



Migration, Diversity and Inequality in Later Life Ageing at a Crossroads

Dora Sampaio

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«Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present».

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Understanding Human Nature*

1. Introduction

What aspires ageing migrants to spend their later life in a foreign land? Indeed, as of June 2019, over 32 million migrants globally are aged 65 and above, accounting for 12% of the total migrant population (IOM, 2022). The median age and the proportion of overseas-born residents aged 55 and above have gradually increased, as the median age of migrants was 39 in 2019 (UN, 2019, p. 27), and major host countries like Finland and Portugal reported that more than half of increase in migrant populations were contributed by older generations (Ciobanu et al., 2017, p. 164). So what motivates seasoned generations to age away from their homeland in spite of uncertainties of resources and opportunities to support themselves through employment, social care, community engagement, and a renewed sense of belonging?

Situated at the intersection of social science, sociology, gerontology, law, public health, political and policy studies, and beyond, this trailblazing ethnographic book revolves around ageing-migration nexus and maps out the stories of the lived experience of major groups of ageing migrants — return, lifestyle and ageing-in-place labour migrants — from ethically, culturally, geographically, and linguistically diverse backgrounds in a comparative approach. Taking the context of the Portuguese islands of the Azores as an example, the author elaborates on biological, social, and cultural constructs of identities and deep-seated inequalities surrounding the narratives of privilege and disadvantage experienced by migrants through their transnational journey across the Global South and the Global North.

The interdisciplinary book draws on diverse insights from 108 ethnographic interviews with ageing migrants. The eye-opening collection of fascinating portrayals is authored by Dora

Sampaio, who is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning, Utrecht University, the Netherlands, and a Research Associate with the Max Planck Research Group “Ageing in a Time of Mobility”. It is intended for a broad range of readership, academic, professional, and general readers who genuinely have an interest in retirement, ageing, migration, aged care, and well-being in later life.

2. Themes and Concepts

The themes explored in the book include but are not limited to (1) the diverse ageing experiences of migrants, (2) the intersectional lens of older migrants’ identities and inequalities of ageing, and (3) the transnational perspective of migrant and non-migrant encounters. To pave the conceptual grounds for further discussions, the author first contextualises ageing in humanities and social science as “not reduced to specific variables such as chronological age, life expectancy or mortality rates”. Instead, the author conceptualises ageing on an individual dimension in a relativist manner as “is socially and culturally constructed and subjectively experienced” (p. 3), following Schwanen et al. (2012) and Walsh & Näre (2016).

Building on such conceptualisations, the author then navigates through diverse categories of motivations and aspirations for migration at a later stage of life. By critically reflecting on influential literature in the field (Rowles, 1986; Wilson, 2000), considering the socio-economical, cultural, and racial diversity, the author summarises eight categories of motivations: (1) return migrants; (2) lifestyle migrants; (3) ageing-in-place labour migrants; (4) older labour migrants; (5) family-joining migrants (also known as “zero generation”); (6) temporarily visiting older parents; (7) older refugees; and (8) involuntarily displaced older adults (both within and across borders), mainly owing to differences in access to financial resources, specific lifestyles, social networks, cultural codes and norms, and mobility between their the country of origin and host country.

Noteworthy, as highlighted by the author, the decision to migrate after ceasing to work can be traced back to three main factors: (1) transferability of healthcare and pension, particularly in parts of the European Union; (2) a strong sense of groundedness and attachment brought by ageing-in-place; and (3) weakening ties with the country of origin over time and the impossibility of ageing there. Considering the decision to migrate, the author further explores the intersections between later-life (im)mobilities and aged care through the lenses of privilege, vulnerability, and access to transnational mobility. These aspects often take the form of migration policies, visa regimes, transferability of pensions and access to healthcare and social provision, and relate to socio-cultural connotations of various forms of care. The author claims that hybrid understandings of care practices are often rooted in values, moral codes, and cultural norms that contribute to the creation of syncretic ageing identities within a more complex constellation of mobility (p. 14).

Next, in the nuanced terrain of mobility, the author takes us on a tour of home and home-making. For ageing migrants, the oscillation between emotional and instrument sense of home, between affective ties and everyday utilities, may render the notion of home deeply ambivalent and impossible to pin down. As a constantly assessed and negotiated concept, home (un)making involves a complicated web of human relationships, place rootedness, memories, and sense of belonging collected over the years. As noted by the author, the interconnected sense of home and belonging is heavily dependent on social relationships created in place, family, friendships, and other intimate networks to avert loneliness and social isolation in later

life. Last but not least, the author reveals the heart-wrenching shared human experiences of loss and bereavement of our beloved ones, which can trigger difficult emotional experiences and relations to place.

3. Structure

Firmly grounded in theory bases and conceptual framework, the well-written book includes six chapters, each elaborating on a specific aspect discussed above. To start with, in Chapter 1, the author provides a thorough overview of intellectual debates and highlights several clusters of themes and topics to be further navigated in the book.

