

South-South migration from a gender and intersectional perspective: evidence from three country-corridors

WORKING PAPER



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1. INTRODUCTION

Global migration flows and their social and developmental causes, characteristics and consequences are inherently gendered. This applies to South-South migration flows as much as it does to other more studied migratory routes to, from and between destinations in the Global North. However, South-South migration may have distinctive characteristics in comparison to other forms of international migration, and this includes how gender dynamics and gendered inequalities shape and are shaped by migration within and between countries of the Global South. Building upon a global overview of gender, intersectionality and South-South migration (Izaguirre and Walsham, 2021), in this working paper we focus specifically on three migration corridors, Haiti-Brazil, Ghana-China and Nepal-Malaysia, which are sites for new empirical research being conducted by research teams on the MIDEQ project.

Migration flows in all three corridors are dominated by migration for work. However, in other respects they differ significantly – for example, in the kinds of work involved, the nature of formal and informal migration channels and the scale of intra- and inter-regional migration involved. Further, as the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare, while existing inequalities have shaped the experiences of labour migrants and their families at both origin and destination, the consequences are not uniformly distributed and are often highly gendered in nature. As such, the three settings provide an opportunity to explore both commonalities and heterogeneity in how South-South migration shapes and is shaped by gender relations/inequalities and their intersection with other social characteristics such as race and class. The review aims to capture and synthesise existing findings on gender and migration within the academic literature on these three corridors and to identify some gaps and areas for future research.

The literature was collected through database and online searches using SCOPUS, SciELO and Google Scholar and supplemented by additional material identified by research teams in individual countries as well as MIDEQ team members working on gender¹. The Haiti-Brazil section incorporates literature in English, French and Portuguese, while the China-Ghana section includes both English language and Chinese language material². Priority in all three corridors was given to literature with an intersectional approach – either implicit or explicit – that sought to explore how gender intersects with other social characteristics to shape the migration experience (see Izaguirre and Walsham, 2021 for a full discussion). The often scarce material on migrant women's experiences in the three corridors, in the context of predominantly male migration flows, is considered in detail where it exists.

¹ See the 'Acknowledgements' above for details.

² Author's names and references have been translated from Chinese into English and this is indicated in the bibliography where translated references are marked 'In Chinese'.

The review also incorporates a broader concern with gender relations between female and male migrants and non-migrants, and – where possible – a focus on migrant masculinities as well as femininities. Beyond these core concerns, the sub-themes in each corridor differ to some degree according to the nature of the migration flows involved.

2. HAITI-BRAZIL CORRIDOR

Haiti has a long history of emigration and cross-border mobility as a product of its political, social and economic order (Handerson, 2015). The Haitian diaspora, especially Haitian migrant women, have mostly been studied in Northern countries of destination (especially the United States, Canada and France) (Handerson and Joseph, 2015) or in the context of cross-border migration to the Dominican Republic. However, as migratory streams are reconfigured at the global level, including increasingly restrictive policies of access in many Northern countries, Haitian migration has been expanding its presence in countries of the South (INURED, 2020). A major turning point was the post-earthquake period from 2010 onwards in which Haitian migrants began to move to South America in significant numbers with migrant journeys often involving complex routes through and between countries of transit (e.g. Ecuador, Peru) and destination (e.g. Brazil, Chile).

MIGRATION TO BRAZIL

Brazil has increasingly attracted South-South migration flows in recent years and the country receives refugees and migrants from many different countries (Baeninger et al., 2018). This includes substantial intra-regional migration from other Latin American countries, with Bolivia and Paraguay the dominant countries of origin up to the 2010 census (Nair et al., 2021). The facilitation of migration under the Mercosur agreement combined with a shift following the 2008 global financial crisis towards an approach grounded in human rights concerns – at least prior to the election of President Bolsonaro – has made Brazil an attractive destination for both economic migrants and refugees and asylum seekers within the region (INURED, 2020). In the latter case, migrants arriving for humanitarian reasons are dominated by two main groups - Haitian nationals and, since 2016, Venezuelan nationals (Nair et al., 2021).

Haitian migration in Brazil only began to attract the attention of researchers within Brazilian migration studies when the numbers of migrants increased dramatically after the 2010 earthquake (Baeninger et al., 2017). Initially focused on São Paulo, the city that received the most Haitian migrants in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, research subsequently expanded throughout Brazil as Haitian migrants arrived and settled in an increasing number of cities. After four years, Haitians were present in 15 states out of 26, in addition to the Federal District of Brasília (Handerson, 2015). Consequently, in addition to major cities such as São

Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, research on Haitian migration now covers smaller cities like Santa Catarina, Porto Alegre, Londrina, Porto Velho and Manaus. However, while the academic literature on Haitian migration to Brazil is growing rapidly – if we include the work of established scholars along with doctoral dissertations and master’s theses – evidence analysed through a gender or intersectional lens is still quite limited³.

