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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION



## Southern reconfigurations of the ageing-migration nexus

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### ABSTRACT

This article intervenes in the fields of migration and ageing studies by examining complex social experiences and local manifestations of ageing and mobility in regions of the world that remain at the margins of such debates. Specifically, it foregrounds groups that are less visible in existent scholarly and policy work: namely, ageing adults from low- and middle-income regions of the world moving across regions of the South, and to places in the North. In doing so, the article critically reflects and approaches ‘South’ and ‘North’ not as essentialised or discrete categories, but as shifting, relational categories that encompass much diversity and varying marginalities. The article introduces a set of contributions that qualitatively investigate translocal intersections of ageing and migration across Central Africa, South, East and Southeast Asia, and Latin America, and in some cases in connection to places in the North. The collection advances debates on the ageing-migration nexus with a southern focus by examining three key themes that display geographical unevenness and social diversity: (Im)mobilities of ageing, retirement and kinship strategies in light of restrictive mobility and citizenship regimes; multidirectionality of care across borders and generations; and the temporalities and spatialities of home, belonging, and displacement.

### KEYWORDS

Ageing; migration; translocal mobilities; life course; global south

## Introduction

Today, two thirds of the world’s older adults live in developing regions, where their numbers are growing faster than in developed regions. In 2050, it is estimated that nearly 8 in 10 of the world’s older persons (aged 60 years old and above) will be living in developing parts of the world (UN 2019). Debates from as early as the 1970s noted that ageing societies were growing across the world (Sivaramakrishnan 2018), and existing data clearly demonstrate that the numbers of ageing individuals are expected to increase more sharply in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and parts of Africa in the coming decades. Nevertheless, research agendas remain primarily focused on ageing populations in the Global North and the socio-spatial ramifications of these demographic processes on care economies of the Global South (Amrith 2018, 2021). What is overlooked in these debates is a recognition of experiences in regions of the South that are themselves ageing. The same regions are also deeply shaped by migration

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and displacement and there is an urgent need to better understand the social transformations and forms of translocal mobility that occur in conjunction with population ageing.

With this special issue, we focus on southern experiences of ageing and migration in and across regions of the world. We make an intervention in the fields of migration and ageing studies by showing how Eurocentric models of ageing are too often taken for granted as 'natural' or universal, while dominant approaches to migration have yet to fully acknowledge the diversity and magnitude of mobilities outside the Global North (Lamb 2015; Amrith 2018; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020).<sup>1</sup> We specifically attend to groups that remain at the margins of existing scholarly and policy work: namely, and broadly speaking, ageing adults from low- and middle-income regions of the world<sup>2</sup> whose experiences are shaped by migrations within national borders, across regions of the South (i.e. South-South mobilities), and to places in the North. Crucially, though, our aim is to complicate existing understandings of those categories by exploring *threads of connectivity* across spatial, socio-economic and cultural borders, rather than enclosing countries within static, oversimplified and sometimes taken-for-granted world geographies. We highlight interdependencies and experiences that crisscross entangled geographies of the South and North (Dirlik 2007; Palomino 2019) that are mutually constitutive, inextricably linked, and part of each other's histories. Put differently, people do not age or migrate in a vacuum. Their experiences are bound up with contemporary expressions of global capitalism, postcolonial relationships, and border regimes in ways that also generate new inequalities *within* and *across* regions. The boundaries between North and South are thus blurred and not self-evident, with each contributor to this special collection framing and situating 'South' and 'North' within the specific context of their research.

We draw on debates of the ageing-migration nexus (King et al. 2017) that capture the complex, shifting and nuanced interconnections between ageing and migration. Taking Europe as a departure point, King et al. (2017) importantly argue that 'ageing and migration' are two of the most important sociodemographic trends; perhaps *the* most important' (194, emphasis in the original). We build on the *interconnectedness* between these two different sociodemographic phenomena – ageing and migration – as a productive site to examine rapidly transforming societies. Crucially, we extend these discussions by focusing on other regions of the world and probing those very connections beyond Northern settings. While ageing is a universal biological fact, it is also importantly a social and cultural process that is both embodied and emplaced with different manifestations across regions of the world. Moreover, not everyone grows older in the place in which they were born, nor do they always age in singular or static locations. This is why looking at the intersection between ageing and migration becomes relevant. We see migration as a spatial and social trajectory that is inherently classed, gendered, and shaped by axes of ethnic belonging, race, nationality, visa status, family, and shifting political and border landscapes. As this collection shows, migration encompasses varying forms of mobility, including diasporic, retirement and intergenerational mobilities, mobilities around care, internal mobilities, and cross-border mobilities. Migration is also linked, in some cases, to experiences of social mobility. The special issue contributions examine three main themes that advance debates of the ageing-migration nexus with a southern focus: (Im)mobilities of ageing, retirement and kinship strategies in light of restrictive mobility and citizenship regimes;

multidirectionality of care across borders and generations; and the temporalities of home and place-making, belonging, and displacement. They examine different kinds of mobility and migration, and translocal experiences of ageing in globalised contexts, illuminating both the challenges of intensified inequality and precarity, but also new possibilities and creative responses.

