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Neglected intersections: a view from the South

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Abstract

While the integration of an intersectional perspective marks a significant advance in gender and migration literature over recent decades, this scholarship remains heavily dominated by studies focusing on South-North migration. Consequently, despite growing attention to gender within South-South migration from both researchers and policy-makers, key research areas applying an intersectional lens remain neglected. In this paper, we identify three such areas that remain significantly under-explored in South-South migration research: sexuality, disability, and ageing. We argue that migration scholarship in general, and gender and migration scholarship in particular, need to urgently move to encompass all types of migrations, including regional, South-South migration, as well as broaden the languages of the publications that are taken into account in the mainstream gender and migration literature. In this article, we put forward a framework for advancing the research agenda on intersectionality in South-South migration, one which departs from the common focus on English-speaking countries and publications. We take a first step towards implementing this approach by including publications in Spanish and Portuguese.

Keywords South-South migration, Intersectionality, Gender, Sexuality, Disability, Ageing

Introduction

The gender and migration literature has made significant advances in integrating an intersectional perspective in the last couple of decades. Intersectionality, a key concept in feminist and anti-racist studies since it was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s (Crenshaw, 1991), has proven useful in analysing how intersecting social and economic inequalities mediate who is able to move, how people move across borders, and the opportunities that migrants have access to in locations of transit or destination.

However, there has been significantly less focus on employing intersectional approaches and examining the comparative dynamics of gendered processes and outcomes within research on South-South migration compared to South-North migration. The migration literature in general, and gender and migration literature in particular, continues to be dominated by studies based on South-North migration. This gap in research leaves critical areas understudied, hindering our understanding of how intersecting inequalities shape migration experiences and outcomes among populations

moving within the Global South. Expanding scholarship in this direction is essential to uncover the nuanced interactions between gender, class, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and other intersecting inequalities that influence migration dynamics within the Global South. Moreover, such research can shed light on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by diverse migrant communities, thereby contributing to more inclusive and just migration policies and interventions.

Despite using the language of ‘Global South’, we retain a critical stance towards this term. We take the position that the South is not a specific and delimited geographic category but encompasses significant heterogeneity and disparity, thus agreeing with Fiddian Qasmiyeh (2023) that an objectively defined ‘Global South’ does not exist. While identifying features that distinguish South-South from South-North migration is helpful, it is important to recognize the diversity within South-South migration itself (Carella, 2024) and its contextual specificities. Furthermore, while acknowledging that the categories of “North” and “South” are problematic and frequently used in a primarily symbolic manner (Bastia & Skeldon, 2020), we take the South as a “serious analytical category” (Crawley & Teye, 2023, p. 9). We understand the South as a space criss-crossed by its own material and symbolic inequalities but one that is also, to some extent, distinct from the Global North. In that sense, the Global South is “a territorial, relational, structural and political construct [which] is fundamentally about the distribution of power in the global system” (Sud & Sánchez-Ancochea, 2022, 1123; see also Müller, 2020), one that remains intimately linked to the Global North through interconnected migration patterns and policies (Gazzotti et al., 2023).

Neglected intersections, as we frame them, refer to specific facets of South-South migration that remain insufficiently addressed within the gender and migration literature. This article focuses on three critical areas—sexuality, disability, and ageing—that, although explored in certain regions, continue to be underdeveloped across South-South migration research more broadly, especially when compared to scholarship on South-North migration.

These neglected intersections in South-South migration perpetuate inequalities and marginalization of certain topics and groups of migrants within the field of migration studies. We contend that these *neglected intersections* demand urgent attention and should be better incorporated into migration scholarship, also expanding beyond the conventional English-centric focus to include a broader linguistic and regional scope (see Bastia & Kofman, forthcoming). This entails paying attention to the “relational and situated nature of knowledge production [...] and the broader geopolitics of knowledge” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2023). As migration scholars in institutions in the Global North tend to have better access to funding and publishing opportunities in the English language, this reinforces the inequalities regarding the circulation of knowledge produced in the Global South (Bastia & Kofman, forthcoming).