Haitian migrants in Brazil are mainly male, although statistics show a gradual increase in the presence of female migrants. Migrants who wish to obtain a work permit (*‘cartera de trabalho’*) to enter the formal labour market must register with the Brazilian Federal Police to access the ‘national migratory register’ or RNM (formerly the ‘national foreigner registry’ / RNE). According to Federal Police data, between 2010 and 2014 some 18,708 Haitian migrants entered the country, of whom 4,425 (23.6%) were women (Peres and Baeninger, 2017, p. 8). More recent data suggests an overall increase in migrant women applying for the *cartera de trabalho*, with Haitian women even outnumbering men in 2018 (Tonhati and Macedo, 2020). From 2011 to 2019, the largest occupational category for Haitian women migrants in the formal labour market was ‘cleaner’ – which includes hotel maids and those who clean public spaces – with significant numbers also working on factory production lines or in food services (Tonhati and Macedo, 2020, pp. 130 - 131).

However, these statistics do not include the large number of individuals who have applied for refugee status, with 34,691 Haitian nationals awaiting decisions on their applications in November 2020 (Observatory of Migration in São Paulo, undated). Nor do they capture undocumented migrants. As such, the presence of Haitian women may be less visible in official statistics because their incorporation into the labour market frequently occurs through informal domestic work. Some Haitian women also find jobs in socially invisible forms of employment such as sex work. For example, in their study of Haitian transit migration through Peru to Brazil, Vásquez et al. (2015) heard oral testimonies referring to Haitian women’s presence as sex workers in informal gold mining camps in the Madre de Dios region. However, reliable information is not available regarding Haitian women in the sex industry nor in many other informal occupations. Even in the official statistics 906 women appear as “unoccupied”, while 759 others have been labelled “occupation not classifiable” (Peres and Baeninger, 2017, p. 8). Another key feature of Haitian women in Brazil is that a majority are single (71%) and are between 25 and 34 years old. This, Peres and Baeninger (2017, p. 13) suggest, appears to confirm the hypothesis that they do not arrive through family reunification channels, but migrate independently, although

³ For example, in a special issue of *Periplos*, a Brazilian academic Journal on South-South migration —“Imigração haitiana no Brasil: estado das artes” (2017) – only one of fourteen papers drew on a gender or intersectional framework.

it is also possible that some single women may emigrate to join their partners without being married to them.

PRECARIOUS WORK AND DOWNWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY

Existing studies of Haitian migrants to Brazil that employ a gender or intersectional lens frequently explore the experiences of Haitian women employed in precarious work and their perceptions of downward social mobility and status loss (Dutra, 2017; Handerson and Joseph, 2015; Sana et al., 2017).

During ethnographic fieldwork in Manaus, Handerson and Joseph (2015) approached Haitian women from the middle classes (former traders and workers in the service sector) and with a previous migration background (in Ecuador and the Dominican Republic). These women had experienced social downgrading, going from “gran fanm” (“important women”) to domestic workers. This work occupies a strongly racialised niche in the context of South America and the authors deploy the New International Division of Labour theoretical framework (Federicci, 2002) to show how processes of racialisation and gender-role assignation result in potential employers recruiting Haitian women only for specific jobs. Thus, when seeking domestic workers (e.g., nannies, cleaning ladies and cooks) employers did so directly from migrants’ shelters in Manaus, aiming to recruit migrant women for those tasks (Handerson and Joseph, 2015, p. 21). They also describe Haitian women’s disappointment concerning working conditions and wages in Brazil. Their labour trajectories are marked by instability, since their jobs are precarious and informal, and they lack work permits that provide access to social protection. Women thus move from one job to another, unable to earn enough to send remittances to their families in Haiti.

Another study by Dutra (2017) draws on interviews with Haitian migrants living in the Federal District of Brasília. In her sample, she identifies some important differences between men and women, with migrant men being younger and generally more educated than women. Thus, while most women had not completed their primary education (57%), this was true for only a minority of men (30%). Most Haitian women got their first job as domestic workers, before later working in the wider service sector as cleaning ladies, cooks, waitresses and self-employed salespeople. Occupational segregation by gender was combined with uniformly low wages and almost no scope for social mobility due to migrants’ precarity and vulnerability, with almost all Haitian migrants (both men and women) earning just above the minimum wage, and some – albeit a minority – receiving lower wages than their Brazilian colleagues for the same roles (Dutra, 2017).