In this editorial introduction, we first outline the contributions of the ‘ageing-migration’ literature to our understandings of these phenomena, yet demonstrate the need to re-examine them from a southern vantage point. In public and political discourses on both ageing and migration, Euro-American assumptions have long dominated the debate, overlooking key experiences and perspectives from the South. We then outline the approach that we take in the special issue, to examine qualitatively the complex social experiences and local manifestations of ageing and mobility in regions of the world that have been at the margins of this debate. At the same time, we take a critical look at the very categories of ‘South’ and ‘North’ by considering them not as essentialised or discrete categories, but as shifting, relational categories that encompass much diversity. The final section outlines the collective and individual contributions of the collection, before closing with reflections on positionality, ethics and concluding remarks.

### **Ageing and migration in the twenty-first century**

Scholarship on the ageing-migration nexus has burgeoned over the past years with wide-ranging studies that have illuminated the experiences of ageing migrants (Horn and Schweppe 2015; Karl and Torres 2016; Walsh and Näre 2016; Ciobanu, Fokkema, and Nedelcu 2017; Näre, Walsh, and Baldassar 2017). Such studies have been important in balancing the still-dominant focus on younger populations in migration studies and they have made nuanced and empirically-rich contributions to our understandings of what it means to age in transnational and globalised contexts. Some of the topics that have emerged in this literature include: the transnational migration of retirees in search of new lifestyles (King, Warnes, and Williams 2000; Sone and Thang 2020); the movements of older labour migrants between countries of settlement and countries of origin in later life (Baykara-Krumme 2013); the balancing of complex questions of home and belonging with social security and welfare concerns (Attias-Donfut, Tessier, and Wolff 2005; Walsh and Näre 2016; Hunter 2018); and the analysis of ageing migrants’ experiences through the lens of agency rather than vulnerability (King et al. 2017). Many of these studies are focused on Europe, with a few looking at other ageing societies in the North. Some studies have further examined the important role of migrant eldercare workers from the South in looking after older people in places such as Japan, Singapore, Canada, and the UK (see e.g. Ogawa 2012).

These studies constitute a productive foundation upon which to further consider and problematise themes of translocal mobilities and ageing; namely, contexts in which ‘home’ and ‘host’ countries are not always neatly separated and more complex constellations of migration and family networks take shape; migration and life course trajectories that do not always follow linear paths; migration regimes and specific spatio-temporal configurations of mobility and stasis that differ from and nuance those found in

Western Europe and North America; and the varied policy implications of international migration and ageing translocally.

In our special issue, we build on the conceptual strengths of the ageing-migration nexus scholarship in primarily northern contexts, and look further afield to investigate expressions and experiences of the ageing-migration nexus in and across the South, and in connection to places in the North. We attend in particular to experiences of ageing and migration that have remained less visible in research agendas to date. This includes the ageing experiences of older refugees and internally-displaced persons, particularly in the South-South contexts; the ways in which restrictive border regimes shape the (im)mobilities of older people (see also Brandhorst, Baldassar, and Wilding 2020); how historical displacements have enduring impacts over the life course; and the mobilities of older people from the South in search of new lifestyles. Important in this approach is to recognise societies and economies in the South not only as those servicing an ageing North, but as societies that are themselves ageing and where everyday lives, care practices, and notions of home are shaped by multiple forms of (im)mobility.

We thus extend the existing scholarly focus from the North to the South whilst maintaining a dialogue between regions of the world and exploring different threads of connectivity as a way of generating a more comprehensive picture about ageing and migration globally. We identify different forms and trajectories of mobility in which there are enduring legacies of colonialism and war, or ongoing political crises and displacements, such as for older East Timorese refugees in Indonesia or internally displaced families in Cameroon (Sakti 2022; Wolter 2023); transnational mobilities that support social mobility, as is the case for migrants from southern India or 'temporary' migrants in the UAE (Sreerupa 2023; Akinci 2023); the quest for amenity-driven lifestyles as we see in the case of Chinese internal migrants (Li and Alencar 2023); and the enduring effects of political borders on transnational family life, as the examples of migrants from Bangladesh, Vietnam, Ecuador and Peru moving to Northern regions exemplify (Miah and King 2023; Nguyen, Baldassar and Wilding 2023; Pérez Murcia 2023).

In our endeavour, we take inspiration from the small but growing body of scholarship that offers rich ethnographic insights into ageing and migration processes in the South. To mention just a few: Sarah Lamb's (2009) work on how Indian transnational families re-organise care through the establishment of new retirement communities is crucial in demonstrating how ideas, practices, and institutions relating to old-age travel across places. Rather than seeing retirement institutions as mere impositions of 'modern' Euro-American models of ageing, Lamb shows us how these spaces take on a distinctively local character. Cati Coe (2021), writing on changing eldercare practices in a rapidly ageing Ghana, notes the role that international migration (specifically, remittances and return migration) has played in sustaining commercial care services in urban areas. In South America, we see examples of how older adults whose children have migrated abroad importantly 'contribute to their families' productive and reproductive activities well into their older age' as Tanja Bastia, Claudia Calsina Valenzuela and Maria Esther Pozo (2021b) argue in their research in Bolivia (see also Montes de Oca, Molina, and Avalos 2008 for an example in Mexico; and Yarris 2017 for an example in Nicaragua). In all cases, migrants and non-migrants alike play important roles in these shifting configurations of care, intergenerational relationships and institutional support. We build on these in-depth studies to think collectively about ageing and migration

experiences in different regions of the world, and to reflect upon why these diverse yet less-told stories matter for our understandings of the complex relationship between ageing and migration.

