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Ageing in a time of mobility: a research
agenda



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Abstract

The world is moving towards significantly older populations with the number of older persons aged 60 years or over expected to more than double from 901 million in 2015 to over 2 billion in 2050 globally. Meanwhile, migration and mobility continue to be a fundamental part of human experience in all regions of the world. The Max Planck Research Group ‘Ageing in a Time of Mobility’ is a global and interdisciplinary project that investigates the interconnections between ageing populations and global migration and mobility and how they jointly bring about new social transformations. The project will explore the different ways through which older persons are actively embedded in global networks and how they engage with new forms of socio-cultural diversity. It focuses on the migration and mobility of older populations in and from the rapidly ageing regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This working paper sets out the agenda of the research group, which runs from 2018 – 2023 and funded by the Max Planck Society.

Keywords: mobility, migration, ageing, anthropology, Global South

Author

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Introduction and Overview

‘Ageing in a Time of Mobility’ is a global and interdisciplinary project that investigates the interconnections between two key phenomena in the twenty-first century: ageing populations and global migration. These phenomena are often spoken about in parallel, whereby ageing populations are understood *in situ*, embodying stillness and stasis, rather than mobility. Yet in many ways, ageing and migration are highly interconnected, jointly bringing about new social, cultural and political-economic transformations in many regions across the world. Older people are among the refugee populations who are forcibly displaced from situations of conflict and environmental change; they migrate across international borders to build new lives in retirement communities; and even when they do not physically move, their lives may be profoundly transformed by the translocal mobilities of members of their families. In many cases, they are not merely passive presences ‘left behind’, but may be agents of such transformations themselves.

As a global portrait of ageing in a time of mobility and displacement, the project adopts an ethnographic approach, allowing for a multi-sited understanding and analysis of these processes and connections in all their diversity, while moving beyond the largely demographic and medico-technical approaches that dominate interventions on ageing. It focuses on regions of the ‘Global South’, bringing to light the social histories and geographies of mobility among older populations in and from cultural milieus that have been less visible in research and policy agendas, including Asia, Africa and Latin America. These are, moreover, regions with rapidly ageing populations. The project will look at the mobility experiences of older populations as they move across borders and regions, as well as intra-regionally.

The research group will address the following questions: how do translocal connections and mobilities uphold or reshape particular understandings and expectations of ageing? How do intergenerational practices of care circulate across borders? In increasingly diverse and unequal societies, how do older people navigate socio-cultural, religious and linguistic differences and boundaries; and how might this enable new freedoms, or impose constraints for people who move in later life? What do the experiences of older generations tell us about the ethics of mobility and the changing character of social norms, expectations and institutions in these contexts?

A team of researchers will trace the multiple relationships between ageing and translocal mobility, among them: ageing in contexts of forced and protracted displacement; migration to new retirement communities; the role of older generations

in familial migration projects; ageing in diverse urban spaces; and the question of return among migrants who have been abroad for a large part of their lives.

In these situations, older populations might face particular vulnerabilities that arise from key transformations in changing familial, economic and institutional structures of care and welfare. But rather than viewing their experiences as entirely shaped by such structures, this project explores how current forms of knowledge and expertise about ageing resonate, or come into tension with, the diverse lived experiences of ageing in a time of intensified mobilities. Between the two poles that are typically associated with growing old – from romanticised imaginaries of living the later years of one's life with dignity, to the isolation and suffering that can accompany older age – are ambivalent and complex negotiations of kinship, care, social relationships and networks, and notions of home, memory and belonging.

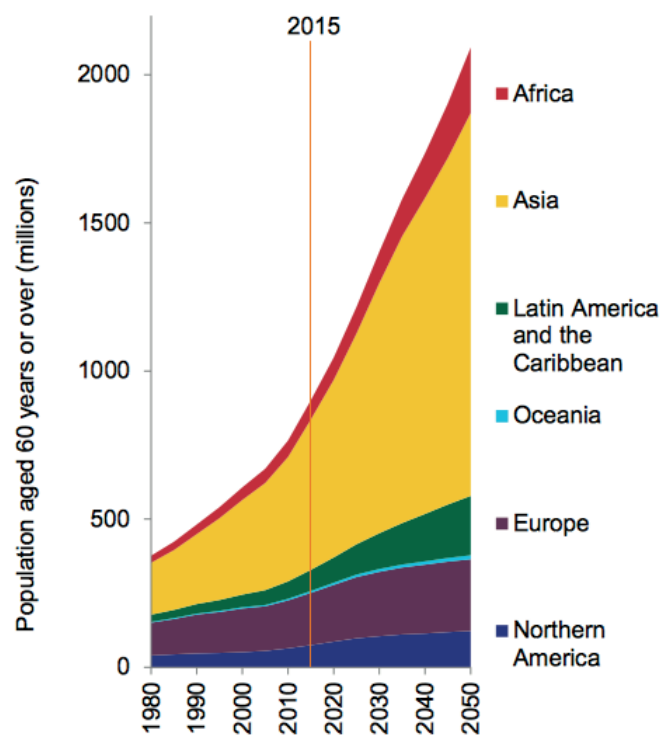
While ethnographic methodologies and the perspectives of anthropology sit at the core of the project, it will adopt an interdisciplinary approach, engaging the field of migration studies; the sociology of care and welfare; the geographies of ageing and migration and the socio-spatial and multiscalar dimensions of these processes; as well as global history, reflecting the importance of situating today's mobilities and displacements in historical perspective. Through detailed field-based projects, the group aims to generate timely and nuanced research findings at the intersection of two major phenomena of our time that speak not only to academic communities, but also to wider public and policy audiences. The findings will be disseminated through single-authored and collaborative academic outputs, as well as through online media and creative audio-visual means.