In the Rio Grande do Sul region, Mejía and Cazarotto (2017) found that most Haitian women they interviewed were previously self-employed in the service or

trade sectors in Haiti. While, as with Dutra (2017), women in the early post-earthquake migration flows had lower educational attainment than their male counterparts, those who arrived since 2015 had equivalent education levels. In Rio Grande do Sul, women mostly found manual jobs in food industry plants where they do not have to speak Portuguese. Being previously self-employed, many reported finding it challenging to be under such close supervision at work. The authors also identified some other gender-related issues concerning initial migration decisions, labour incorporation and social relations at destination. First, they argue that the migration decision-making process was not an individual decision for most women, but a family-based one. Second, in accessing employment women faced greater challenges than Haitian men as recruiters from local business preferred not to hire women because “they got pregnant just after starting working” (Mejía and Cazarotto, 2017, p. 184). Indeed, the perception among employers – repeated by a male leader within the Haitian community – was that Haitian women frequently become pregnant. However, while the birth of children in Brazil does enable migrants to access the “Registro Nacional de Estrangeiro” and, thus, to secure permanent residency in the country, it should be noted that there is no direct evidence to support these claims. Further, the Haitian leader above described the issue as a ‘double edged sword’, facilitating access to permanent residency for some while at the same time undermining women’s access to employment opportunities. Third, the authors identify practices of ‘masculine domination’ among Haitian migrant couples, reinforced in the context of religious practices, particularly in Pentecostal churches. At the same time, they acknowledge that, while Haitian women migrants’ social lives appear to be quite limited, these churches also provide spaces of protection, social relations and solidarity.

On a related note, Alles and Cogo (2018) explore the way communication technologies have impacted on the ability of Haitian domestic workers to network with fellow nationals. The authors identified some forms of activism in the public sphere carried out by Haitian women. They argue that information and communication technologies are perceived by these women as a key tool to deconstruct common stereotypes of Haitian migration, and as a means for establishing a presence outside the domestic sphere.

ACCESSING EDUCATION AND HEALTH SERVICES

Haitian migrants’ motivations for coming to Brazil also involve educational goals, especially since higher education institutions were particularly badly affected by the earthquake (Alles and Cogo, 2018; Ledix, 2017; Mejía and Cazarotto, 2017). In the aftermath of the disaster, the Brazilian government launched the Emergency Pro-Haiti Higher Education Program to facilitate access to a university education for Haitian citizens through affirmative action. Seventy-eight Haitian students benefited from these scholarships, although the programme’s initial goal was to award 500 in

total (Alphonse and Macedo, 2017). Other efforts have been made by Brazilian institutions to provide qualifications to Haitian migrants, but they remain quite limited in scale (e.g. Portuguese lessons, affirmative action-based recruitment in some universities). One example is the Pro-Haiti Special Program at the Universidade Federal da Integração Latino Americana (Unila), which benefits Haitian women with high educational backgrounds through scholarships and access to financial assistance (Schiavini and Souza, 2019). However, research has also shed light on how Haitian students experience racism and discrimination which hinders their prospects in Brazilian universities and leads some individuals to withdraw from their studies (Bizon and Dangió, 2018).

Finally, some studies have analysed the access of Haitian migrant women to health services. Most focus on sexual and reproductive health or maternal care services, often with the aim of improving social interventions in this area (Allebrandt et al., 2017; Batista et al., 2018; Sitta, 2018). For example, Batista et al. (2018) found that a lower proportion of Haitian women in Mato Grosso compared to Brazilian women had at least 6 prenatal consultations and that the prevalence of low birth weight in live births among Haitian mothers was higher. Jardim (2017) analysed the provision of care to pregnant Haitian women in a public hospital in Porto Alegre using the governmentality framework. The author highlighted how technologies of control are imposed on the bodies, lives and itineraries of these women. Haitian migrants with legal residency status are thus still seen as ‘foreigners’ with no rights by public service agents and have to navigate substantial bureaucratic obstacles and prejudice to access health services.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDAS

This review of the literature has assessed what is known about the gendered characteristics of migration from Haiti to Brazil a decade after the arrival of Haitian migrants in Brazilian territory began on a large scale. The results are mixed. In general, research on the Haitian presence in Brazil is still rooted in quite local, descriptive studies about particular aspects of the migration experience in specific cities or regions. The territorial expansion of the Haitian presence in the country has not yet been addressed through comparative studies, for example contrasting these local reception contexts. Further research should link local experiences to more general and macro-structural levels of analysis.