Southern re-configurations of the ageing-migration nexus are important because Euro-American assumptions operating in public and political discourse, and among international ‘experts’, have shaped the policies and realities of both ageing and migration for many people around the world. Understandings of ageing in the Global South have been primarily informed by Euro-American experiences of later life, often without adequate consideration of the historical and cultural specificities of various spaces and places (Sivaramakrishnan 2018). While in the ‘West’, ageing has become a politically-laden subject and policies have largely focused on older adults ‘ageing successfully’ and remaining actively and independently engaged in surrounding communities (Lamb 2015), popular depictions of ageing in other regions of the world have linked older age with marginalisation, dependency and destitution. Moral prerogatives based on such social representations deemed populations in developing regions of the world as ‘in need of rescuing’ (Mohanty 1988), and promoted international development agendas that considered ageing practices across regions of the world through the lens of the ‘West’ (Sivaramakrishnan 2018). In so doing, they have glossed over culturally-situated and dynamic understandings of (in)dependence, ageing, care, intergenerational relationships, and kinship (Lamb 2015). In addition, many places in the South are still often perceived globally as ‘young’ societies, with questions of ageing thought to be less relevant and state policies ill-prepared (Campos and Barbieri 2013; Alejandria, Ghosh, and Sacco 2019). This ignores the fact that demographic and socio-cultural transformations are occurring at an accelerated pace across regions of the South (Sun 2021). The absolute number of elderly people (aged 60 years old and more) across parts of the Global South is soon expected to outpace their numbers in the other northern regions (Sivaramakrishnan 2018, 2). Binaries of ‘young’ vs. ‘old’ nations are therefore fruitless for they do not capture the scale of these transformations, nor do they allow for subjective interpretations and alternative accounts of fluid age categories (Sivaramakrishnan 2018).

Likewise, public and political discourses on migration, put forward in intergovernmental debates and in contemporary migration policies, reproduce an ahistorical narrative of migration that have yet to fully grapple with the historical contexts that produce contemporary movements of people, which is also reflected in the field of migration studies (Mayblin and Turner 2020). Such de-historicised discourses produce the very idea of the ‘immigrant’ (and the ‘refugee’) and their ‘deservingness’ to migrate and to be included in a society; they uphold border and bordering narratives, and promote views of migration that remain profoundly Eurocentric (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Mayblin and Turner 2020). These discourses overlook the enduring legacies of colonialism and extraction, histories of displacement, contemporary social and economic inequalities, diverse cultural narratives of migration and mobility, and migration and displacement within regions of the South, in particular. If we consider that around 90 per cent of displaced populations worldwide are located in developing regions of the world (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016; Sakti 2022), this is a significant omission. In the contemporary context, ever-restrictive border and citizenship policies have produced ongoing forms of precarity and vulnerability for those crossing borders to seek safety or a better future. This has far-reaching impacts on transnational family life, on

intergenerational relationships, and on social protection in a globalised world, while generating new inequalities between those who have the means to surpass restrictive citizenship and migration policies, and those who do not.

Current debates have thus produced a broadly homogenised, 'one size fits all' understanding of what ageing and migration ought to look like (Vera-Sanso 2006; Sivaramakrishnan 2018; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020). In light of these debates, we reiterate that global understandings of ageing (Lamb 2015; Sivaramakrishnan 2018, 2020) and migration (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020; Mayblin and Turner 2020) need to be integrated with and informed by experiences across the South that remain largely unobserved or mis-represented in current agendas. The sharp and rapid rise of older populations and more widespread access to mobility deem this nexus a timely and urgent topic of discussion and demands more inclusive and nuanced approaches.

### **Southern reconfigurations of ageing and migration**

With this special issue, our primary line of inquiry is to interrogate whether global experiences of ageing and migration can be grasped by social theories and classical concepts that draw on experiences in the Global North writ large. From the vantage point of the South, we seek to unsettle long-established certainties about the social experience of ageing and its interconnections with mobility, and come up with novel approaches and new ways of thinking about categories that are often deemed universal (Lamb 2015; Zubair and Norris 2015; Sampaio, King, and Walsh 2018; Alejandria, Ghosh, and Sacco 2019; Bastia, Valenzuela, and Pozo 2021a). We know that beyond global demographic trends and macro indicators lie great diversity and inequity that call for detailed, 'zoomed in' analyses, and historically and context-grounded perspectives. Such local specificities include changing social roles, family constellations and care responsibilities, increasingly medicalised and neoliberal approaches to global health, rising translocal mobilities and their implications across generations, changing social and cultural values assigned to the elderly across places and, more broadly, the taken-for-granted welfare-based equation of 60 or 65 years old (and progressively later) with ageing and paid retirement.