In this paper we draw on our collaborative research on South-South migration undertaken in several projects. L. Izaguirre has been engaged in researching regional migration in South America for over a decade and has also worked with M. Walsham on some early framing papers on gender and intersectionality within South-South migration studies (Izaguirre & Walsham, 2021; Izaguirre et al., 2021). T. Bastia has been conducting research on South-South regional migration within Latin America for over twenty years (Bastia, 2019; Bastia & Calsina, 2025) and more recently with M. Walsham on a

large collaborative project on South-South migration involving over 40 partners from over 12 countries. M. Walsham has additionally been working for the past decade on disability and social protection across low- and middle-income countries and on gender and intergenerational dynamics in translocal households in Uganda (Walsham et al., 2018; Walsham, 2023). P. Cortés's focus has been on Central America, with a particular interest on gender, migration and sexuality (Cortés, 2023). We have built on these earlier works and included more recent research to develop the framework we present here. Regarding our positionality, two of the four authors are originally from the Global South, and they have both had the opportunity to study and engage with academic institutions in the Global North; and three of us are based in the Global North. We are aware of the privileges and asymmetries that come with access to Northern academic resources and networks. It is precisely for this reason that we seek to use these opportunities to foster spaces for dialogue where epistemologies, perspectives, and knowledge rooted in the Global South are equally valued and critically engaged with. Accordingly, we are committed to advancing a reflexive approach to migration studies.

Our contribution is twofold. First, through our literature review on gender in South-South migration across various regions, we identify critical gaps and propose a working framework to guide future research, thereby contributing to a broader research agenda to decentre migration studies. Rather than offering an exhaustive overview of this literature, the goal of this article is to critically examine some blind spots that persist in how intersectional approaches have been mobilised. A global perspective enables us to uncover regional differences, including to interrogate why certain topics are absent in specific contexts, fostering a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of South-South migration dynamics. By doing so, we also contribute to the ongoing effort to rectify Eurocentrism in migration studies (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2023).

Secondly, our call to reconsider migration beyond the conventional North-South binary arises from our individual research interests. As researchers with different positionalities, engaged in the study of migration processes in the Global South, we assert that transcending the North-South binary requires thinking in a comparative and relational manner. This involves looking at South-South migration beyond the Western gaze and understanding it beyond Western priorities (e.g., the development industry, remittances). By incorporating neglected categories such as sexuality, disability, and ageing into our analysis, we not only enrich the intersectional analysis but also underscore their relevance in shaping the experiences and dynamics of South-South migration.

The article begins by presenting our theoretical framework, addressing how the gender and migration literature has been dominated by studies of South-North migration but also how intersectionality has enriched gender and migration studies by revealing the multiple social positions and axes of oppression that migrants navigate in their daily lives. The following section focuses on three critical research areas that represent overlooked intersections in the analysis of South-South migration from a gender and intersectional perspective: sexuality, disability, and ageing. The article concludes by advocating for the decentring of gender and migration scholarship to more fully integrate South-South migration. It also emphasises the need to address persistent data limitations and to foreground migrants' agency, in order to develop more nuanced and inclusive migration policies that reflect the diversity and heterogeneity of migration experiences across the Global South.

Theoretical framework: a gender and intersectional approach to South-South migration

Today, about a third of all international migratory movements occurs between countries in the Global South (Abel & Sander, 2014). However, although regional, South-South migration has long been researched, mainstream migration research, particularly that which has been published in the English language and in some of the top migration journals published in the UK and the US, has largely been based on South-North migrations. However, this has started changing since the turn of the century, when research into South-South migration gained prominence, as seen in some key publications on this topic (Baeninger, 2019; Bakewell, 2009; Campillo-Carrete, 2013; Crawley & Teye, 2023; Khan & Hossain, 2017; Ratha & Shaw, 2007).

Growing evidence indicates that, regardless of the chosen definition, South-South migration flows are noteworthy not only for their considerable scale and diversity at cross-border, intra- and inter-regional levels but also for exhibiting distinctive characteristics when compared to other migration patterns in relation to remitting patterns, the length of journeys, and border dynamics (De Lombaerde et al., 2014; Melde et al., 2014). South-South migration is generally less selective than South-North migration, reducing the likelihood of increased inequalities in origin countries (de Haas, 2009). Many of the people who move across borders in the Global South do so as refugees: in 2022, low- and middle-income countries in the Global South accommodated 76% of the world's individuals requiring international protection (UNHCR, 2023), a trend that is not always acknowledged in the current literature (Leal & Harder, 2021).

Despite some commonalities, South-South migration is shaped by distinct regional specificities, notably diverse migration policy approaches that influence migrants' trajectories, rights, and access to resources. These policies often have gendered effects, as illustrated by age-specific migration bans (Shivakoti et al., 2021) and mandatory pregnancy tests for female migrants in temporary migration corridors in Asia (Lee et al., 2018).