This working paper will first contextualise the project in light of global trends, highlighting the contemporary relevance of ageing populations and translocal mobilities, together with a reflection on the meanings and uses of terminology and concepts. It will then present the research group's objectives and situate its approach in the broader field of scholarship on ageing and migration. It then moves on to outline the key research questions, framework and thematic interests of the group, and finally presents the working methodologies and expected outcomes.

Ageing Populations and Translocal Mobilities

The global population is rapidly ageing. According to United Nations statistics, the number of older persons aged 60 years or over is expected to more than double from 901 million in 2015 to over 2 billion in 2050 (UNDESA, 2015). In the next fifteen years, the number of older persons is expected to grow fastest in Latin America, Asia and Africa. The ‘Ageing in a Time of Mobility’ project will study the mobilities of older populations in and from these regions, as they remain under-represented in this field of research.

Figure 1: Population aged 60 years or over and aged 80 years or over, by region, 1980-2050



Source: United Nations (2015). *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision*.

Ageing populations and the increasing life expectancies that they reflect are called, on the one hand, ‘a triumph of development’ by international organisations.¹ On the other hand, they are framed in many debates as a policy problem or even a crisis, generating social and economic anxieties about a shrinking labour force and increasing strains on health and care services. The dominant focus on ageing as a

¹ See e.g. United Nations Population Fund: <https://www.unfpa.org/ageing>

social problem and older people as vulnerable, withdrawn and unproductive, however, overlooks the fact that this is a very diverse and heterogeneous category of people, whose experiences represent vastly varied life trajectories (King et al., 2017; Palmberger, 2017).

For these reasons, the project does not follow a fixed or universal definition of ‘ageing’. It acknowledges the statistical cut-offs used by states and by agencies of the United Nations that define ageing populations as comprising persons over 60 years of age. These categorisations clearly have very real practical and policy implications on people’s lives in terms of welfare, work and care in later life.² At the same time, the project follows the argument of Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2002: 865) who writes that ‘life stages....emerge only as the result of institutional projects; their coherence should be an object, rather than an assumption, of ethnographic inquiry’. The project therefore recognises the specific socio-cultural and historical meanings of age in different societies and sees ageing as a process fundamentally connected to other stages of the lifecourse; that is, going beyond age as simply a ‘biological transition’ and rather as a category to be ‘navigated and negotiated’ relationally (Danelly, 2016). Anthropology and related disciplines in the social sciences are well placed to capture the nuances of what ageing means in different local and translocal contexts, and how this relates to questions of the body, personhood, intergenerational reciprocity, ethics, and the shifting roles of state, market and family. A global perspective on ageing ‘beyond the view of the West’ can further ‘unsettle the certainties of Eurocentric models’ that are often taken as universal (Lamb, 2015: 42). ‘Retirement’, for example, may not hold relevance for someone who has worked for years in the informal sector; meanwhile, belonging to a particular generation may carry greater social significance or status than reaching a particular chronological age threshold. This project also shares the critical lens of scholars who demonstrate that gerontological discourses of ageing as a science and as a medicalised category often diverge from the everyday lived experiences of older people (Cohen, 1992). Historical work further shows us how gerontological discourse did not emerge evenly or consistently across the world. For example, Kavita Sivaramakrishnan (2014: 968-970) argues that before age in India became a social and demographic question in and of itself, it was, in the mid-twentieth century, ‘confounded with the lack of family, changing generational roles rather than as a distinct chronological stage and problem’. She writes that ‘old age

2 We note that life expectancies vary widely across countries, and this also has a bearing on what ageing means.

or its social pathology could be experienced across life rather than at a specific age', and was seen to reflect failures in family life in light of the growing number of infirm, frail and weak bodies in a period of rapid migration and urbanisation.