In this light, we address questions of critical relevance for thinking about ageing and migration in the South. How relevant are assumptions around the 'comfortable' reliance on the welfare state in retirement to the experiences of precarious ageing migrants or refugees who live in contexts where informalised social protections are more salient? Equally, what do we miss in assuming that mobility aspirations are always oriented towards the 'North' and 'northern' models of living and ageing? And how productive are discourses that tend to homogenise and neatly separate fixed (both in time and space) categories of 'North' and 'South'? As Sarah Lamb argues (2015, 37), such questions are important not only to understand 'others', but also to observe critically our own societies and immediate surroundings, 'unsettling familiar ways of thinking and revealing underlying values.' This important remark reminds us, moreover, that we should not take as a truism that questions of welfare, pensions and social equality are widespread across northern countries.

With these questions, we reject discourses that position the South as merely reactive to or 'catching up' with transitions elsewhere in the world as teleological modernisation



narratives might infer (Sivaramakrishnan 2018; Brosius and Mandoki 2020). We also follow Sivaramakrishnan (2020) in emphasising that ageing in the Global South, and we would add migration as well, needs to be addressed ‘in their own terms’, ‘without viewing these transformations as deviant or deficient from “standard” norms of age and aging’ (2018, 12–13). In doing so, we aim to contribute to scholarship committed to the idea of ‘provincializing’ Euro-American discourses and redressing and recentring debates of ageing and migration (Lamb 2015; Bastia, Valenzuela, and Pozo 2021a; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020).

This special issue advances our knowledge of these key social issues by illuminating diverse translocal ageing experiences and identities across and beyond the South, and examining how people make sense of, actively shape and creatively imagine novel ways of ageing, caring and relating on their own terms in contexts of mobility, displacement, and globalisation. Through the focus on agency, the collection challenges and complicates persistent public narratives and shared imaginaries of older people as a social burden or as people ‘in need of saving’ from their psychosocial isolation and alienation from a productive world. Equally, we recognise how migration and displacement can exacerbate forms of precarity and vulnerability and thus create new challenges for old-age, while producing new gender and class-based inequalities. With this approach, we therefore negate simplistic binary logics that reduce ageing and migration experiences, as well as the intersections between them, to either ‘success’ or ‘failure’ (Segal 2013). We also remain careful to avoid gross generalisations and reifying Northern ideas about age, retirement, institutionalised care and social and leisure needs and aspirations. Equally, we question discourses on the need to remain productive over the life course, including through later life, and fears of welfare-dependency (Ferguson 2015).

In highlighting southern experiences of ageing and migration, the intention is not to essentialise ‘South’ and ‘North’ as fundamentally different or to reinforce binaries. As a starting point, we understand ‘Global South’, broadly-speaking, as regions of the world ‘shaped by the histories of appropriation, colonisation, and an extraction of their knowledges, resources, and ways of life’ that have produced wide-ranging forms of dispossession (Bigelow and Miller Klubock 2018, 574). Yet the articles in this collection also demonstrate that ‘South’ (and ‘North’) are far from monolithic social constructions and offer no single articulated discourse. The categories instead are always in flux and inherently uneven, diverse, and locally specific. While we recognise the utility of such categories as we discuss shifting global agendas on ageing and migration, we remain deeply cognisant of social distinctions, income differentials and cultural specificities within the ‘South’ (and the ‘North’) (Palomino 2019; Trajber Waisbich, Roychoudhury, and Haug 2021). We address this very concern throughout the special issue, both in this editorial and in each contribution. We do so by providing ‘thick’ context to each study, novel conceptual vantage points, rich empirical detail, and by clearly situating social realities across a range of scales from regions, countries, states, cities, neighbourhoods, refugee camps, and other units of analysis.

The categories of South and North thus go beyond conventional assemblages of particular nation-states and evoke the necessity to consider historically constructed relations of power, inequality and oppression (Gonzalez Vincente 2019; Bhambra and Holmwood 2021). Following Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s (2020) compelling argument for recentring the South in migration studies, this special issue captures a diversity of lived experiences



and forms of knowledge that are relationally produced through deeply unequal power relations. Our intention is thus to explore linkages across spatial, socio-economic and cultural borders rather than 'locking' countries into inflexible geographies (Sheppard and Nagar 2004, 563; Trefzer et al. 2014; Bhambra 2014; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley 2018; Sheppard and Nagar 2004, 563; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley 2018). We emphasise historical interdependencies and global entanglements that traverse and tie in together South and North (Dirlik 2007; Palomino 2019; Statham et al. 2020). Cognisant of such constitutive inter-connectedness and the ambivalences of these categories, each contributor to this special collection situates and discusses 'South' and 'North' within the specific context of their research. This is observable, for example, in the case of the British-Bangladeshi diaspora, and the historical and colonial legacies that continue to shape their lives and mobilities in older age (Miah and King 2023); the complex positioning of China within shifting centres of the global economy and set geographies of 'North' and 'South' (Li and Alencar 2023); or the ambiguous positioning of the Gulf countries that, through the ongoing exploitation of migrants from the Global South, produce new sets of inequalities within and across regions (Akinci 2023).

