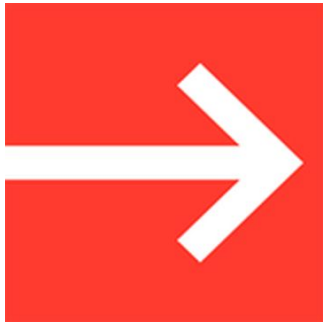


Men Ageing Between Switzerland and the « Global South »

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The « Global South » is becoming an increasingly common destination for older people ageing abroad. Older men traveling alone to spend several months a year in countries like Thailand or Brazil tend to be subject to ambiguous social judgment, that is, they are often associated with condemned sexual practices in imaginaries, but they may also be admired or envied by others. To overcome these preconceptions, a study looked at their multiple experiences and questioned the impact of social norms on

their practices and identities.

This case study focuses on the mobility experiences of six men between the ages of 60 and 70, whose habits include spending anything from three months to almost a year in the Antillean islands, Thailand, Madagascar, or Brazil. The studied men did not move abroad with a Swiss partner as a couple, but they were either single or in a relationship with a woman they had met in the South.

Opportunities for Transnational Mobility

Among the main motivations for transnational mobility seems to be an experienced or anticipated decrease in living standards. This mobility is therefore seen as a means of enhancing their financial conditions and improving their social status. Being wealthier in the “Global South” allows them to negotiate progressive and desirable ways out of working life. Moreover, being able to afford the assistance of low-paid local workers can be an advantageous option to face the increasing care needs due to ageing.

Their new economic and racialized status can also compensate for the decrease in their desirability and romantic attractiveness through redefining the importance of age in intimate relationships. Moreover, their newly improved financial means allow them not only new romantic opportunities but also the ability to shape relationships by, for example, buying a matrimonial home or providing a pension to free up their partner’s time. On the other hand, the expat community’s solidarity may also be an important source of care for single men and provide an alternative to the couple as the main caregiving unit.

Ageing and Migration as Potential Vulnerabilities

Crossing borders, as well as ageing, are both processes that bear the risk of marginalization and increasing precarity related to the migratory status, as well as to the health or physical conditions (Lafferty and Maher 2020). Moreover, economic and migratory statuses can lead to an unhappy love life, a breakup and financial loss. This is particularly true for countries, in which non-nationals have no property rights as is the case in Thailand.

Increasing care needs due to ageing make romantic relationships more attractive to the studied men, and for this reason, they seem more inclined to engage in relationships. In some cases, however, mobility itself can be an obstacle in establishing or maintaining a romantic relationship. Furthermore, the participants' ability to activate social rights, resources and their transnational network play a determining role in reducing economic precarity caused by forced, expensive stays in Switzerland for treatments or hospitalizations.

Gender Relations as an Essential Positioning Issue

In the western world, the social norms relative to old age and masculinity are seen as contradictory, and the identities of older men as paradoxical as per their physical condition, social (in)dependence and sexual activity (Spector-Mersel 2006). If transnational ageing may reduce some of these paradoxes experienced at the intersection of old age and masculinity for these men, it does not make them disappear. On the contrary, transnational mobility in old age renders these paradoxes more complex because of the geographical variation of norms.

These men have to deal with not only contradictions between ageing and masculinity, but also with cultural differences in the interpretations of the meaning of age and gender. This is the case in romantic and sexual relationships as well as with attitudes towards work, which might be accepted in the men's residences in the "Global South" and yet are condemned in Switzerland. Professional inactivity, the commodification of sexual relationships and age differences in romantic relationships are issues that systematically create tensions in the participants' narratives. Whether their actual everyday activities include engaging in such practices, the divergence in norms is sufficient to provoke the need to implicitly position oneself regarding these issues.

Building a Culture of Masculinity

During the interviews, the participants condemned behavior relative to privileges in certain cases and cautiously situated their own practices in opposition to those of other westerners publicly displaying their wealth or racial domination while living in the "Global South." To position themselves, they mobilize and redefine geographical, national, or racial imaginaries and outline forms of unacceptable masculinities. In some cases, the participants also referred to forms of hypermasculinity by condemning other men's competitive and hypersexual behavior as well as the frequent use of alcohol and violence. In doing so, the participants seem to moralize the enjoyment of privileges to preserve

their advantageous positions from being questioned by others. Indeed, taking advantage of a privilege implies the risk of damaging relationships with locals in both of their countries of residence.

In some other cases, the men interviewed seemed to be alluding to forms of hypomascularity by referring to other men's sexual frustration, naivety, and extreme kindness. In doing so, these participants seemed to be non-committal, thus perhaps avoiding disappointments in romantic relationships as well as potential financial losses. This search for a balance between allowing and preserving privileges seems to be articulated around gender relations and negotiations to outline (un)acceptable practices, which seem to occur in two different local contexts simultaneously. In doing so, the participants are contributing to the creation of new norms, and a specific culture of masculinity (Udrea, 2020) that answer to the specific needs of ageing, Swiss men living between Switzerland and the "Global South."

A Way Forward

It seems therefore important to use an intersectional lens to study the transnational ageing experiences of Swiss men moving to the "Global South" to grasp the diversity of social situations and understand the variety of ageing experiences. We would highly benefit from the development of theoretical approaches that combine intersectional and transnational lenses to explore questions of inequality in international retirement migration, particularly as these practices are not only increasing but are also transforming the identities of these men in later life.

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