The meanings of ageing are thus far from self-evident or natural and this project will be attentive to how people experience and articulate age in our respective field-sites. At the same time, it remains aware of how ageing features in broader political framings, and in the prescriptions and policies of international institutions and of states.

These varied ways of ageing, however, are not necessarily rooted in a fixed place, given that people's lives are often mobile and traverse borders. The social and cultural meanings of age therefore change across space and time; new dimensions of experience are brought in and previously held understandings are re-shaped, negotiated or reasserted. In these border-crossings, age intersects with other aspects of people's identities and identifications, which are themselves not static. The project considers movements across borders as both international border-crossings and the crossing of local and regional borders. Border-crossings also have a significant impact on those who do not move, as they remain connected to other places through members of their families and localities. Further, migration is a life project that is often oriented towards the future, with imaginaries, plans and aspirations focussed on later life, and on intergenerational relationships.

The project works with the idea of mobility to capture not only migration (which will be a key component of our studies), but also the more transient and fluid forms of mobility in and through places. It further captures dimensions such as the imagination and the mobility of ideas, emotions and materialities, including digital spaces (Madianou and Miller, 2012; Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006). As a research group, we will be keenly attentive to the politics, hierarchies and 'frictions' of mobility, the unequal ways that people experience growing older across multiple places. The very real constraints that state borders, questions of citizenship and documents can present, have a distinctive and significant impact on people in later life (Creswell, 2010; Hunter and Ciobanu, 2017; Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013). While the project is primarily concerned with these kinds of translocal im/mobilities, there are intersections with fields that consider mobility in terms of the ageing body and how these bodies interact and move through the surrounding environment.

Research Objectives

Having set the scene for the project, this section outlines the research group's overarching objectives and its approach. These objectives are:

- to investigate the interconnections and between ageing and mobility in transnational and global contexts
- to explore how current forms of knowledge and expertise about ageing resonate, or come into tension with, the diverse lived experiences of ageing in a time of intensified mobilities
- to understand how the mobility of older generations transforms expectations, meanings and experiences of later life; and how these articulations of ageing and mobility respond to and shape social, cultural and political-economic transformations

The following four points serve as pillars guiding the group's approach and contributions:

Firstly, the projects within the research group will move beyond nation-centered narratives on ageing. Demographic and policy-oriented debates typically presume an understanding of ageing as a process that takes place *in situ*, and within the bounded framework of nation-states, while this project views ageing as intricately tied to the wider connections and mobilities of twenty-first century life. It nonetheless acknowledges the tension between these two framings, given that state-based frameworks and borders continue to shape and constrain the mobilities of older people whose lives span multiple localities.

Secondly, the project examines the links between ageing and mobility in regions where ageing is happening rapidly, but which have been less prominent in research agendas: namely Asia, Latin America and Africa. Often perceived as 'young' societies, or as those providing labour or services to ageing populations elsewhere, the project seeks to understand how these societies are themselves witnessing processes of ageing and mobility.

Thirdly, the group's work will challenge characterisations of older populations as the passive presences 'left behind' and to rebalance the focus on youth or younger adults in migration studies. It will study the active embeddedness of older populations in transnational networks, how they engage with new forms of sociality, activism and politics and their integral role in familial care practices. Their stories are far removed from characterisations of older generations as unproductive and depend-

ent; at the same time, their experiences of mobility are ambivalent. Such mobilities bring to light debates about how to live the later stages of one's life and they see the refashioning of ideas of care, obligation, reciprocity and interdependence.

Finally, we will bring our findings from the perspectives of anthropology, sociology and geography on the social and cultural dimensions of ageing in a time of mobility, into dialogue with interdisciplinary fields of research on ageing, migration and their intersections. In addition, we seek to tap into fields that are seemingly less proximate, including gerontology, demography and policy and practice-oriented debates so as to fully understand the multi-faceted interplay between ageing and migration in different spheres. The paper now turns to examine how the research group's approach relates to the current state-of-the-art on ageing and migration in the social sciences.