In this regard, we believe that Gonzalez Vincente's (2020) proposition to consider global, postcolonial, and intersectional perspectives to building an understanding of the 'South' and forestalling some of the shortcomings of methodological nationalism is particularly valuable. A global perspective opens up avenues to consider 'South' and 'North' not as mere national groupings but also as 'class-based formations' that play out at translocal and national levels (29). A postcolonial perspective allows us to consider enduring legacies of oppression and underrepresentation among women, indigenous populations, racial minorities, agricultural workers and other groups *across* 'North' and 'South' and *within* the 'South'. Finally, an intersectional perspective enables a consideration of how people, differently positioned in social milieus, navigate, challenge or reinforce existing structures of inequality. Echoing these concerns, with this special collection we want to emphasise the multiple axes and formulations of privilege, exploitation, marginalisation and agency, and their composite spatio-temporalities across diverse and unequal translocal contexts (Purkayastha 2012).

A neoliberal turn and marketised approach to ageing and care is another way through which experiences in the North and South are connected; in this respect, neoliberal approaches and policies across geographies have exacerbated already existing social fault lines and inequalities. It has left those who are old and more vulnerable, such as the eldest cohorts, older women, disabled individuals, informal workers, those without family support and networks, and those who have faced a lifetime of socio-economic disadvantage excluded from or at the margins of social protection (Sivaramakrishnan 2018). These processes are not unique to the South, but they have different and localised impacts in different regions of the world, the specificities of which are important to attend to. The authors in this collection, for instance, consider how experiences of older age among migrants and refugees have been compounded by rural and urban poverty (Wolter 2023) and by ongoing forms of exclusion (Akinci 2023; Miah and King 2023; Sakti 2022). Ageing and the global marketisation of care have similarly generated settings that rely both on people's – older adults, younger generations, medical and care workers, and others – mobility and immobility, whether this is a choice or not. Neoliberal framings of ageing and care across the North and South thus re-inscribe social and spatial

differentials at various scales. This includes those who migrate transnationally to provide care for grandchildren (Nguyen, Baldassar and Wilding 2023); those who migrate translocally while purchasing cheaper care locally, simultaneously generating new or furthering old social hierarchies (Sreerupa 2023); or those who find themselves ‘stuck’ and unable to care (Pérez Murcia 2023); and those who purchase new independent lifestyles in later life (Li and Alencar 2023).

In dialogue with the theoretical interventions outlined above, the articles in this issue make significant empirical contributions by drawing on a variety of qualitative work – e.g. in-depth interviewing, participant observation, thick descriptions, emic perspectives, digital research and spatial analyses, long-standing engagements with the communities studied, and rich ethnographies. The contributors document experiences of growing older on the move across regions of the South and, in some cases, in connection to places in the North. They demonstrate how structural forces are embodied, shaped, and contested in different ways by older people migrating, by migrants who are ageing, and by older people who stay put while being part of the migration projects of others. In doing so, they draw attention to a broad spectrum of ageing experiences and meanings and focus on people situated at different points of the life course, holding varying degrees of privilege and disadvantage, and varying rights and access to mobility.

Building on life course, intersectional and grounded-theory approaches, the articles examine how socio-political contexts shape older and younger generations’ life decisions and transnational makings of later life. They explore a range of (im)mobilities: (i) internal mobilities, both rural-urban and between culturally and linguistically distinctive regions within countries (ii) South-South connections, and (iii) mobilities that connect the South to places in the North. These shifting mobilities include back-and-forth movements, unexpected displacements, and experiences of ‘stuckness’. The contributions trace lived experiences across continents – Central Africa (Cameroon), South, East, and South-east Asia (India, Bangladesh, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and East Timor), and Latin America (Ecuador and Peru). They offer detailed accounts of individual experiences, but simultaneously ‘zoom out’ to analyse the intricacies of family and ancestral belonging, urban and regional mobilities, and cross-border transnational dynamics.

## The contributions

The special issue contributions thread through three main themes that advance debates of the ageing-migration nexus with a southern focus: *(Im)mobilities of ageing, retirement and kinship strategies in light of restrictive mobility and citizenship regimes; multidirectionality of care across borders and generations; and the temporalities and spatialities of home, belonging, and displacement.* These thematic lines touch upon significant and timely issues of migration and mobilities in its various forms and scales – internal and international, temporary and permanent, ‘voluntary’ and ‘forced’. We approach migration in all its amplitude, considering the experience of recent arrivals, long-established diasporas, seasonal migrants, visitors who may consider settling in the future, and those who stay put when families migrate. We are concerned with how increasing restrictive migration regimes, both regionally, nationally, and globally, re-configure thoughts, experiences, and futures in migration and stillness.

The articles explore diasporic and uneven mobilities across space, generations, over the life course and in relation to gender (Miah and King; Sakti); the times and spaces of belonging (Akinci; Wolter); retirement trajectories and family negotiations in relation to structures of (im)mobility (Akinci; Nguyen, Baldassar and Wilding; Pérez Murcia; Miah and King); translocal and intergenerational care configurations (Nguyen, Baldassar and Wilding; Sreerupa); shifting class positionalities and inequalities (Sreerupa; Akinci, Li and Alencar); home and (digital) place-making (Li and Alencar; Pérez Murcia); and ageing in displacement and exile (Sakti; Wolter). In documenting older adults' struggles to build better livelihoods; to creatively sustain family relationships at a distance and in situations of 'stuckness'; to care about, care for and receive care (in life and death); to cope with trauma, loss and political instability; and to find a sense of self and identity in later life, the contributions to this collection reveal resourceful and resilient individuals and families who confront both the challenges and possibilities of translocal life.