Although this is a predominantly male migration flow, the migration of Haitian women has increased over time, at least until 2014 (Peres and Baeninger, 2017). Nevertheless, most studies remain gender blind, neither directly exploring the experiences of migrant women, nor investigating how the gendered nature of migrants lives and livelihoods in Brazil affects male and female Haitian migrants. One potential difficulty for researchers in getting access to Haitian women is the language barrier since it is men who have historically migrated, often learning

several languages in the process. Other researchers have also described difficulties in speaking with Haitian women because “married women only accepted to be interviewed with their partners, or with the partner’s permission” (De Oliveira et al., 2018, p. 153). The employment situation of most Haitian women – in domestic service, other informal occupations or unemployed — also makes them less visible in public spaces. Finally, even though this is predominantly a male migration stream, research has not yet addressed the issue of Haitian masculinities in the context of migration.

Within the literature that adopts a gendered or intersectional perspective, we have also identified some other gaps. Studies highlight the vulnerable position that many Haitian women occupy because they are poor, black and have little educational capital. However, we lack an analysis that systematically identifies in what contexts, and to what extent, these multiple social positions act, interact and produce conditions of inequality. In this regard, the interlinkages between domestic work, gender and race cannot be understood without taking into account the Brazilian colonial heritage and history of slavery, both of which are crucial in understanding contemporary Brazil (Vidal, 2012). Slavery has been associated for a long time with domestic work and its most demeaning aspects. Moreover, in post-slavery Brazil, paid domestic work has historically been a niche for internal migrants and black women (Dutra and Matos, 2016). The arrival of Haitian migrants introduces further complexity to this situation and requires an interrogation of how these social inequalities are reinforced or transformed in migration contexts. Thus, future research would benefit from addressing the specific mechanisms that lead to the construction of Haitian women as subaltern subjects, in contrast to other women occupying similar positions in Brazilian society (e.g., black Brazilian women who are internal migrants or other South American migrant domestic workers).

The social landscape of Haitian migrants in Brazil should also encourage researchers to include religion within their intersectional analyses. As noted above, several authors have identified the importance of evangelical and other Christian churches in the daily lives of Haitians in Brazil. Indeed, the role of religion has also been highlighted in relation to migration facilitation networks during the transit of Haitian migrants through other countries (Vásquez et al., 2015). Finally, all the papers cited above draw attention to the difficulties Haitian migrants face in affording their rent and accessing decent housing. The heavy burden of housing expenses is thus a major barrier to the greater inclusion of migrants in Brazil, but no studies tackled this aspect directly. New research should seek to engender the ‘right to the city’ perspective and explore the impact of this type of exclusion on migrant women in particular, as well as how gender relations structure the engagement of migrant women and men in grassroots and migrants’ organisations to claim these rights (Bastia, 2018).

All these potential avenues for research have been given additional impetus by the very severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and their families across the Global South. As described above, Haiti is highly reliant on remittances and initial evidence from this project suggests that while remittances from the Global North increased in 2020, those from the Global South declined (INURED, 2020). In Brazil, reports of anti-immigrant sentiments and xenophobia following COVID-19 appear to have been compounded by a lack of transparency on migrant populations from the Brazilian Ministry of Health and an increase in deportations, particularly to Bolivia (INURED, 2020, p. 23). Remittances from Brazil to Haiti declined significantly after April 2020, although they recovered towards the end of the year and Brazilian Federal Police data for 2020 registered a smaller decrease in Haitian migrants compared to migrants from other countries, especially among men (INURED 2020; Cavalcanti and de Oliveira, 2020). It is too early to understand the gendered dimensions of these effects, both on remittances and families at origin as well as among migrants at destination. However, what is clear is that COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing inequalities Haitian migrants face and that this includes migrants in Brazil, not least the significant number of Haitian women working in the informal sector without any protections. Further research on this issue is an urgent priority and will contribute towards a broader understanding of the gendered and intersectional inequalities that shape the experiences of Haitian migrants in Brazil and their families back in Haiti.

