK but instead was thinking about moving to 'warm countries' for some (undefined period): '*Greece, Spain, Portugal, to live there for longer. I do not know what it means 'permanently', so it's hard for me to say whether it will be 'permanent' if it will be 10 or 20 years, but for a while for sure. Good food too—I like Mediterranean food*'.

The interview with Jan held five years later proved that he managed to develop his deeper economic embedding in the UK through some anchors he set up or planned to establish. He became a self-employed, landlord and financial investor with the latter turning into his passion after splitting from his partner and their child becoming more independent. He was preoccupied with developing his skills and being active in the transnational community of like-minded Polish businessmen interested in development,

business and socialising as well as talking about libertarian political ideas and blockchain inspirations Experiencing formal problems with his application for residency, he interpreted this a sign that he should not apply, particularly in the context of his future plans and cosmopolitan identity: '*So well, I don't want to be, so to speak, another citizen of a country, because I feel more like a citizen of the world than a person assigned to some borders or I don't like bureaucraticy for a passport (...) I don't really care anymore'*. When asked whether he does not think that Brexit can have a negative impact on his life, Jan went on to explain his advantageous position in the UK and non-UK based plans and opportunities:

> *I will manage for sure at the moment in my life as I am now, then I don't need that, so to speak, the paper, I think so (...) I don't have to work here anymore, I can create businesses, etc. (...) My plans for the future are such that in two or three years I want to live partly in Spain, start businesses there and work, so to speak, earn money, and I will be there more often, and gradually maybe I will move there and I will be here only once a year let's say, I don't know, for a few days (Jan 2019).*

Thus, Jan's vignette features anchoring in non-place based networks and transnational spaces around certain projects and ideas as well as a new cosmopolitan identity. His case illustrates selective and differentiated embedding in the UK predominantly based on the anchors related to work, assets and economic activity but without simultaneous embedding in political and institutional domains (e.g. settled status or citizenship) or British socio-cultural life (culture, neighbourhood).

Deliberate strategy of limited anchors and shallow embedding

Although migrants may have lived in London for several years that does not mean they have developed anchors and deep attachments in the city. Some see their migration as purely time limited, despite staying for several years longer than initially anticipated. Hence, they have little interest in putting down anchors in London. In describing their embedding as 'shallow' we are not making any normative judgements about the success of their migration experience.

Izabela had initially arrived in London in 2004 but since then had moved around a good deal for work and pleasure as well as returning to Poland to study for her Master's degree. She returned to London in 2013, with her Polish boyfriend, as part of intra-company transfer through the corporation for which she worked—so called double return (White, 2014). Because of the nature of her job in a large multi-national company there were many opportunities to transfer abroad in the future. Izabela seemed to have no interest in establishing strong anchors and settling in London or returning to Poland, instead she was keen to travel and explore new places:

> *In my soul, it's a kind of gypsy soul, so I always wanted to move somewhere and when I'm here I'm thinking about moving somewhere again. So probably I will then maybe come back here or maybe not, I don't know (Izabela 2014).*

She was keen to move to Australia or New Zealand. As a young, highly qualified woman, who spoke fluent English and did not have any family caring responsibilities, Izabela saw the world as her oyster and had no desire for embedding in London. She

extended the stay in London in order to gain professional experience but she saw this as a time limited project. Nonetheless, having researched migrants for two decades including countless follow up interviews over time, we are aware that migration plans can change. Thus, we have observed that initial temporary migration can gradually become extended over time (Ryan, 2018). Therefore, it was interesting to see if Izabela was still in London when re-contacted in 2016.

In fact, Izabela had dis-embedded and left London. But she had not travelled further afield to take up career opportunities. Sadly, she developed a serious illness and had to return to Poland to be cared for by her parents. Her experience underlines the contingency of mobility and the unpredictability of migration plans. This demonstrates the importance of follow up research as a way of understanding how migration projects evolve over time, sometimes in unexpected ways. Izabela had no significant anchors in London. Her plans were temporary and she had no motivation to engage in embedding in the city or wider society. Her job for an international corporation meant that future mobility was very likely and her career advancement did not depend upon building up local networks and embedding in the London labour market. It is difficult to speculate, but it may be the case that her shallow embedding in London, especially her lack of strong relational anchors, meant that when she developed an illness she needed to return to Poland to access care from her family there.