**Md Farid Miah and Russell King** discuss different modes of ageing among Bangladeshi migrants and non-migrants. Through multi-sited research and in-depth interviews with Bangladeshis in London and Sylhet, they show varying experiences, imaginaries and mobilities connected to ageing in the diaspora and the country of origin. In contrast with a now conventional 'Western' model of active and successful ageing, older Bangladeshi in London and Sylhet see ageing through a family and community lens, where 'feeling part of', be esteemed and looked after by family in older age play a vital role in the experiences of growing older. The authors further demonstrate how their research participants combine different ideas about ageing, (in)dependence and mobility from both London and Sylhet, revealing how migration itself challenges binaries through these hybrid ideas. The authors also reveal a gendered dimension to the British-Bangladeshis' experiences of ageing and mobility, with older men partaking more in opportunities for socialising (e.g. religious gatherings at the mosque) and international mobility with (extended) visits to the *desh* or homeland (which tend to be less desired by older Bangladeshi women). Miah and King's study crucially underscores the unevenness of mobility in this diasporic transnational space, wherein British-Bangladeshis can easily visit their homeland, but visits from family in Bangladesh to London are fraught with legal issues and financial obstacles.

**Luís Eduardo Pérez Murcia's** contribution follows the examination of mobility in transnational space in contexts of ageing and international mobility, by looking at how death and funerals influence experiences of home among people ageing apart from their migrant offspring abroad. Through ethnographic work with Ecuadorian and Peruvian migrants in Spain and England and the elderly members of their families in their countries of origin, Pérez Murcia shows how restrictive migration regimes in Europe and prolonged separations have added significant strain on transnational relationships structured around south/north divides. He reveals how the fear of dying, the death of relatives, and the impossibility of being physically present in funerals severely affects generations across borders, accentuating feelings of loneliness and an ever-temporary sense of belonging and completeness. The author concludes that bringing death and funerals into the ageing-migration-home nexus is essential to dissect the ambivalences of home and complicate questions of return in later life. This is particularly the case in the face of structures of (im)mobility and inequality that act as fault lines and narrow the mobility possibilities of bodies deemed from the South.

**Idil Akinci** examines the im/mobility strategies of temporary, ‘middling’ migrants approaching retirement in Dubai. Based on interviews with the adult children of first-generation migrants from the ‘Global South’ settled in the UAE, she discusses the varying strategies that their parents deploy in order to navigate restrictive immigration regimes upon retirement. This is an issue of critical concern for these families because upon reaching the retirement mark of 65 years old, migrants are no longer entitled to receive work visas in the UAE. The author shows that whilst a residency path is possible, without social and pension security, sustaining a decent livelihood requires significant financial investment and support from family and social networks, which further creates divisions based on class, ethnicity and skills over the life course. In her study, Akinci nuances global ‘north’ and ‘south’ understandings of the ageing-migration nexus that are additionally complicated by the fact that the UAE, as well as most of the Gulf States, are amongst the wealthiest countries in the world. Though the adult children of first-generation migrants may have lived in the UAE for much their lives, they remain on the margins in terms of their sense of belonging and their futures.

**Hien Thi Nguyen, Loretta Baldassar, and Raelene Wilding** investigate the caregiving experiences of Vietnamese grandparent visitors during their trips to Australia. Drawing on a grounded-theory approach and care circulation framework, they consider the duties, opportunities and constraints inherent to these caregiving sojourns. They further explore how intersecting dimensions such as gender, age, socio-economic background and culture influence Vietnamese grandparents’ care norms and practices. The authors outline grandparents’ important contribution to their adult children’s households, and underscore that through their ‘informal care mobility’, they generate ‘informal care chains’ that require migrant families to seek unpaid family care in Australia (even if the parent visitors are from relatively affluent backgrounds in the country of origin). Nguyen, Baldassar and Wilding importantly make a case for probing further into South–North informal care flows and developing a political economy of informal care that considers the remarkable contribution of grandparent visitors from the Global South, despite the highly restrictive ‘parent visitor visas’ they hold in Australia. In doing so, the authors also emphasise the need for receiving countries – largely located in the ‘North’ – to design and implement migration policies that effectively support migrant grandparents in their care circulation journeys.

**Sreerupa’s** contribution follows the theme of care, by studying eldercare practices among the Syrian Christians of Kerala, India. Drawing on ethnographic work with this affluent and highly transnational community, she argues for a more careful examination of ‘market transfer’ of proximate care services as reciprocal filial care. Through an approach attentive to the historical and cultural local specificities of migration, ageing and care, she shows how the transnational care strategies used by migrants to overcome the effects of distance have altered the local eldercare economy, furthered the marketisation of the eldercare landscape, and (re)created class-ranked eldercare spaces. The author discusses the Syrian Christian community’s long-standing privileges in the region, focusing on inheritances, access to transnational mobility and remitting practices to show how such inscribed inequalities have produced (new) hierarchies and forms of class-based access to paid eldercare in an increasingly commercialised care landscape. Sreerupa closes with a plea for policy-makers to take heed of growing inequalities in the access

to private eldercare in the region, further exacerbated by unequal access to transnational mobility and remittances.