Notwithstanding the numerical significance of migration within and across countries in the South, the field of migration studies has historically been dominated by studies based on migration into North America and Western Europe (Crawley & Teye, 2023; Crush & Chikanda, 2018). This is also the case with the gender and migration scholarship, which originated with the feminist critiques of migration theories (see Morokvasic, 1984). Early compilations focused on Europe (Anthias & Lazaridis, 2000; Kofman et al., 2000), while a strong focus on the experiences of women migrants to the US continued to frame this scholarship for much of the last half century (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Brettell, 2016; Pedraza, 1991; Pessar, 1986). Interestingly, there was a more 'global' approach at the turn of the century, as illustrated by the collection curated by Willis and Yeoh (2000), which, besides an interdisciplinary approach that also included historical perspectives, also included chapters on Tanzania, South Africa, Malaysia, and Bolivia, indicating an early opening in the gender and migration literature to South-South migration. However, as in the broader migration literature, in the gender and migration literature there continues to be a bias towards the Global North, where universities tend to have greater resources that can support research and publication (Bastia & Kofman, forthcoming; Nawyn, 2016). This skewed focus raises questions about the inclusivity and comprehensiveness of migration research more generally and gender and migration

more specifically, prompting a re-evaluation of the field's priorities to ensure a more balanced and globally representative understanding of migration dynamics.

In much of the literature on gender and migration, intersectionality has now become almost commonplace, acknowledging that the singular focus on gender alone falls short in comprehending the intricate experiences of migrants, who navigate various social positions and confront multiple forms of oppression (Anthias, 2013; Parreñas, 2015; Bastia, 2014; Bastia et al., 2023; Izaguirre & Walsham, 2021; Fresnoza-Flot, 2024).

As an analytical framework, intersectionality aims to encompass the intricate interactions between different systems of power, oppression, and privilege. Its analytical power lies in examining both the combined effects of structural inequalities through the lens of marginalized individuals (Christou & Kofman, 2022) and the hierarchies and power dynamics embedded within macro-level structures, such as global migration governance and policy (Cleton & Meier, 2023; Cleton & Scuzzarello, 2024). Crenshaw (1989), a US-based legal scholar, introduced the term to highlight the intricate nature of social exclusion experienced by black women within the American legal system. However, intersectional-like approaches to social justice have existed in the US since the 19th century and among grassroots women's movements in countries of the Global South since at least the 1970s (Davis, 2020; Bastia et al., 2023). Thus, research might analyse intersecting inequalities without necessarily using the concept of intersectionality. Moreover, we also recognise the need to critically address the origins of the concepts used in analysing migration and recover and amplify those that are not usually recognised and valued.¹

As a theoretical and analytical framework, intersectionality draws attention to the problematic nature of homogeneous and essentialised social categories. Research has extensively shown that inequalities are often intersectional, and migrants are, by definition, "intersectional subjects" (Bastia, 2014). Intersectionality thus enables the recognition of the diversity of migrants and their experiences of dis/advantage, as well as how gender relations intersect with other social characteristics such as age, class, race, ethnicity, disability and sexuality to produce, reduce or reproduce inequalities.

The application of intersectional approaches varies significantly across socio-historical and geographical contexts, influencing the selection of hierarchical categories prioritised in analysis. For example, while race is often overlooked in some contexts—such as its treatment through discrimination and xenophobia in research on migration between Africa and China (Bastia et al., 2023)—it plays a central role in others. In Latin America, ethnicity is more prominently examined, often in relation to gender and class. Some scholars prefer terms like "ethnoracialised subjects" (Muñoz & Muñoz, 2021) or use ethnicity and race interchangeably (Souto-García & Ambort, 2022). While race has been a critical focus of Brazilian research on intersectionality and parallels patterns observed in the Global North, in the Brazilian context race is uniquely linked to broader debates on coloniality (Piscitelli, 2009) and its persistent influence on national structures and institutions (Magliano, 2015). Furthermore, migration not only replicates but reconfigures the colonial hierarchies that shape the nation-state and modern migration governance (Stefoni & Stang, 2017). For example, in the Chilean context, racism is not a new phenomenon nor limited to recent Afro-descendant migrants; it also manifests in the

¹ Although this is something that we cannot advance in this paper.

racialization of Peruvian immigrants and the marginalization of indigenous Mapuche (Téllez, 2016).