Anchors and embedding in dynamic contexts

Mateusz arrived in the UK as a student in 1998 and took various jobs including as a waiter. In those years, before Poland joined the EU, Mateusz had very limited opportunity for embedding in London. As someone without official status, his work situation was precarious and his right to enter and leave the UK had to be continually re-negotiated at border crossings (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). EU enlargement and the expansion of mobility rights to ten new accession countries in May 2004 made a huge difference to the mobility and settling opportunities of many millions of people, including those, like Mateusz, who had already moved to the UK prior to accession (Eade et al., 2006).

For Mateusz, Polish accession and his newly acquired rights as an EU citizen marked a major transformation in his lived experiences in Britain. These rights can be seen as anchors that enabled him to gain a secure foothold in the country and so begin embedding across multiple dimensions of society. He decided to study nursing and began to work as a psychiatric nurse in the National Health Service. He married a Polish woman, met in London, and had two young children. When interviewed in 2014 he felt very settled in London. He said parts of his Polishness were 'evaporating slowly' as he had never known adult life in Poland. By contrast, as his sense of Polishness was decreasing, his sense of being a 'Londoner' was gradually increasing. Having lived in the city for 16 years, he felt at home in London and had no plans to leave.

Interestingly, Mateusz noted that when he visited outside London he felt more foreign: '*I spent a holiday in Nottingham after being here in London, and it was dreadful to go in the countryside to some rural area where I think my status as an immigrant could stand out more*'. For migrants, like Mateusz, becoming a Londoner is a process that may take time but, unlike Englishness or Britishness, is possible. As a world city, London is not particularly British. It does not belong to the British: 'Migrants in London enter a

space that is not only already marked by diversity, but also understands itself as such' (Hatziprokopiou, 2009: 26). The narrative of the multicultural city 'reflects a powerful imaginary' in which the visibility and otherness of migrants is apparently reduced (Hatziprokopiou, 2009: 24). Hence, it can be argued that Mateusz was embedding in London but not in Britain as a whole. This point becomes important when Brexit occurs.

When re-contacted after the referendum, Mateusz seemed to be experiencing emotional dis-embedding as his sense of belonging and attachment were undermined. Despite living in the country for 18 years, and already having a secure anchor in the form of a British passport, Mateusz now felt like an 'immigrant' in the midst of rising xenophobia (Rzepnikowska, 2019). He now felt like he was living 'in a different country'. This revealing observation reminds us of his earlier statement about London being different from the rest of the UK. However, despite London voting with a large majority to 'remain' in the EU, the results of the referendum made it clear that London was part of a wider country and had to accept the results of the British electorate. Being a 'Londoner' may be an open and available identity but it is not a legal entity and does not confer a special relationship with Europe, regardless of how cosmopolitan the city may feel.

Nonetheless, Mateusz planned to stay, reflecting his multiple anchors and the extent to which he had been embedding over many years across different dimensions: '*my home, my family, my work are all here*' (Mateusz, 2016). Therefore, he now had to undertake a form of re-embedding in Britain as a country outside the EU.

Embedding is not an all or nothing state, one may be embedding in one sector of society—e.g. economically embedding in the labour market—but not in other areas—e.g. not politically embedding in the nation-state as a whole (Mulholland & Ryan, 2022). Hence, a multi-dimensional and multi-spatial concept of embedding captures processes of differentiated degrees of attachment, involving various anchors, across diverse dimensions of societies.

Uneasiness of anchoring and shallow embedding

The case of Maria illustrates uneasiness, unevenness and changeability of anchoring. When interviewed in 2014, Maria a single woman without children living in the UK for over 10 years, seemed to combine work, social life, volunteering and artistic activity being her anchors in England. Although during the first interview she presented her life as relatively stable, balanced and satisfying, the follow-up interview in 2019 proved her embedding was quite shallow and decreasing over time. Her temporary work contract had been terminated, friendship network shrunk, her voluntary and artistic activity became marginal. When re-interviewed Maria appeared more unsettled and displaying lower levels of embedding with fewer and weaker anchors than before. Despite her excellent command of English, work experience and previous successful jobs in NGOs, she struggled to secure a permanent or even long term job. Shortly before the second interview, Maria started a new employment (far away from her flat) which, as it turned out later, did not give her the promised prospects of development and a future permanent position. Maria's circle of acquaintances shrunk, partly because of her withdrawal from some relations to 'save energy' for the new work and due to her expressed preference for more in-depth and intimate contacts, that is stronger anchors, whereas her acquaintances either set up their own families, had children and lived a different life or/

and concentrated on their careers. Not only did Maria have fewer friends but her closest social relations became weaker and less diverse with more Polish friends than in 2014.