3. CHINA-GHANA CORRIDOR

Although movements between China, Ghana and other African countries have a long history, the scale of contemporary migration flows is comparatively new. Thus, large-scale immigration from mainland China to countries across Africa started only relatively recently and appears to be enhanced by China's interest in Africa's natural resources and in strengthening broader political relations and economic ties with African states through bilateral aid and investments in infrastructure and other sectors (Mohan and Kale, 2007). At the same time, the growing presence in China of migrant entrepreneurs and students from a variety of African countries, including Ghana, has been attracting increasing attention from scholars and policy makers in recent years, especially those migrants living in trading centres like Guangzhou.

MIGRATION BETWEEN CHINA, GHANA AND OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES

In the 1990s, the Chinese government implemented the 'Going Out' policy to encourage Chinese companies – especially state-owned enterprises – to invest in developing countries, mainly in Africa (Mohan et al. 2014), following which the number of Chinese migrants gradually increased across the continent (Yang Beibei, 2019). Chinese migrants in Africa remain, however, a minority of overseas Chinese

across the world and despite increasing economic and political links with African states, migration policies at the national and regional level barely mention China as a country of origin for migrants. For example, although nearly half of ECOWAS countries in West Africa have bilateral labour agreements in place with countries outside the region, most are with other African or European states and Sierra Leone is the only country to have an agreement with China (ICMPD and IOM, 2015, p. 60).

While there is a substantial body of literature on Chinese migrants in Europe, the United States and Australia, studies of Chinese international immigration with a focus on the Global South have until recently been mainly concerned with countries in Southeast Asia. However, following the rapid growth of migration to countries across Africa since the turn of the century, these migration flows have begun to attract increasing academic attention (Lin Sheng et al, 2017). For example, Chinese scholars have explored the history and experiences of Chinese migrants in Africa (Li Anshan, 2000; Wan Xiaohong, 2007; Li Pengtao, 2010) and conducted studies on social integration and cultural conflicts (Chen Fenglan, 2012; Zhou Haijin, 2014; Shen Xiaolei, 2015), personal and material security among Chinese migrants (Lin Sheng and Zhu Yu, 2015) and the Chinese business economy in Africa (Li Qirong, 2013).

Migration streams from African countries to China have also become the focus of increasing scholarly attention over the last two decades (Bertoncello and Bredeloup, 2007; Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2009; Zhou et al., 2016), especially regarding the presence of traders and entrepreneurs (Marfaing and Thiel, 2014a; Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2009); of African university students (Bredeloup, 2014a); and of an increasing number of mixed marriages between African migrants and Chinese partners (Zhou, 2017). Chinese scholars have conducted a significant amount of research, which – as with English language scholarship (Liang and Le Billon, 2018) – often focuses on African ‘enclaves’ in Guangzhou. Among other things, this research has explored social networks and social interaction among African migrants in China (Xu Tao, 2009), the causal determinants of African migration (Liang Yucheng, 2013) and the formation, development and spatial distribution of African migrant communities in China (Li Zhigang et al, 2008). Much of the existing literature in both Chinese and English, however, analyses the ‘African’ presence in China as a whole, gathering under that label migrants from different countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Mali and Zambia. As such, it obscures potential differences in migration flows from different countries and regions within Africa to China. It is therefore important to explore migration dynamics between specific African countries and China at both origin and destination. Similarly, while there may be commonalities to be identified across West Africa or the African continent as a whole, the experiences of Chinese migrants in Ghana are deserving of specific attention in their own right.

In the China-Ghana corridor, two main dynamics seem to stand out. The first concerns the migration and circulation of traders (Chinese and Ghanaian) dealing in

'Made-in-China' products between the two countries. This dynamic can be associated with forms of migrant entrepreneurship. The second concerns Chinese migrants – miners as well as entrepreneurs – in Ghana attracted by the profitability of small-scale gold mining production, popularly known as 'galamsey'. We address the gendered dimensions of each of these in the sections that follow. Beginning with transnational trade and entrepreneurship among both Chinese and Ghanaian migrants, we firstly explore these regarding gendered trading practices and labour relations, before a consideration of broader social and community relations. Following this, we address the gendered consequences of Chinese informal mining activities in Ghana.