Considering the heterogeneous contexts within the Global South, this diversity of approaches can be a strength in comprehending and shedding light on the various ways gender interacts with other social inequalities. For instance, recent studies on intersectionality in Latin America have highlighted the discrimination that migrant women experience within the justice system (Rodríguez, 2021; Magliano & Ferreccio, 2017); practices of care in transnational migration (Ariza & Jiménez Chaves, 2022; Garcés et al., 2022); health (Aizenberg, 2019); and generation (Gavazzo et al., 2020; Mallimaci & Magliano, 2023). Together, these studies illustrate the richness and diversity of intersectional approaches to migration in the Latin American region. They also highlight the need for contextual categories and the fact that universal intersectionality does not exist (Magliano, 2015).

However, the uptake of intersectionality has been quite uneven in regions of the Global South. In addition, some topics— which we review below— have received much less attention than others. This becomes evident in the following section, where we examine three often-overlooked intersections in the analysis of South-South migration from a gendered and intersectional perspective.

Neglected intersections across three underexplored topics

While existing research on gender and migration tends to implicitly prioritize specific intersectional concerns such as education, class, ethnicity, and marital status, there is a notable silence around other dimensions, such as race, disability, caste, and sexuality (Bastia et al., 2023; Izagirre & Walsham, 2021). This imbalance is partly attributed to a research focus on labour migration and on migrants as labouring, ready-to-work bodies (Pisani & Grech, 2015), which, in turn, accentuates certain concerns while minimizing others.

In this section, we discuss three thematic gaps—sexuality, disability, and ageing—within the context of South-South migration. While these issues are generally under-examined in migration studies more broadly (including South-North migrations), they operate in distinct ways in the Global South due to diverse regional socio-economic, cultural, and political dynamics.

While this article does not attempt to provide an exhaustive mapping of the literature on South-South migration, it focuses on how sexuality, disability, and ageing have been addressed within gender and migration research. By highlighting these overlooked dimensions, we aim to stimulate further academic enquiry and propose avenues for their broader inclusion in future studies on South-South migration.

Sexuality

In the past three decades, the literature on gender and migration has expanded to also include sexuality (Palmary, 2021). Several studies written from an intersectional perspective have shown how sexuality shapes the migratory process from the beginning to the end of the migration journey, affecting the identities and personal experiences of migrants but also impacting the social, cultural, and political dynamics of destination communities (Carrillo, 2004; Cantú, 2009; Luibhéid, 2002; Manalansan, 2006). The incorporation of sexuality as an analytical framework has primarily allowed the study

of queer migrants and heteronormative migration policies. However, it has also been expanded to include the analysis of how sexuality can motivate or impact the migration journey of any person (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2017).

While sexuality has received more attention than other factors discussed here, much focus remains on queer mobilities, often overlooking, for example, the sexualisation experienced by heterosexual migrant women, such as Asian domestic workers (Baas, 2020; Baas & Yang, 2020). During the late 1990s, research on sexuality and migration was closely linked to health, particularly epidemics like AIDS, and, to a lesser extent, gender, which was gaining prominence (Pisarevskaya et al., 2020, p. 475). Queer scholarship subsequently intersected with migration, gender, and border studies, shedding light on national regimes of reproductive control and the containment of contagion, disease, and sexual deviance (Holzberg et al., 2022). This intersectional focus enriched analyses of queer mobilities, particularly in exploring rural-to-urban movements of LGBT individuals seeking more fulfilling lives (Luo et al., 2022). Additionally, evolving international policies on sexual orientation and gender identity, such as those regarding same-sex marriage, created new migration motivations for LGBT people (Hoffman and Velasco, 2023).

Despite this, contemporary authors still point out that “sexuality is an understated yet increasingly important motive for migration” (Usta & Ozbilgin, 2023, p. 1). A systematic review of articles conducted between January 2000 and June 2021 found a relatively small number of publications about this topic in demographic studies, with the scarcity becoming more acute regarding quantitative studies and those focused on the Global South (Fortes de Lena, 2022, p. 21). Other systematic reviews of existing literature tend to focus on sexual violence experienced by migrants or their health (Dzomba et al., 2019; Kwankye et al., 2021; Nematy et al., 2023). Furthermore, scholars draw attention to the fact that most studies about sexual migration focus on migratory flows from the Global South to the Global North, neglecting the analysis of South-South migration where differences in sexuality can be highlighted while contrasts in other factors such as race, religion, class, and ethnicity are usually not that significant, particularly in intraregional migrations in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East (Ruiz, 2017).