Over the years Maria additionally reduced her involvement in artistic and voluntary activity due to a lack of time and hopes that establishing herself professionally in the voluntary sector would compensate for direct charity work. She felt that she had already given a lot as a volunteer and needed to look after herself more in the face of health problems (predominantly stress-related).

Despite renting the same accommodation for years, Maria did not feel that she was embedding in her neighbourhood nor had substantial anchors in the local community except her one Polish friend. Nonetheless, she felt relatively safe, having her 'little world' there.

After the initial upset, Maria came to terms with Brexit, but she could not accept that people started to demonstrate their negative attitudes towards migrants so openly. After expressing her sadness on Facebook, Maria was struck by the response of her former Eastern European colleague, married to a British man and having children with him, who justified hostility towards migrants because they- are only guests. Maria commented on this in the following way:

> *This was the biggest post-Brexit shock that how someone who has settled here, has a family, has put roots deeper than I have, can think in this way. And at that moment I began to contemplate how many people feel as such islands on the island, who are not a part, do not feel a part of, despite actually, they are so much [a part] that you cannot be more because of three children and a big farm. (Maria, 2019)*

Although this story articulated Maria's feeling of disconnecting, the Brexit vote prompted her to prevent her dis-embedding by establishing a stronger anchor in the UK in the form of permanent residency. In 2019 she was considering an application for citizenship to secure rights in the UK but also to be able to move elsewhere with an open return to England.

In spite of relatively strong anchors in Poland in terms of her mother and friends, Maria was unwilling to return to Poland due to expected low levels of tolerance there. Therefore, she was fantasising about moving to another destination: '*And all the time I have a little dream that maybe, that is this dream came forth about three years ago that I will escape, that is I will move out from Great Britain*'. She visited a potential destination place in Spain a few times and established some footholds such as a social insurance number and friends. At the same time, Maria commented that this vision is more like an unrealistic dream. Interestingly, the idea of changing a country also surfaced in 2014, when Maria mentioned about going abroad to do artistic and volunteer work in Africa to the place where she knew people involved in an interesting project.

Generally, in 2019 Maria's life seemed more unsettled than in 2014, exacerbated by Brexit. She had fewer and weaker anchors in the UK and felt more temporary and disconnected, hence, her uneven embedding could be noted in some spheres, especially in British culture and the surrounding superdiversity. Not demonstrating substantial embedding in the local community, she was rather anchored in dispersed social relations not perceived as strong and solid but emotionally important. Maria's unsettlement

was visible in her reaction to the employer's question about prospects for her permanent employment:

> When I was asked yesterday, (…) whether I would be interested [in permanent employment], in all honesty, I say no, that is theoretically yes, but at this stage, I am not able to promise anything for 100% because this is such a moment when I am simply not able to decide. And the truth is that somewhere inside me I feel that I am about to exit, so in general, I look at my flat and say, damn, I should get rid of some of stuff, because it will be difficult to move out. So somehow, there is no clear plan, but this may be a second year while I have been packing my things in my thoughts, but I do not know where (Maria 2019).

Referring to the concept 'intentional unpredictability' (Eade et al., 2006) as a strategy of post-accession migrants, Maria's case manifests a different tendency towards an unintentional unpredictability. In her case, a longing for safety and stability was accompanied by her struggles and relatively unanchored life in the UK. Her vignette demonstrates uneasiness, ambiguity and tensions in anchoring and hence shallow embedding, for example visible in Maria's efforts to establish herself professionally but simultaneously continuously feeling as on the move.