Ageing and Migration: A Growing Field

The project situates itself in a field that has been steadily and actively growing. Over the past two decades, and particularly in the last few years, studies examining the intersections between ageing and migration have multiplied across a number of academic disciplines and in interdisciplinary fields in the social sciences. For instance, in 2016-2017, there have been at least eight edited volumes and special issues of journals dedicated to the study of transnational ageing (see: Walsh and Näre, 2016, Näre, Walsh and Baldassar, 2017; Karl and Torres 2016; Horn and Schweppe, 2016; Ciobanu, Fokkema and Nedelcu, 2017; Hunter and Ciobanu, 2017; Baldassar, Wilding, Boccagni and Merla, 2017; Dossa and Coe, 2017). What follows is not an exhaustive review of the field but rather an overview of some of the key (and overlapping) themes that have emerged in recent and earlier publications in the field. These include:

- (i) **transnational families** and how practices and expectations of care between generations are negotiated and reconfigured in transnational contexts. Loretta Baldassar, in her pioneering work in the field, contributed an ethnographic perspective on the 'micro', 'quotidian' and 'domestic' dimensions of transnational studies and argued that mobility is often driven by the need to give or receive care in the family. Through the lenses of different cohorts of Italian migrants in Australia, we see how practices of care for aged parents, for instance, sit at

the heart of long-distance kin relations (Baldassar 2007; Baldassar, Baldock & Wilding, 2007). A number of studies have continued this line of research on transnational caregiving practices in relation to older family members, including studies of grandparents' care for grandchildren (e.g. among those who stay when parents are abroad, or when the grandparents move to care for grandchildren) (Zickgraf, 2016; Aguilar et al., 2012; King et al. 2014). These studies highlight the agency of non-migrant family members and firmly demonstrate that migration is never an 'individual enterprise' but a familial one that creates new interdependencies and inequalities (Deneva, 2017).

- (ii) **international retirement migration**, with a focus on the 'lifestyle' retirees who move in search of a better climate and affordable amenities, primarily in European contexts, from northern Europe to southern Europe (see e.g. King, Warnes, & Williams, 2000; Oliver 2008; Olsson and O'Reilly 2017; see also Miles, 2015 on North Americans in Ecuador). These studies analyse the community-making practices of retirees, but also the relatively isolated existences that they live in relation to the local communities in their midst; the dynamics of privilege and precarity; the role of retired migrants in tourism development and their imaginaries of what constitutes a 'good life'. A few studies on retirement migration in the Asian context have emerged in recent years, with Toyota and Thang (2017) for instance, writing about the 'retirement industry' in Southeast Asia. Retirees from wealthier parts of the region (e.g. Japan and South Korea) move to destinations such as the Philippines and Thailand where retirement is being packaged and sold as an experience with particular ideas and visions on retired life.
- (iii) **Ageing labour migrants** in Europe and how they relate to their home countries and rethink their transnational arrangements in this stage of their lives. Return may or may not be a definitive step, as studies document how some retired migrants travel back and forth regularly as 'transmigrants' (Baykara-Krumme, 2013). In his study on male North and West African seniors in France, Hunter (2016) suggests that time spent in their country of origin centres on reconstructing familial bonds, while continued presence in the country where they have spent their working lives oftentimes relates to the practical matters of welfare (where they receive their pension and healthcare, for instance). This strand of the literature also looks into the role of different actors and institutions in the inclusion or exclusion of older labour migrants. Among Turkish migrants in Vienna for instance, older people face discrimination in institu-

tional care contexts, but build social ties and a sense of embeddedness through diverse cultural, political and religious voluntary associations (not to be subsumed under the reductive label of ‘ethnic’ associations) (Palmberger, 2017). There is, furthermore, work about people who decide to begin new migrant journeys in later life – an example being older Latvian women for whom ‘ageing and migration are entwined becomings’ as they ‘transgress negative perceptions of ageing in their home country and achieve a measure of empowerment’ through migration (Lulle and King, 2015: 444).

- (iv) The subjective experiences of **older diasporic communities**, which relates to the theme above on labour migrants, but is theorised by scholars in terms of the ambivalences and contradictions of diasporic belonging, rootedness and identity. These works consider how migrant journeys shape new constructions of selfhood, as well as how imaginaries about home and homeland shift over time (Walsh and Näre, 2016; Näre, 2017; Gardner, 2002). Some studies focus more specifically on the embodiment of diasporic longing, the creative possibilities of this condition, as well as disillusionment and loss over the lifecourse. For sociologist Yasmin Gunaratnam (2013: 2) ‘attending to the situation of the migrant at times of illness and death is to open ourselves to the coming together of two of the most radical thresholds of bodily estrangement and vulnerability: the movement across territories and from life to death’. Katy Gardner similarly explores how older members of the diaspora express their narratives and life histories not only through words, but also through the body; the process of ageing recalls for many the ‘physicality of migration’ (Gardner, 2002: 37).
- (v) Studies on **health and eldercare** deal with how ageing migrants seek and receive care through institutions such as hospitals, medical services, and care homes, as well as through domestic caregiving arrangements in the household. This strand of work treats the medicalization of old age as a social experience, as health institutions become spaces through which older migrants interact with others in the wider social milieu. The health sector may serve as a source of empowerment for migrants (e.g. for first-generation Turkish immigrants in Sweden, medical routines ‘[shape] their everyday lives so that they continue to engage in social life in Sweden’ and ‘where they see their rights to medical care as a well-earned indication of belonging in terms of citizenship’ (Naldemirci, 2013: 88-89). In other cases, eldercare may be a sector where discrimination and exclusionary practices prevail (see e.g. Karl and Torres, 2016). This area of