Although it is undeniable that there is a growing understanding of South-South migration in which sexuality is a relevant factor, most mainstream literature is written mainly from a Global North perspective. For instance, queer, gay, lesbian, trans, and other concepts are seen as Western terms that may not accurately reflect the life experiences of gender and sexual minorities in other parts of the world (Mole, 2018). Even though the field has steadily grown in the past few decades, empirical research in sexuality and migration studies is still considered incipient, particularly from intraregional perspectives in Latin America and Africa (Pérez, 2021). Further, authors from the Global South still perceive that most fieldwork in this regard has been overwhelmingly focused on South-North migrations (Stang, 2019). The field still receives criticism for reinforcing a simplistic idea in which sexual migrants move from the ‘oppressive’ Global South to a ‘liberal’ Global North. This is a homogenising perception that ignores the fact that several countries in the Global North have been slower to legally recognise the rights of sexual minorities than have some countries in the Global South, particularly in Latin America (Sousa & Chamberland, 2021). Other scholars have complained that, notwithstanding the rising international attention being paid to queer refugees, particularly

those fleeing from criminalising laws in Africa and the Middle East, much of the literature still focuses on asylum-seeking upon arrival at Western borders, with scant scholarship on LGBT refugees' experiences in first countries of asylum in the Global South (Pincock, 2021).

Some studies have tended to reinforce a false dichotomy in which the North is perceived as 'modern' and 'tolerant' regarding the inclusion of sexuality, while the South is uniformly stigmatised as 'backward', a preconceived bias that could affect research results (Wieringa & Sívori, 2013; Gontijo, 2021). Research has become more challenging due to the lack of official statistics and the ordeal of collecting data about queer migrants or other people who may be migrating because of sexuality since both the origin and destination country does not have official statistics about sexual migration. In addition, migrants may choose to hide their sexuality (Tamagawa, 2020).

Cvajner and Sciortino (2021) observed that sexuality and migration research often prioritizes sex work and trafficking over sexual minorities seeking better living conditions or safety. Many LGBT individuals, especially trans women migrating within Latin America or Asia, turn to sex work due to employment barriers (Gómez, 2017; Bano, 2023). In Africa, South Africa attracts queer migrants seeking protection but remains a site of marginalization and precarity (Camminga, 2022). Other studies highlight intersections between queer and labour migration, such as queer workers moving from the Philippines to Thailand for economic opportunities and greater sexual freedom (Ulla & Pernia, 2023). In Asia, where research on queer mobility has been expanded, it reveals complex intra-regional dynamics shaped by ethnicity, class, and religion. For example, Yu (2021) explores how Chinese Malaysian students in Taiwan renegotiate ethnic and sexual identities, while Yang (2022) examines how Taiwanese gay men's travel to Bangkok reconfigures sexual subjectivities through racialized desire. Similarly, research explores how gay men and transgender Kathoey utilize tourist zones in Thailand as spaces for non-heteronormative living and social opportunities (Statham & Scuzzarello, 2023). Jansen's (2025) work on queer activism in Indonesia similarly highlights how context-specific religious dynamics shape queer visibility. Furthermore, queer mobilities driven by sexuality also shape spatial practices (Gong & Liu, 2022; Luo, 2020; Luo et al., 2022). Although these studies engage with intersectional inequalities, they often do so without explicitly using the term intersectionality.

Migration studies have increasingly addressed sexuality, particularly among queer migrants, yet research remains concentrated on cisgender gay men. Quantitative data on sexual migration is scarce, and cisgender heterosexual migrants driven by sexual motives are largely overlooked. Significant gaps persist in South-South contexts—especially in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa—where the experiences of LGBT+ migrants, masculinities, and women beyond binary gender frameworks remain underexplored.

Disability

Disability has received very little attention in the literature on gender and migration, particularly in the context of South–South migration. This is a significant omission given that approximately 15% of the world's population live with a disability, with an estimated 80% residing in the Global South (WHO & World Bank, 2011). Although Article 18 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reaffirms the right to international mobility for all persons with disabilities, their migration experiences remain

under-researched at the global level (Burns, 2019, 2024; Izaguirre & Walsham, 2021). This lack of research is underpinned by assumptions about the immobility of people with disabilities, both internally within borders and internationally. These assumptions are further exacerbated by negative and often narrowly defined understandings of the 'productive' capabilities of disabled people and a failure to critique essentialist ideas of disability as biological within migration studies, in contrast to critical engagements with race, sex, gender and sexuality (Burns, 2024). Ultimately, these reflect underlying attitudes to disability grounded in a 'medical model' that stresses the functional limitations of individuals with impairments rather than a 'social model' that focuses on the constraints imposed by disabling environments, barriers and cultural attitudes (Barnes, 2019). Thus, while the migrant body is usually presented as productive and ready-to-work, the presence of those whose bodies are framed in hegemonic political discourses as 'unproductive' or 'burdensome' is obscured or stigmatised, including people with disabilities (Pisani & Grech, 2015; Yeo, 2021).