GENDER AND TRANSNATIONAL TRADE

Concerning transnational trade and entrepreneurship, a significant Chinese presence in Africa became apparent only in the twenty-first century. Although the evidence suggests that this form of migration is a growing phenomenon, it is still rather "temporary" and "experimental" in nature (Lam, 2015). Likewise, the African presence in cities such as Guangzhou and Yiwu is seen by most migrants as an entrepreneurial opportunity only for a relatively short period of time, particularly after China passed stricter immigration laws in 2007 (Bertoncello and Bredeloup, 2009; Bredeloup, 2014b; and see below for further discussion, including on restrictions enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic). Even though most of the literature on African traders and entrepreneurs in China is focused on male migrants – either explicitly or implicitly – African women have also historically played a significant – in some cases dominant – role in cross-border trade (Brenton, Gamberoni and Sear, 2013; Desai, 2009). This includes Ghana where women have a long association with trading and a key role in cross-border trade, although gendered constraints in their access to credit and transportation lead many to concentrate on agricultural and food products for street or market trading rather than less perishable and value-added goods more often traded by men (Desai, 2009; Wrigley-Asante, 2013). Similar constraints also limit the role of women in longer-distance trading with countries outside of Africa, but a small number of studies have begun to explore the experiences of Ghanaian women involved in inter-continental trading and entrepreneurship (Bowles, 2013; Darkwah, 2007; 2009; 2016). However, very little research has studied female traders from Ghana in China specifically and, with only limited exceptions, this represents a major gap in the literature at present.

Zhou (2017), during her fieldwork in Guangzhou, found some Ghanaian women traveling and trading worldwide who were the primary earners in their families. Obeng's (2019a, 2019b) research on Ghanaians in China also highlighted some gendered dimensions of transnational trade that reflected financial and social inequalities between men and women. While he encountered similar numbers of male and female Ghanaians studying in China, female traders were in a significant

minority and concentrated on imports of “soft” commodities requiring limited capital (e.g. jewellery, clothes and textiles) in contrast with the focus of male traders on more capital intensive and higher volume ‘hard’ commodities (e.g. wall and floor tiles and vehicle parts). Female traders were also noticeably older than most male traders. Obeng attributes this later entry to women’s unequal access to financial capital, the practice of handing viable businesses to male rather than female children, and the domestic and gendered responsibilities of women – especially those with young children – that make long-distance business travel difficult (2019b, p. 1617). At the same time, he also notes that these categories were not universal and that some traders crossed gender barriers, for example one woman was a leading importer of spare parts for vehicles (Obeng, 2019a, p. 73).

Some further insights into the gendered dimensions of transnational trade come from a paper by Bowles (2013) on young Ghanaian returnee women working as transnational traders. The author interviewed a number of women who owned wholesale businesses trading in goods made in China. This trade generated significant profits enabling women to purchase land and luxury goods and to journey multiple times a year to China and North America. Transnational entrepreneurial endeavours are deeply rooted, following Bowles, in a tradition of mobility within families, and in social and cultural capital built upon through studies abroad. In a more detailed manner, Kwami (2016) draws on feminist and post-colonial perspectives to study the role of mobile phones in transnational Ghanaian women’s trade activities with China. The author shows that mobile phones are “embedded in the livelihood practices of Ghanaian women in the informal sector” (2016, p. 154). They are tools for doing business, for parenting at long distance, for dealing with spouses’ surveillance, and for constructing network capital. The author’s analysis explores intersections between generation, class and educational attainment to demonstrate that these transnational traders are highly heterogeneous and occupy differentiated positions at the margins of global trade. As a result, these women deal unevenly with globalising forces, forging multiple alternative pathways towards their own development goals.

The asymmetric dynamics of globalisation are also locally grounded in Ghanaian marketplaces, which are primarily located in the informal economy. These areas are privileged spaces for migrants – internal or international – looking for economic opportunities. Among the studies that explicitly address the gendered dimensions of these experiences, Giese and Thiel (2015) explore how the presence of Chinese migrant traders has transformed the conditions of female head porters – “kayayei” who are themselves internal migrants from the northern region of Ghana – in public spaces in Accra. The Makola market area, for example, brings together hundreds of Chinese wholesale traders along with female head porters. Adopting a place-making perspective, they show how these women display strategies of visibility and affirmation in public markets and private shops, entering into tacit or informal

agreements with Chinese traders, who prefer not to antagonise them. These are spaces of co-existence and cooperation, but also tension, since the Chinese presence is ultimately perceived as a threat to the livelihoods of locals.