**Yongjian Li and Amanda Alencar** examine the phenomena of the so-called *Houniao* ('snowbirds') in China, wherein elder Chinese seasonally relocate from the North to the South of the country in the search of amenity-driven lifestyles. They show that the rise of these seasonal migration trajectories has been facilitated by the flexibilization of the Chinese household registration system, increasing urbanisation, infrastructure development and, crucially, the support of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Building on findings from a qualitative study with 24 elderly *Houniao* participants in the city of Sanya, the authors use the concept of digital place-making to illustrate the elderly's use of smartphones and social media during their periodic travels. The study identifies three main themes that reveal the vital role of ICTs in these sojourns: establishing social contacts and a sense of community; rebuilding a sense of identity and place through food with recourse to digital media; and coping with changes that take place over the life course. One of the study's key findings is that more inclusive and concerted policies are needed that consider the digital needs of older internal migrants, ensuring that suitable technological infrastructures and services are implemented.

**Nele Wolter's** contribution addresses the plight of older internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Cameroon, following the so-called 'Anglophone crisis' where large numbers had to leave their homes in the anglophone region of the country to find refuge in the francophone capital. This ongoing national unrest has produced a period of uncertainty for these populations whilst they 'wait' to eventually return. Based on ethnographic research with internally displaced families in Bafoussam, the Francophone capital of Cameroon, the author examines the practices of care, work, and 'doing nothing' that older IDPs experience while in displacement to show how they actively reconfigure the very condition of 'waiting'. In doing so, Wolter challenges notions of older people as vulnerable or passive and reveals the varying ways in which older IDPs shape and transform relationships, social and gender roles and think about and plan for the future, in spite of the precarious conditions of their lives. This point also nuances ideas about waiting that have dominated studies of youth and migration. She concludes that even when feelings about the past are uncertain, going back is the desired future for most people who long to re-connect with familiar sites and people; in the meantime, while they 'wait', they remain active agents for as much and for as long as they can.

**Victoria Kumala Sakti** similarly contributes a South-South perspective on ageing and forced migration, focusing on the case of older East Timorese refugees living in protracted displacement across the border in Indonesia. Through long-term ethnographic engagement with refugee communities, Sakti traces how the long histories of displacement in the region and the enduring effects of colonial rule shape older people's experiences of both ageing and displacement. Sakti focuses specifically on the narratives and experiences of older refugee women, whose stories have typically remained on the margins. Through this gendered lens, we see how older East Timorese women confront the significant hardships and structural barriers (such as land dispossession) that shape their everyday lives in different ways. Their informal work has been crucial to sustaining familial survival and supporting the next generations' needs. Older women are also more likely to be able to cross national borders to ancestral places of origin than men (who were implicated in past crimes). Through connecting people and places, they reconfigure

perceptions of ageing in exile in a more positive light. Sakti's contribution critically shows that regional and local histories matter and are key to understand gendered marginalities in ageing and displacement.

### Notes on reflexivity, geopolitics of knowledge production, and positionality

In outlining this ambitious research agenda, we also hope to contribute to rethinking and geopolitically recentring modes of knowledge production (Lugones 2007; Bhambra 2014; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020) in the fields of migration and ageing studies and their crossings (Lamb 2015; Alejandria, Ghosh, and Sacco 2019). In putting forward a special issue that focuses on southern experiences of ageing and migration, we see it as imperative to reflect on the geopolitics of knowledge production, and our own positionality as scholars in such an endeavour. These are also essential considerations for their implications for ethical and inclusive research. This remains a vital concern throughout, as several of the studies included in this collection involve minority, marginalised, and potentially vulnerable groups, for example, on the grounds of ethnic belonging, social class, gender, age, legal status, or ability.

Fieldwork is invariably a contextual, relational, subjective and embodied practice, where (shifting) positionings and unequal power relations determine what stories are told and how they are told (Sultana 2007). Inspired by the work of Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley (2018, 2) and others, we too advocate for 'diverse ways of knowing' that valorise and foreground knowledges that transcend traditional canons through attentiveness to absences, silences and erasures (Sampaio 2020; Bhambra and Holmwood 2021). And yet, we recognise the inequalities in resources and power relations that still draw many scholars to academic institutions in the North, where we, the editors, and several of the contributors are currently based. Equally, we emphasise that many of our intellectual commitments, long-standing ethnographic engagements, professional trajectories, and personal biographies (and those with whom we do our research) crisscross geographies of 'North' and 'South'. 'North' and 'South' and resulting threads of knowledge are not, as we posited earlier, separate entities; instead, they are deeply enmeshed, and it remains critical to interrogate the utility and analytical implications of such categories in our ongoing endeavours (Gonzalez Vincente 2019; Trajber Waisbich, Roychoudhury, and Haug 2021).