This is very apparent in relation to the Global South, where existing research on disabled migrants focuses almost exclusively on forced displacement and the experiences of refugees with disabilities (Pisani et al., 2016; Grech & Pisani, 2022; Polack et al., 2021; Mirza, 2014). This is clearly an important issue since conflict is a cause of disability, and people with disabilities face additional risks and are often excluded in humanitarian responses. The IOM estimates that there were approximately 12 million forcibly displaced people with disabilities globally in 2020, and there is a growing policy agenda that seeks to address their needs (IASC, 2019; UN Special Rapporteur, 2020). However, there is no such agenda in relation to people with disabilities who migrate for other reasons. Indeed, good data on the 'voluntary' migration of people with disabilities for work, education or other purposes does not exist. For example, the ILO publishes no data on labour migrants with disabilities, nor is there disaggregated data on migrant men and women with disabilities.

Where disability is mentioned in existing migration research, it is typically treated as one category of 'vulnerability' among many others. This approach fails to acknowledge the role of structural, societal barriers in producing these vulnerabilities and to address the specific intersectional inequities faced by migrant women and men with disabilities (Yeo & Afeworki Abay, 2024); nor does it contribute to our understanding of relationships between family members with disabilities and migrants at sites of origin or destination. For example, in research on gender and remittances conducted by Crush et al. (2007), data was collected on women with disabilities at origin and male migrants who had acquired a disability at destination. However, rather than analysing this data on its own terms, disability is incorporated alongside other categories of vulnerability. Similarly, in Stulgaitis's (2015) assessment of the legal framework for transnational families in South Africa, attention is not given to the specific needs of people with disabilities who are considered alongside multiple other groups of 'individuals with special needs'. A recent literature review on migration and disability also conducted in South Africa attempted to adopt a broader framing incorporating the voices of disabled migrants. However, limitations in the available data meant that, in practice, the main report focuses mainly on challenges faced by migrants with disabilities engaged in begging (Govere & Walker, 2020).

The dominance of this ‘vulnerability lens’ is reflective of regressive charitable models of disability and downplays the agency of migrants with disabilities (see, for example, Grech and Pisani (2022) on ‘vanishing agency’ or Yeo and Afeworki Abay (2024) on colonial and ableist constructions of vulnerability). It also largely precludes discussions of livelihoods and migration for work. A limited exception is research on social protection for labour migrants in dangerous and stressful contexts. This includes studies on workplace injuries and social protection among migrant labourers (Yea, 2022; Sun & Liu, 2016; Loganathan et al., 2020) and those that explore disability among returnees from Gulf states, including mental distress and psychological trauma (Nisrane et al., 2020; Tilahun et al., 2020). Many of these studies highlight the highly gendered nature of the vulnerabilities faced by migrants and the risks of physical and mental impairment that this entails. However, they focus exclusively on migrants who acquire disabilities at destination and often employ a biomedical framing that is poorly connected to the broader literature on disability-inclusion in the Global South, which is underpinned by the social model of disability and a rights-based approach grounded in the UNCRPD. Latin America appears to be a promising exception, despite the near absence of research on disability and South-South migration (notable exceptions include Bregaglio & Camino, 2021; Ortemberg, 2022). Returnees with disabilities along the Honduras-Guatemala-Mexico-United States corridor are gaining attention, with studies highlighting their struggles for recognition and rights (González, 2018; Dondé & Botega, 2020). In sum, existing research in this area is highly fragmented and—through the emphasis on vulnerability—fails to account for the agency of people with disabilities adequately, their heterogeneous motivations for migration and the structural constraints and discrimination they face (Izaguirre & Walsham, 2021).

Bell et al. (2020) argue for integrating a disability lens rooted in social relational models of disability into migration and climate change discourses. They propose that this approach challenges ableist dynamics that frame disabled migrants as either victims or burdens, failing to address structural inequities that perpetuate vulnerability. Beyond climate change, this perspective is relevant to diverse forms of migration—such as for work, education, or leisure—and to debates on the migration-development nexus across the Global South.