research additionally demonstrates how people work out different or similar understandings of care in intercultural contexts, and includes studies on the emotional labour of migrant workers who care for older people in institutionalised and domestic settings (Huang et. al, 2012; Sahraoui, 2015). This question of improving provisions of eldercare for migrants has recently become a noted point in national policy in some cases.³

Towards a Global and Ethnographic Approach

All of the studies mentioned above examine the intersections between ageing and migration in a range of geographical contexts, though there is notable emphasis on Europe (and secondarily on North America or East Asia), given that these regions are considered among the most ‘aged’ (UNDESA, 2015). Yet it is equally essential to investigate these social and cultural dynamics in the regions of the world that are ageing rapidly (even if these are not societies widely perceived as ‘aged’). The studies above have appeared in different publication formats and disciplines, advancing a productive interdisciplinary conversation that brings together a range of conceptual and methodological approaches. There is still, nonetheless, plenty of room for sustained ethnographic attention to the intersections between ageing and migration in a way that captures the micro, intimate, contradictory and multi-layered dimensions of ageing in people’s lives. On these points – broadening the regional focus, and deepening ethnographic attention – the project makes its key contributions to a dynamic field.

There certainly are notable examples of ethnographic work on ageing and mobility in regions of the world beyond Europe and that bring to light important themes that will resonate strongly with the group’s research plans. This includes Sarah Lamb’s work on ageing in India and the growing presence of ‘old-age’ homes in Calcutta. She considers such homes as ‘travelling institutions’, reflecting how ideas and imaginaries of ageing cross borders. Lamb argues that while ‘such institutions are widely interpreted as signs of pervading processes of Westernization, globalization, or modernity contrasting historically traditional family-centered care practices’, they are in fact ‘unique local institutions creatively forged and interpreted, critiqued

3 See e.g. Eldercare for migrants in Germany: <http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Publikationen/WorkingPapers/wp75-altenpflege-muslime.html>

and expanded, opposed and embraced by local actors' (Lamb, 2016: 178). Her fine-grained ethnography on ageing and the Indian diaspora demonstrates how elder care is being reconfigured in transnational families how people 'are grappling with – both embracing and critiquing – such profound social changes in their lives' (Lamb, 2009: xi).⁴

Annika Meyer (2017) similarly studies ageing in India, in a context of urbanisation, globalisation and transcultural flows. With a focus on the city, she argues that 'older people invent new ways of urban life and therefore take part in bringing about urban change'. She writes of 'elderscapes' as 'the cultural spaces and sites that have emerged for and by older persons, including residential spaces, leisure spaces and market spaces. They are shaped by real estate companies, diasporic networks, neighbourhoods, families, and individuals' (Meyer 2017: 11). Meyer, together with Roberta Mandoki – who studies changing perspectives on ageing in middle-class Kathmandu in light of increasing migration – and Jakob Gross, have produced an interactive website and film entitled '*Elderscapes*' (2016), that brings these themes to life in urban South Asia. It is an audio-visual initiative that inspires an appreciation beyond the written word of how these social changes shape people's ordinary lives.

We see the prominent and transformative role of older members of the diaspora in Eric Pido's (2017) ethnography 'Migrant Returns'. While not thematised as a study of ageing migrants, it is a rich ethnography about retired, or soon to retire, Filipino migrant professionals in the United States and their political-economic clout in the Philippines. Many invest in property at home in the Philippines as they contemplate returns home after decades abroad. Here capital and demonstrations of social status through property intermingle with the aspirations, anxieties and ambivalences associated with return. Also notable on questions of the political economy of ageing is Cati Coe's (2017) work on the complex role of transnational migration in the novel and growing provision of commodified elder care in Accra. This market involves 'a range of social actors differently involved in transnational migration' and it exists, in part, to offer employment as a stepping-stone to aspiring migrants hoping to do care work abroad, and as a consequence of migrants returning to Ghana who are

4 Another ongoing study by Tanja Bastia is on ageing Bolivians 'left behind' who play an important role in their children's migration projects. Yet rather than being dependent on these familial migration strategies, they remain active in local grassroots politics and activism for dignified futures. See: <https://ageingandmigration.wordpress.com/dissemination/collaborative-research-for-an-increasingly-mobile-and-ageing-world/>

‘translating eldercare ideas and practices from abroad’. While Coe is careful not to overstate the impact of migration in changing social norms (the commodification of eldercare is shaped by other economic and gendered transformations too), one can see how transnational connections play a significant role in the shifting imaginaries of care.