In Chapter 2, *Moving, Settling, Ageing: Diversity of Migration Trajectories*, the author applies a temporal lens to explore various motives for migration over the life course. These motives include labour, lifestyle, and return migrants. A thorough analysis of pre-migration motives can help readers understand the post-migration experiences and settlement in later life. In particular, such understanding can offer insights into the diversity and inequalities inherent in the everyday experiences of aged migrants.

In Chapter 3, *Re-grounding: home, family, friendship and intimacy*, in response to the interview questions (1) how various groups of older migrants experience home and community-making in later life and (2) what role our family, friendship and romantic relationships assume in later life, the author challenges the prominent views of older people as passive and lonely and reveals the predominant trend of being active, resilient, and resourceful through work, hobbies and other social activities.

In Chapter 4, *Active ageing and transnational cultures of ageing*, the author deals with two central questions (1) how older migrants engage in acts of active ageing and (2) how cultures of ageing are reconfigured in migration and transnational contexts. By drawing on the notion of active ageing under the hybrid cultures of transnational ageing experience, the author identifies three interrelated themes: care in later life, mindset and work ethic, and self-care and the ageing body.

In Chapter 5, “When you make too many plans, God laughs”: thinking about the future in later life, the author examines how age, ability, class, gender, place attachment, and relationships shape our understanding of mobility and emplacement over the life course and in later life. The author does so through in-depth explorations of fluid and provisional decision-making in later life related to illness, loss of loved ones, and thoughts about mortality and critical reflections on the nuanced understanding of transnational mobility.

In Chapter 6, the author summarises the main patterns and tendencies related to the themes and topics explored in the book and provides new scripts for contemporary ageing in search of the good life. It closes the book with an overview of individual aspirations and possibilities in later life, supported by access to good public healthcare, social care, cultural capital, networks, and financial resources that are structurally enveloped in various ageing experiences.

4. Evaluations and Reflections

The monograph sheds light on a lesser-explored aspect of migration — the well-being and ageing experiences of senior migrants in the European context. As a reviewer, I find this book

eye-opening on two main accounts. Firstly, it inspires me to reflect on wellness and a sense of belonging at the later stage of life when our work and family life becomes quieter. The sense of home and family roots could mean different things at different stages of our life. When we are young, all that we want is freedom, leaving home and finding our own place in this world. In the process, we build a diverse network of friends, families, and communities by our own choice. Gradually, we become parents who take responsibility for our kids and loved ones. Yet still, our childhood home remains a sacred space in our hearts. No matter how far we have travelled, this unique sanctuary always leaves its door open, gives us a shoulder to cry on, comforts us, and shields us from all storms in our adult life. This book is a keen reminder of all the nostalgic feelings enshrined in our shared experiences. We give these experiences different names - the experience of a human being, coming-of-age, or simply humanity. The second is the author's open and balanced worldview, transcending all perceived or visible differences marked by anthropological and sociological traits. As a researcher who travelled through different places, paths, and stages, I immensely resonate with the author's humanistic gaze. This is embedded in the language she used and the way she interpreted discourses with a distinctive style marked by calmness, clarity, and candour. Through her lens, we can piece together fragments of relatable experiences at some point in our life.

In many ways, the monograph is the first of its kind in ethnographic studies that enlightens the nexus between ageing and migration. It has revealed two prominent merits. One sure merit is its firm stance on the interdisciplinary approach to investigating transnational experiences of ageing. Drawing on the theoretical strengths of neighbouring disciplines in social science such as cultural geography, anthropology, sociology, social gerontology, social work, law, and public health and well-being studies, the author of this book provides the readers with a panoramic view of the intricate constellation of global mobility. Another strength of the book is its balanced perspective reflected in the analysis of a massive amount of subjective accounts of ethnographic data contributed by personal stories of migrants in later life. The author successfully achieves this balance by applying a clear, rational, and also empathetic thinking-frame to sometimes difficult emotions revealed in these accounts.

On a personal note, the book immensely expands my understanding of ageing and migration in later life. Dora's portrayal of ageing migrants in later life demystifies our popular misconception of rootless and lonely grandma and grandpa in a foreign land. It shines a new light on the active ageing experienced by diverse groups of migrants aspired by various motivations to relocate after their work life in and beyond the European Union. As one of our social science scholars community, I'm gravitated towards the heart-wrenching but inevitable experiences of loss and bereavement of our loved ones. My personal take-home message is that Dora's book restores our faith in universal humanity manifested through a caring and supportive host society where our fleeting existence in this universe is cherished.

Overall, the author skillfully crafts a stunning account of lived experiences of ageing migrants in the Portuguese islands of the Azores. By adopting a comparative approach, the author illustrates the contrasting experiences of diverse groups of later-life migrants who are united in their pursuit of 'good ageing' but sharply divided in having the resources to achieve this. Combining theoretical insights with empirical data, the author enriches our understanding of ageing and later-life migration in a transnational context and invites us to visualise our desired later life.

5. Notes

See International Organization for Migration. (2022). World migration report 2022. <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>

See United Nations Population Division. (2019). International migration report 2019: Highlights. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/InternationalMigration2019_Report.pdf

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