To avoid perpetuating epistemic inequalities rooted in colonial histories, disability and migration research must foreground scholars and activists from the Global South, addressing the marginalization of Southern theories and experiences in migration studies (Burns, 2024; Grech, 2016; Nguyen, 2018). This research should examine migrants acquiring disabilities abroad and how intersecting factors like disability, gender, and race shape their lives and those of their families at origin and destination. It should include migrants with physical or mental, visible or invisible disabilities moving within the Global South and those caring for disabled individuals in their home countries.

Ageing

Most of the literature on gender and migration deals with women of child-bearing age. For example, researchers working on gender, migration and health often choose to use WHO guidelines and focus on women aged 16 to 49 years old (see e.g. Riggirozzi et al., 2023). This is somewhat justified, given that women require specific support related to child-bearing during this period in their lives. However, this completely disregards

the fact that women continue to be sexually active as they age past this age range, for which there is very little recognition. As Lulle and King (2016) aptly argue, middle-aged women often choose migration to fulfil their dreams and desires, including seeking new intimacies. In addition, we also know that while categories, such as older citizens, sexually active person, etc., are often defined using specific age ranges, ageing is a process that takes place over a long period of time and differs— both physiologically as well as socially— for men and women.

The ‘ageing and migration’ literature is dominated by studies that are based on the experiences of migrants ageing in place in higher-income countries of the Global North (Hunter, 2011; Fokkema & Naderi, 2013; Sampaio & Walsh, 2023) or wealthier citizens, usually Europeans or North Americans, retiring to sunnier places in Southern Europe or in places such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Malaysia and Thailand in the Global South (Hayes, 2015, 2018; King et al., 2000; Toyota & Thang, 2017; Toyota & Xiang, 2012; Janoschka & Haas, 2014). More recent research has strived to broaden out and advance a ‘Southern’ perspective (Sampaio & Amrith, 2023); while in some regions, such as in Asia, there has also been some engagement with the topic of ageing and migration, both in relation to migrants as care-givers for older national citizens as well as in relation to their own ageing as their stays in destination countries get prolonged with the sequential renewals of their contracts (Amrith, 2021, 2022; Ho et al., 2022).

Countries in the Global North receive the largest numbers of migrants and have historically had policies that allow migrant workers and refugees to naturalise and/or retire. But many countries in the Global South also attract large numbers of migrant workers and refugees. Clearly, regional migration regimes influence whether migrants can settle and remain in their countries of destination after finishing their work there. In Asia, for example, it is much harder for migrants to settle in this way and ‘age in place’ given migration is managed through contractual arrangements (Walsham, 2022). Contract migration effectively limits the number of years that migrants can remain at destination. In most Asian countries, migrants are expected to stay only for the duration of their contract. Once these finish, they must return to their country of origin, although some do stay on, as has been shown by recent research in the Middle East (Akıncı, 2023) and Malaysia (Zulueta, 2024). Other regional centres of attraction for migrants, such as South Africa for the African region and Brazil and Argentina for South America, have been attracting large numbers of regional migrants for decades, and the regional migration regimes do allow the possibility for these migrants to ‘age in place’. However, only recently have studies in these regions started paying attention to what happens to migrants as they age and reach what in higher-income countries would constitute a retirement age (Mallimaci & Magliano, 2023; Schatz, 2009; Böcker & Hunter, 2022). In lower- and middle-income countries, social protection frameworks are much weaker, so pensions are generally limited to those who have worked in the formal sector— a minority (Barrientos, 2024; Zihindula et al., 2023). If having a job in the formal sector is a rarity for national citizens, it is even rarer for migrant workers, who generally have worse work opportunities than nationals. The experiences of these migrants are seldom covered in the literature on ageing and migration. They are often also overlooked in migration studies more generally, given the predominant focus on migrants who are younger and in their most economically active years (Bastia et al., 2022; Mallimaci & Magliano, 2023).

There is some attention that has been paid to migrants' older family members, the 'left-behind' (Toyota et al., 2007) or 'stayers' (Bastia & Calsina, 2025; Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2020). Following the pioneering research by Vullnetari and King (2008), several studies have researched the consequences that migration has for the migrants' parents in their countries of origin, including Ghana (Coe, 2017), Sri Lanka (Gamburd, 2020), India (Sreerupa, 2023), and various countries in Central and South America (Bastia & Calsina, 2025; Perez, 2023; Yarris, 2017). The predominant focus of these studies has been on transnational care, including questions about access to health care, communication, transnational visiting, and experiences at the end of life and death.