The contributors to this special issue add to these vital conversations on at least three counts through their scholarship. First, by providing historically grounded accounts that are attentive to enduring colonial legacies and plural histories of migration, development, globalisation, precarity and exploitation (e.g. Sakti on the colonial and war legacies in East Timor that affect(ed) and transform(ed) mobilities in the region; Wolter on the ongoing Cameroonian crisis and resulting displacements across the country; Akinci on retirement negotiations that include multiple generations and crisscross South Asia, the Gulf and beyond). Second, by drawing on long-term engagement with the places, people and experiences captured in their work (e.g. Sreerupa on migration, relative privilege and the re-production of class-stratified care spaces in India; Nguyen, Baldassar and Wilding on care circulation and grandparenting between Vietnam and Australia). And third, by exploring shifting positionalities across places (e.g. Miah and King on



the British-Bangladeshi diaspora and mobilities that connect London and Sylhet; Pérez Murcia on families between Latin America and Europe and how they negotiate loss and life's final moments; Li and Alencar on the *Houniou* migrations from the North to the South of China).

### By way of conclusion: towards a global approach to ageing and migration

We write this conclusion at a time when COVID-19 has acutely transformed people's lives across the world. Among many other things, the global pandemic has profoundly affected translocal mobilities and spotlighted aged populations (and the need for care) in ways that have further exacerbated social inequalities, spatial disjunctions and entrapments. Such developments call, even more, for a critical examination of the global significance of ageing and migration and the complex interconnections between them.

With this special issue, we have sought to advance existing knowledge of the ageing-migration nexus in a way that is directly relevant to the field of ethnic and migration studies in three distinctive ways. First, by foregrounding the intersections of ageing and migration in regions that have come to be described as the 'Global South'; these are regions that are undergoing significant sociodemographic change but have remained mainly unheeded in research agendas, and remain too often observed and interpreted through the lens of northern experiences. In foregrounding and extending analyses of ageing and migration beyond the North, this special issue emphasises the urgency to consider diverse configurations and intersections of these phenomena.

Secondly, and relatedly, this collection has aimed to complicate 'fixed' geographies and attend to a more complex landscape that includes different constellations of mobility. Rather than seeking straightforward answers, we have endeavoured to open up conversations on what it means to age and move across 'Souths' (and 'Norths') that are internally plural and products of deeply intertwined histories. We found that southern expressions of ageing and migration are greatly affected by enduring legacies of colonialism and war, ongoing political crises and resulting displacements, continued labour exploitation and lack of access to basic healthcare and welfare rights, and restrictive migration and citizenship regimes that limit life possibilities in and across generations. But we also observed resourcefulness, resilience and hope. We witnessed a growing embodiment of ideologies of active ageing across geographies, the ability to plan within uncertainty, make new places home, reconfigure limitations and imaginatively seize periods of waiting, 'not knowing', and nearness to death.

In foregrounding southern experiences of ageing and migration and recognising the multiple 'Norths' and 'Souths' within, we also want to underscore the shifting and deeply contextual nature of such categories and varying marginalities within the north and south. Such altering marginalities have, for instance, changed over the twentieth century as new forms of mobility emerged within former empires. Likewise, we remain cognizant of the multiple spaces and places across the world that question and challenge set geographies of 'North' and 'South'. Most prominently, the so-called 'Global East' and the specific regional and local histories of post-socialist countries and how these histories shape ageing and migration (Lulle 2018; Iossifova 2020). But also, as well captured by the special issue's contributors, the complex positioning of China within shifting centres of capitalist dynamism; or the in-between positioning of



the Gulf countries, which remain a case in point in regards to the exploitation of southern labour and the production of new social hierarchies and forms of inequality. We believe that a historically-grounded approach that attends to enduring transformations and *threads of connectivity within and across* 'South' and 'North' is essential to a conceptual understanding of global experiences of ageing and migration.

Finally, this collection has examined how global permutations of the ageing-migration nexus are emplaced and embodied across the geographical spectrum and in varied socio-cultural contexts through long-term engagement with the communities studied, rich qualitative and ethnographic analyses, and 'thick' descriptions. Drawing on different disciplinary perspectives, the contributions to this special issue push knowledge boundaries forward and reiterate the importance of reflexivity and inclusivity in researching the multiscalar intersections between ageing and migration. Crucially, too, and particularly relevant as we navigate the unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic, we see the key role that digital technologies are playing and will play in conducting research across regions of the world in the future.

In laying out these ambitious and timely objectives, we highlight the importance of historical, socio-political and cross-cultural trajectories as fundamental to our contemporary understandings of ageing and migration. We aim for this special issue to serve as a building block inviting further debate about past, present and future reconfigurations of ageing and migration, both as separate and intersecting phenomena, as two major sociodemographic trends of the twenty-first century.

## Notes

1. We do not equate the North to the 'West' but nonetheless want to recognise that a number of 'Northern' perspectives (not all) are derived from Euro-American experiences.
2. While for explanatory purposes we use here the World Bank's definition of low and middle-income countries, we also acknowledge its limitations in fully capturing local realities and complexities that go beyond income thresholds.

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