Another aspect of made-in-China goods trading in Ghana concerns labour relations. Some authors have investigated difficulties emerging between Chinese employers and their Ghanaian employees (Giese, 2013; Giese and Thiel, 2014). They show how representations and perceptions of the Chinese presence in Ghana – as in the rest of the African continent – are based on stereotypes and anti-Chinese feeling. In part, this may reflect the commercial competition that has emerged between Chinese and Ghanaian traders, which has deeply affected Ghanaian small-scale entrepreneurs who may feel a sense of relative deprivation (Marfaing and Thiel, 2011). It is in this context that Chinese traders and importers are systematically prey to rumours, for example about dangers related to low-quality Chinese products or that the Makola market was to be sold to a Chinese investor (Marfaing and Thiel, 2014b). In this literature, the gendered dimension of Sino-Ghanaian relations is not adequately taken into account, although different class positions and inequalities within and between both national groups seem to play a major role.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Gender relations play a significant role in structuring Chinese migrants' social relationships in Ghana. Lam's (2015) paper on the adaptation strategies of Chinese newcomers in Ghana noted that relations between Chinese migrants and Ghanaians expose the interplay of gender, class and ethnicity. The Chinese community openly discriminates against unions between Chinese women and Ghanaian men, whereas marriages between Chinese women and Ghanaian men of Lebanese or Indian origin are perceived to offer better prospects. The author notes,

“This type of marriage is beneficial to the Chinese side because it helps them them to obtain residential rights and business advantages as Lebanese and Indian men in Ghana are usually considered well settled and of higher socio-economic status. The Chinese in Ghana accept this form of marriage more readily than a marriage with an ordinary Ghanaian, which they consider to be marrying down, regardless of the social background of the Chinese wife.”
(Lam, 2015, p. 33).

Two elements seem to play a key role here. First, the national category 'Ghanaian' fails to grasp intra-group diversity – i.e., between Ghanaians with foreign origins and Ghanaians without them – and the social inequalities between individuals with the same citizenship. And second, although race is not explicitly discussed within the article, it seems that the Chinese in Ghana draw on a racial hierarchy to privilege a marriage with men of Lebanese and Indian descent. Thus, the interplay of

class, race and gender sheds lights on how “marrying down” is defined within the Chinese community in Ghana. In a later paper, Lam (2019) also briefly explores the experiences of two highly successful, unmarried female Chinese entrepreneurs who are part of the foreign business elite in Ghana. However, since both were unwilling to discuss their experiences directly – in part, because they were in non-marital relationships with other established entrepreneurs – the author can only briefly explore some of the complexities and challenges they face in navigating the gendered and racialised social and business fields of migrant elites in Ghana.

On the Chinese side of this corridor, various authors have explored the social characteristics of African communities of traders and entrepreneurs in China. As noted above, these articles mainly refer to migrant traders from across Africa rather than to specific countries, even where studies acknowledge their diverse origins and, in the case of Zhou et al. (2016), discuss the problematic homogenisation of Africans as a single ‘foreigner’ group by Chinese locals. In most cases, African migrants living in Guangzhou jointly rent apartments or stay in family hotels, resulting in the emergence of “transient households.” These households are characterised by relatively simple furniture, limited space and household members with high mobility and without kinship ties. Limited interactions with neighbours, informal or vague agreements with landlords and tensions with the Guangzhou authorities constrain their integration into Chinese society (Niu Dong, 2016). At the same time, African migrants in Guangzhou have formed social organisations, usually based on common nationality and leaders within the community, providing mutual aid and guidance and representing their interests in interacting with other organisations or groups. The emergence of these associations can be understood in terms of communal values and a strengthened sense of national identity among Africans living abroad, but also as a response to the stressful situation the Guangzhou authority has created for African migrants. These include new measures requiring residents to report any ‘malpractice’ in which foreigners are involved and increasingly tight registration requirements for residents and controls on visa extensions (Castillo, 2016; Niu Dong, 2015; Pelican and Dong, 2017; Pieke et al., 2019).

Another important issue in relation to China as a destination for African migrants is intercultural or binational marriages and unions. Research has documented how African-Chinese couples pursue a strategy of ‘integration in segregation’ to deal with social discrimination, coordinate social relations and address challenges related to the household registration system and immigration management policy (Zhou Yang and Li Zhi, 2016). Zhou’s (2017) doctoral dissertation also explored the challenges faced by African men (including Ghanaians) and Chinese women in couples. In their role as traders and entrepreneurs, the legal status of Africans in China is not a major issue. However, since their status is based on an assumption of “short-term mobility” they are not eligible for permanent residence, making their access to social services and resources difficult (Zhou, 2017, p. 75). This has an impact on romantic and

family relationships and can have long-term, intergenerational impacts as the lack of access to social services and resources can also be transferred to their children under the rule of the “hukou”⁴ system. Zhou notes,

“As migrants, Chinese partners are not eligible for the same social welfare as locals, nor are their Chinese-African children, some of whom are born out of wedlock where neither parent has Guangzhou hukou. Normally, children are automatically given Chinese nationality when they are born in China and have at least one Chinese parent. They are required to register their hukou in their Chinese parents’ place of origin. Because the hukou of their Chinese parents is outside of Guangzhou, African-Chinese children born and living in Guangzhou are not considered Guangzhou residents (Zhou, 2017, p. 111).”