From embedding to unanchoring and reanchoring

The vignette of Paulina illustrates the processuality of settling and the significance of (re) establishing security and stability. Since Paulina joined her husband in the UK with their young child, her life in the UK revolved around the family and their re-created home which constituted Paulina's main anchors abroad, especially when she quickly gave birth again. The rhythm of a day, daily routines, repeated house chores and caring for the children, gave Paulina a feeling of control and predictability, leading to her anchoring, and so contributing to her safety and stability corresponding to Gidden's assertion (1991) that ontological security is largely based on everyday practices. This also helped Paulina to maintain self-esteem as a good mother and a spouse as she explained:

> You know, I like a well-kept [house], because if I am at home a whole day. I also like to have real flowers in a vase, and I have. You know, if I sit at home whole days, this is my duty as I say. Nobody tells me that I must do this because my husband says that I should stop running with this rag. I just like it. I have taken this from my home. My mother always liked order, and I have inherited this from her. I think that my home is such my refuge. I feel so secure (Paulina 2014).

Paulina was deeply embedding in Polishness abroad—living in her little Polish world with her family in the centre and a narrow circle of Polish acquaintances. Her embedding in the Polish community contrasted with her loose relations to British society and the superdiverse urban context. However, being separated from her family network of support in Poland and not establishing truly strong emotional anchors in the UK either among other Poles or non-Poles, made Paulina feel isolated and alienated in addition to suffering from 'a language blockage' as she confessed.

Paulina's further life story after the first interview in 2014 exemplifies the fragility of weak anchors and the relativeness of her 'settlement' in the UK which resulted in shallow

embedding. Her relative stability and safety were destroyed by a chain of events started at the beginning of 2016 when her husband experienced health problems and lost a job followed by Paulina's accident while performing casual work and an eviction from their home. The last event was particularly impactful for Paulina as the home played the role of sanctuary and her major anchor in the UK. While the family seemingly recovered from the problems, after the temporary support of visiting family from Poland, Paulina made an abrupt decision about her return with the children to Poland due to feeling a lack of stability and security as she stated:

> *(…) in fact, I told my husband overnight that I was returning there and at first he was shocked and didn't believe it would happen, but I just knew, I was already so desperate, I said, I'm fed up with this England, I'm fed up with everything (…). One time there was work, another there wasn't, and it was not stable, you know, and that scared me the most, I also couldn't go to work because what about the kids. We just didn't have anyone there, so it didn't make sense to remain and struggle (Paulina 2019).*

The increasing anti-immigrant hostility and uncertainty related to the pre- and post-Brexit political environment (Rzepnikowska, 2019), contributed to Paulina's sense of growing instability and insecurity. When interviewed in 2014, Paulina emphasised her 'quiet life' in the UK yet already spontaneously expressed some anxiety about possible political and legal changes. This shows that despite the apparently stable legal and institutional situation of Polish migrants before the 2016 EU referendum, some already began to experience a growing sense of anxiety and uncertainty which could overlap with their personal unsettlement and hamper their embedding. It could also prevent investing in the establishment of anchors in the UK, such as language acquisition or buying a house. The hostility and political processes of shifting borders co-occurring with the personal problems destroyed Paulina's emotional attachment to the UK, exacerbated her feeling of non-belongingness (Yuval-Davis, 2006), so impacted on her anchors and thus resulted in the low levels of overall embedding in British society.

Paulina's return to Poland was accompanied by the process of re-anchoring when she started to explore available opportunities on the job and housing markets in Poland. The processes of re-anchoring were more visible than un-anchoring from the UK due to Paulina's shallow embedding in England with her husband staying in the UK being the only significant anchor abroad. After returning to Poland, Paulina quickly organised her life, rented a flat and found a job which she then quit after becoming pregnant. Her oldest teenage child, while first reluctant to return to Poland, quickly adapted to the Polish school and peer environment which was for Paulina the crucial aspect of the family's re-embedding in Poland. This prevented Paulina from returning to the UK, which she had contemplated to reunite with her husband. Eventually, Paulina managed to persuade him to re-join the family in Poland which ultimately un-anchored her from the UK and constituted the final stage of her dis-embedding from England as overtime also her ties with other Polish migrants there dissolved or became very weak. The story of Paulina shows the complexity, contingency and changeability of the processes of adaptation and settling over time. When interviewed the first time, she had few but strong anchors related to her closest family, daily practices and social circle of friends and relatives in the UK

that gave her the sense of stability or security while accompanied by weak anchors on the labour market, at her children's school and in the neighbourhood. Therefore, her embedding both, relationally in wider inter-personal networks and economically in the labour market, could be seen as shallow. Hence, it seemed to be relatively easy for her to return, with the children, to Poland after the quick process of unanchoring tiggered by the abrupt negative personal experiences and unfolding unsettling impact of Brexit. Therefore, Paulina quickly invested energy in re-establishing anchors in Poland, for example through her children's schooling, and thus re-embedding back into Polish society.