Some of this research has shown how migration regimes and socio-economic status mediate decisions surrounding transnational care. Wealthier families make the most of the opportunities afforded by migration, while those who come from poorer backgrounds struggle with long-term separations, inadequate communications, fragmented or ruptured travel plans brought about by immigration restrictions, and ill health (see Bastia et al., 2021; Bastia & Calsina, 2025). This research highlights the importance of class and socio-economic status in the ability of migrants and 'stayers' to practice transnational care.

Gender does feature in some of these discussions, given women's usually longer life expectancy and their generally heavy involvement in offering care to their grandchildren whose parents have migrated. However, while ageing and migration scholarship has to some extent incorporated gender, the gender and migration literature has yet to fully recognise the significance of ageing as a key process shaping migration experiences. Some of these shortcomings are starting to shift, particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of older people, including migrants. But, as others have argued, it is imperative that we pay greater attention to older women migrants and to the gendered experience of ageing among migrant populations, particularly given migrant women's continued critical contributions in the areas of social reproduction and care (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015; Mallimaci & Magliano, 2023).

Conclusion

This article underscores the need to broaden gender and migration scholarship to more robustly engage with South-South migration, which has long been overshadowed by an emphasis on South-North mobility. Rather than assuming a singular dynamic, we argue for comparative and context-sensitive approaches that attend to the distinct historical backgrounds, colonial legacies, political regimes and social institutions shaping migration in the Global South (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2023; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Daley, 2018). These structures impact how gender, class, race, age, and other stratification markers are constructed and contested through migration.

Although intersectionality has become increasingly central in migration studies, mainstream scholarship still largely centres on South-North dynamics. In this article, we offer a conceptual framework to advance intersectional research within South-South migration studies, with particular attention to underexplored axes of stratification. We focus on three domains—sexuality, disability, and ageing—that, while not entirely absent from the literature, remain significantly underdeveloped when considered at a global level. Although important regional differences exist, with some intersections receiving more scholarly attention in certain areas, the overall picture reveals persistent

gaps, particularly in comparative and multi-regional perspectives. Our review draws on research published in multiple languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese) to provide a broader and more inclusive mapping of existing scholarship and to highlight these enduring disparities.

As we show, migration research often operates through an implicit normative figure: the migrant as a cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual man in his prime working years. Thus, migration scholarship has to overcome male bias and gender blindness (Fresnoza-Flot, 2022) and further address the three thematic gaps we identify as relatively absent in the literature on intersectionality in general and within South-South migration (Bastia et al., 2023; Izaguirre & Walsham, 2021) in particular.

Two major challenges must be addressed. The first critical issue is the lack of data. Across the three neglected intersections we have identified, official statistics are inadequate or non-existent, and empirical data is scant. For example, heteronormativity still prevails in migration studies, along with the marginalisation of LGBT and queer migrants because of varying legal and cultural regimes. Similarly, data on migrant workers with disabilities—especially when broken down by gender—is almost nonexistent. Ageing among migrants is rarely examined, despite the growing number of older people in intra-regional migration flows. To address these gaps, researchers must work collaboratively to generate robust datasets and encourage comparative analyses across regions.

Second, intersectional research must be attentive to migrant agency. As prior studies show, gendered, racialized, and national identities take on different meanings in various South-South contexts, shaping how migrants resist, adapt, and strategize (Herrera, 2019). Understanding these processes is essential to consider how intersecting inequalities shape migrants' and their families' prospects at origin and destination.

Our discussion also carries implications for migration policy. As noted earlier, South-South migration governance varies widely. A nuanced understanding of thus far neglected intersecting inequalities can shed light on invisibilised groups and inform tailored policy interventions for migrants with specific needs in healthcare, social protection, education, and employment.

Finally, we hope this article contributes to a more plural and inclusive South-South migration scholarship—one that recognizes regional diversity and foregrounds neglected intersections. We see this work as a starting point for future research that is both comparative and attentive to the lived complexities of migration beyond dominant North-centric paradigms.

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Author contributions

L. Izaguirre and T. Bastia co-developed the article's conceptual framework, building on early framing papers by L. Izaguirre and M. Walsham. The main thematic sections were authored by T. Bastia (ageing), P. P. Cortés (sexuality), and M. Walsham (disability). L. Izaguirre drafted the remaining parts and, with T. Bastia, led the revision of the text. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declarations

Competing interests

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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