The ‘Ageing in a Time of Mobility’ project will speak to and expand on such studies of ageing and mobility in these regions of the world. As with the studies mentioned above, we go beyond seeing the ‘South’ as merely a location for outsourcing services for older populations from the ‘North’, or as a source of care and intimate labour. This essentialist (and self-essentialist) trope of the ‘caring South’ (within and across regions), appears widely in the narratives of diverse groups of people. For example, King, Warnes and Williams (2000) relate how the British retirees who have settled in southern Spain, Malta and the Italian regions of Tuscany and Umbria remark that in these countries, older people are respected by the young and lovingly cared for within the family circle. Similar ideas emerge in popular films such as in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, which follows the journeys of British retirees who are in search of a new life and companionship in ‘exotic’ India. Studies have also demonstrated how migrant care workers from Ghana and the Philippines, looking after older residents in nursing homes, put forward social critiques that they would never put older members of their families in nursing homes in their own countries (Datta et al., 2010; Amrith, 2017). While such narratives about dichotomous ways of caring are telling in how people perceive and represent themselves in relation to others, it is equally important to see their contradictions and inconsistencies. There is a more complex story to tell, as the presumed coherence of ethical ideals about care, kinship and social norms come sharply into question in contexts of mobility and of socio-political change. In a number of countries, these changes trigger debates between the state, private institutions, families and individuals, debates which the topic of ageing brings sharply into focus. To take an example, both Brazil and India have in recent years adopted policies and laws (the National Policy for the Elderly and The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Bill, respectively), to ‘protect’ older groups and to emphasise the family as the primary location for their care (Duque, 2018; Lamb, 2016: 194).

With this in mind, we follow recent developments in the literature on ageing and migration that do not take for granted particular understandings of care or kinship. Some of the literature on transnational families, for instance, presumes a fixed and normative understanding about particular generational or gendered roles, such as

the roles of grandparents or mothers and how they are or ought to be. More recent studies develop a critical engagement with these norms and demonstrate, through ethnography and qualitative field-based research methods, how familial roles, expectations and institutions are changing (Hromadzic and Palmberger, forthcoming 2018; Deneva, 2012; Buch, 2015). Accordingly, we understand ‘care as a socially, culturally, historically, and politically constituted process’, an ethical and political project, rather than something fixed, apolitical or restricted to the domestic sphere (von Poser, 2017). The group will further dialogue with the emerging literature on the materialities of ageing, for it is not only people who are moving in later life, but also objects, ideas, practices and digital technologies, which are themselves changing what it means to relate to others in later life (Ahlin, 2018; Baldassar et al., 2017; ASSA UCL⁵).

The focus of the ‘Ageing in a Time of Mobility’ focus on Asia, Africa and Latin America will enable a greater understanding of how mobility and border crossings are uneven processes that do not have uniform effects. The project will consider the historical and political conditions under which people have moved and avoid an overly ‘presentist’ view of mobility. Here, the narratives of older generations can offer crucial insights into the historically situated character of mobility across borders, regions and generations. The selection of regions is not intended to create an artificial divide between studies of the ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ (themselves not clear-cut or uncontested categorisations), but rather to firstly investigate how colonial and postcolonial histories and connections and global inequalities in power and resources, shape individual and collective trajectories across the life course and across generations; and secondly, to see how such structures and outcomes are contested, reshaped and transformed through a variety of social and political aspirations, practices and claims. Central to all of the sub-projects in the research group is therefore an understanding of older people as agents and subjects in these processes of social, cultural and political change. Our work will delve further into themes under-represented in the literature; the section below on the project framework outlines the conceptual areas within which we plan to conduct our research.

5 Anthropology of Smart Ageing and Smartphones project: <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/assa/>

Project Framework and Thematic Areas

The group adopts a global and transregional approach that looks at connections, narratives and experiences. Research group members will situate their sub-projects within a framework that explores the different pathways linking ageing and mobility:

- Ageing and forced displacement
- Migration to retirement communities
- The role of older family members in transnational migration projects and in inter-generational care processes
- Ageing and internal migration
- Experiences of ageing in global cities and in diverse urban communities
- Questions of return among ageing migrants

The areas outlined within the framework are in fact overlapping, rather than mutually exclusive. Particular cases are likely to bring together different scales of mobility that connect the internal, translocal and transnational. For instance, research on the displacement of older refugees in conflict or post-conflict settings may well consider more localised as well as transnational forms of displacement. It may also deal with ruptures and continuities in intergenerational relationships in families and communities in situations of prolonged separation. As another example, a study on migration to retirement communities will bring together a focus on internal movements of older people within national borders (such as the ageing parents of migrants), as well as those who return in retirement temporarily or permanently from abroad. Likewise studies of ageing migrants in global cities would consider their situatedness in a transnational social field where familial relationships and social, cultural and political relations to other homes are very present.