Conclusion

This paper brings together, for the first time, two concepts that we have been developing separately over recent years to capture the dynamism, complexity and contingency of migration processes. We have drawn on our longitudinal data, generated by repeated interviews with participants over several years, to show how migration plans, projects and experiences evolve and change over time.

This paper had three specific key aims. Firstly, we sought to show that our two concepts of anchoring and embedding, although similar and complementary, have some significant differences and not are simply interchangeable. As discussed, these concepts are informed by different intellectual roots and so provide distinct approaches to understanding migration experiences and strategies. The concept of anchoring highlights the issues of safety and stability, focuses on the migrant agential activity of establishing them and points to particular anchors that are used. The concept of embedding emphasises the contexts and contingencies of where and how migrants establish different degrees of attachment in different structural settings, including labour markets and immigration regimes, and through particular interpersonal relationships. While acknowledging agency and contingency, embedding also takes account of tacit dimensions of forming attachments in specific contexts over time (Mulholland & Ryan, 2022).

Secondly, we wanted to demonstrate how bringing the two concepts into conversation could provide additional insights because of their different but complementary perspectives. As shown through our rich case studies, migrants tend to seek psychological security and stability in new and unfamiliar contexts. In so doing, they may establish anchors that enable them to gain a foothold, a sense of security in their new environment. Through their anchors, migrants may develop attachments and connections and hence begin embedding in particular settings or networks of relationships. However, as discussed above, some anchors may be more secure than others, leading to different depths of embedding, some shallow, and some deep. Hence, in this paper, linking both conceptual frameworks, we have argued that anchors are footholds which are used by migrants for establishing their sense of stability and security (anchoring) enabling wider processes of embedding within specific socio-structural contexts. Moreover, our concepts take account of multi-dimensionality as migrants simultaneously may have anchors in some spheres of life, such as a house or a secure job, but lack relational ties to local friendship networks, leading to differentiated embedding.

Therefore, working together, our concepts provide a rich analytical toolkit to understand complex, nuanced and multi-dimensional processes beyond any simple view of

integration or settlement. Of course, it should not be assumed that migrants can establish anchors and begin embedding just as they choose, or indeed that all migrants necessarily want to do so. As demonstrated in our data, some migrants see their migration as time limited and do not wish to invest in anchors or long term embedding. Therefore, we do not make any normative judgements about anchoring and embedding as idealised outcomes of migration. It should also be noted, that some migrants may encounter obstacles that hinder them in establishing footholds in destination contexts. Thus, while our concepts emphasise agency, we are mindful of potential constraints posed by wider structural factors such as barriers to employment, anti-migrant hostility or restricted immigration status.

Thirdly, our concepts pay particular attention to dynamism over time. We are especially interested in how migrants' experiences unfold within changing contexts and changing lives. Personal lives, on the micro level, need to be understood within the macro level of wider socio-political structures (Elder et al., 2003). Through our longitudinal data, collected over several years, and using different methods of follow-up interviews, we are well placed to explore how personal migration projects have evolved over time, especially against the backdrop of structural transformations such as Brexit. We argue that anchoring and embedding, by focusing on processuality, agency and structure, are useful concepts to mediate between micro and macro level analysis. Hence, through this collaboration and bringing the two concepts into conversation together, we aim to answer new research questions on migration processes and experiences generated by personal, as well as socially, transformative events. On the micro level, we have shown how personal experiences, e.g. serious illness, accidents, unemployment, eviction, etc., can cut anchors, undermine security and stability, and provoke dis-embedding from the destination society. Similarly, on the macro level, geo-political transformations like Brexit can undermine migration projects. However, the more secure the anchors, the deeper the embedding, the more likely people are to withstand shocks. Hence, gaining a secure anchor, such as citizenship, may reflect and also reinforce migrants' political embedding in British society. While this paper has focused on Brexit, there is potential to inform research into other transformative and unsettling events such as the Covid19 pandemic.

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