The sub-projects are not intended to be directly comparative, but will rather have common thematic strands that will enable us to build a more complex picture and understanding of ageing in a time of mobility in different parts of the world. While the projects will have their own set of locally specific questions, they will address the core research questions shaping the group's work:

- How do transnational connections and mobilities uphold or reshape particular understandings and expectations of ageing?
- How do intergenerational practices of care circulate across borders?
- In increasingly diverse and unequal societies, how do older people navigate socio-cultural, religious and linguistic differences and boundaries?

- What do the experiences of older generations tell us about the ethics of mobility and the changing character of social, cultural and political expectations, institutions and practices?

While the state-of-the-art overview focussed specifically on studies at the intersections of ageing and migration, our work will not be limited to this specific body of literature; it will be situated in a wider intellectual field. We will engage with and contribute to key theoretical and conceptual debates in our disciplines of anthropology, sociology and geography, and relevant interdisciplinary areas such as migration studies. Below, I present in brief some of the broad conceptual areas that are likely to resonate with the group's work.

The group will investigate ageing and translocal/national connections at its core, but this means a close understanding of how borders affect people's mobilities. As such, theories relating to **borders and the state**, including conceptual debates about **citizenship** and its multiple forms and expressions will be central to all projects; as will questions of **belonging** at different scales – from the transnational and national to the micro, intimate forms of belonging in everyday life. The latter forms of belonging include **kinship** (and its changing character), as well as other modes of relatedness and interaction that might better be captured by concepts such as **conviviality**, **friendship** and **community**. These new relations and socialities involve negotiating boundaries of **inclusion and exclusion** along the intersecting lines of race, class, religion and gender. For this reason, the importance of an **intersectional** approach and recognition of 'multiple grounds of identity' becomes very clear in our work, including the careful consideration of age as a marker of social difference (Crenshaw, 1991: 1242; Calasanti and King, 2015). For instance, how specifically does a female migrant worker experience ageing abroad and what might this tell us about ageing and gender inequalities? How do matters of race affect or relate to ageing bodies? Questions such as these will once again illuminate the diverse meanings of ageing across borders that affect people in different, uneven ways. This also speaks to wider debates about **migration, development** and the production or reproduction of **social inequalities**. It is widely asserted in migration scholarship and in migrants' own narratives, that migration offers possibilities for social mobility over the lifecourse (Faist, 2016). In what ways does the realisation, or not, of these aspirations for social mobility impact communities at home and how does a focus on older groups enable us to identify social change in contexts of migration and globalisation? Here, the sub-projects will draw upon the vast literature on **diasporas, transnationalism** and **postcolonialism**, the place

of older generations within these conceptual debates, the particular nature of their social, economic, cultural and political ties across borders and their engagements with different forms of diversity, ‘old’ and ‘new’ (Vertovec 2009; 2015). Alongside this, observing how individual and collective forms of **memory** operate among older groups can tell us much about change, relationships and identities across **generations**, spatially and temporally.

The researchers joining the group in its starting cohort in 2018 have proposed their own fieldsites within the project’s overall focus on Asia, Africa and Latin America, including work with migrant and diasporic groups and the translocal/national connections pertinent to their lives.⁶

Methodology and Ethics

Ethnographic methods and longer-term field research will be at the core of all sub-projects within the research group. This will include **in-depth interviews** and **focus group discussions** with migrants, members of their families and communities, as well as with representatives of the institutions and organisations that are relevant to our subjects’ lives, as well as the so-called ‘expert’ voices that comment on different dimensions of ageing and migration. The personal biographies of older generations and their telling of their own histories of migration and displacement will be crucial to understand. Some of our interviews may thus follow the format of **oral history** interviews, in order to understand how our informants lived through and experienced particular historical periods, events and transformations; as well as how this relates to present and future aspirations. The group will undertake studies of oral historical methods prior to fieldwork, learning how to conduct and interpret this form of interview and to be attentive to how these histories are told and expressed, and to perceive what is included or left out in processes of remembering.

Participant observation in our respective fieldsites will complement interviews, enabling close observation of the everyday routines and spaces in which our research subjects are living and interacting. This allows for an appreciation of the nuances

6 Please visit the research group’s webpage for further details on current projects: <http://www.mmg.mpg.de/en/departments/max-planck-research-group-ageing-in-a-time-of-mobility/>.

and contradictions of people's lives, while providing opportunities to engage in spontaneous interactions and conversations. As a group working on mobility and immobility, the fieldwork will necessarily be **multi-sited** as we trace, and at times follow, their translocal/national connections and relationships. At the same time, we endeavour not to forsake depth by acknowledging, in our fieldwork designs, that certain sites will require more intensive and 'thick' engagement than others and that some degree of 'boundedness' will be necessary (Marcus, 1995, 2005; Candea, 2007). Our ethnographic work will continue through analysis of fieldnotes and writing-up thick descriptions, as a part of the process to effectively convey a sense of our informants' worlds and their complexities.

Fieldsites will include institutions of care, retirement communities, urban neighbourhoods, migrant associations, refugee camps, family households and online spaces of transnational interaction. For the latter, we will consult ethnographies of **digital media** (Madianou and Miller, 2012) to learn how to sensitively observe exchanges on Whatsapp, Skype, Facebook and other social and digital media platforms of images, videos, messages, emotions, music and everyday banalities. Aside from digital material, we will work broadly with **material culture**, looking at how objects, gifts and belongings tell stories and represent particular relationships, memories and connections, while attention to consumption practices (e.g. media consumption, investment in property and home decoration, consumer goods sent home from other countries) often reflect or express migrants' multiple identities, as well as their unique status within local communities. Where relevant to our projects, we will work with public archives and family archives of photographs, documents, letters and cassettes (and more recently, the digitalised archives).

The project seeks to incorporate **audio-visual methodologies** to capture the voices and stories of our informants beyond just the medium of words. The inclusion of audio-visual recordings and photographs as a means to present research findings will allow for the project to speak to wider audiences. Visual documentation will always take place in collaboration with our informants, and with the support and guidance of visual anthropologists and professional practitioners.

All field research will follow the ethical guidelines of the professional bodies in our fields, for example the ethical guidelines of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth and the American Anthropological Association. It will follow core ethical principles surrounding confidentiality, anonymity, negotiated consent as a process, and a sensitivity to power differentials and our own positions as researchers in the field. Each field site will have its own set of

ethical challenges and questions with regard to access and trust. Ethical recommendations drawn up to guide research with older populations will also be consulted. For instance, the ‘elderly’ as a category is often included in categorisations of ‘vulnerable populations’, yet care will be taken not to ‘over-interpret chronological age boundaries’ and to recognise the heterogeneity of ageing subjects given that ageing does not automatically mean vulnerability.⁷ When vulnerabilities do confront us, they will be treated as context-specific with a view to understand how specific circumstances introduce or accentuate vulnerabilities. This could relate to changes in physical or cognitive health, and to the impacts of particular social categories (age, gender, class, race, and immigration status) interacting to produce social inequalities that place someone in a vulnerable situation.

Expected Outcomes

The research group aims to generate novel understandings of ageing and mobilities through detailed field-based projects that have at their centre individual and collective narratives. This will enable a deeper understanding of how ageing and mobilities are jointly experienced by people in their everyday lives. It will contribute original theoretical, empirical and interdisciplinary perspectives on the social and cultural dimensions of ageing in translocal contexts, and sharpen the intergenerational focus in studies of migration.

The project will lead to a number of academic publications produced by the research group members, both individual and collaborative – this will include monographs and articles submitted to leading peer-reviewed journals in our fields, as well as interdisciplinary journals that relate to different dimensions of ageing and migration. The collaborative publications – in the form of special issues of leading journals in our fields, and edited books – will emerge from combining insights from our different field sites and from international conferences and workshops that we hold over the duration of the project. In these activities, we will foster and develop collaborations with other research groups and initiatives working on ageing and migration globally.

7 For example: ‘Ethical Considerations in Research Involving Older People’ https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.165643!/file/SREGP-Older-People.pdf

The group will also share its work-in-progress and research findings with a wider audience. To achieve this objective, we will start a blog series, on which group members will post reflections, observations and photo diaries from the field, as well as provide updates on project activities and publications on social media, particularly Twitter. Likewise, the audio-visual outcomes of our research, which we plan to share through an interactive website, are intended to speak to a general, interested public. We also plan to record short interviews with the scholars who come to present their conceptual and ethnographic findings in our academic events and discussions. Given the clear policy relevance of both ageing and migration, the group will share research findings (from our position as academic researchers), with policy actors at local and global levels, highlighting key points (e.g. through concise research summaries) that could have a tangible impact on the wellbeing, dignity and empowerment of our research informants and their communities.

The project is thus greater than the sum of its parts and our work as a group aspires, from the ground up, to advance understandings on the global experience of ageing in a time of mobility within and beyond the academy.

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