Obeng (2019a) also remarks on the precarious situation of even long-term Ghanaian residents in China, including those who are married and whose children are Chinese citizens. As these studies show, binational unions among African men and Chinese women are thus marked by instability due to cultural, religious, educational and gender differences, as well as by the legal and institutional frameworks.

CHINESE MINERS IN GHANA

Concerning small-scale gold mining as a driver for the Chinese presence in Ghana, researchers have explored its geopolitical, ecological and economic implications, placing special emphasis on the transformation of traditional Ghanaian artisanal mining practices. They point out that since 2000 this ‘gold rush’ has attracted approximately 50,000 irregular Chinese migrants, especially from Shanglin County, a Chinese region well known for its alluvial gold mining (Botchwey et al., 2019, p. 310). Among Chinese migrants, women account for only 5% of the total number of gold miners, and most do not directly engage in gold mining activities but carry out tasks such as washing and cooking. Young male miners account for the vast majority of gold miners and since most are living in isolated locations without family or spouses, prostitution and gambling have gradually emerged in mining areas. As a result, there are also a small number of Chinese women engaged in prostitution since the income from the ‘gold rush’ has made it sufficiently lucrative for some women to migrate to Ghana (Cao Weimeng, 2014). These women mostly come from Fujian Province and are organised under the leadership of bosses, in contrast with the informal sex work practices of local Ghanaians. Not all come voluntarily and the Ghanaian media has reported on the trafficking of Chinese

⁴ The *hukou* system categorises Chinese people born in urban areas as ‘residents’ (*jumin*/居民) and those born in rural areas as ‘peasants’ (*nongmin*/农民) with each category having different social statuses and rights (Zhou, 2017, p. 107).

women in order to prostitute them, with the complicity of some corrupt Ghanaian officials (Antwi-Boateng and Akudugu, 2020).

For local residents, benefits from small-scale mining are highly differentiated and the gold rush may actually increase or exacerbate inequalities among Ghanaians whose livelihoods depend on mining or mining-related activities, as well as with those not directly involved but whose livelihoods may still be impacted. Some of these inequalities are gender-related. This includes the impact of small-scale mining on sex workers and the exploitation of women sustained by this economic activity, who are recruited locally as well as from other parts of Ghana (Antwi-Boateng and Akudugu, 2020). Other economic activities traditionally carried out by women – for example, working as cooks or doing laundry – are also supported by informal mining. Stopping this form of gold extraction may therefore negatively impact Ghanaians who depend on these activities and for this reason some local communities may also want Chinese miners to stay (Liu, 2014 cited by Botchwey et al., 2019, p. 320). In contrast, those working in agriculture may find that the environmental impacts of gold mining undermine their livelihoods, potentially exacerbating food insecurity among women and children who are already at greatest risk. Finally, there are those Ghanaians at the bottom of the social hierarchy – disproportionately women, children and young people – who can only work with the scraps left by the Chinese miners' machines. As Botchwey et al. state, this painful and difficult work involves, "rewashing gravel in heaps of 'tailings' at pits that have been abandoned after intensive mining with the Chinese machinery" (2019, p. 319).

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDAS

In this corridor, research drawing on a gender or intersectional perspective is scarce. Most studies leave the reader to assume that they refer to male migrants. This is the case in many of the articles on Chinese small-scale mining and, to a lesser extent, on transnational trading between China and Ghana. Since a gender perspective was mostly absent from these works, we conclude here by identifying some gender-related aspects of these migration dynamics that deserve to be explored and analysed in greater detail.

In relation to mining in Ghana, some authors have linked the presence of Chinese miners in this region to radical transformations in the living conditions of Ghanaians residing locally. Women in small-scale mining communities must deal with the harmful environmental consequences of this activity, which threatens the food security of those who make a living from agriculture. In contrast, the livelihoods of some women who depend on the presence of informal Chinese miners could be seriously affected if this activity were to disappear. Further research is needed to engender the analysis of these issues and to address the invisibility of many women in these spaces: How does this informal and irregular economy affect Ghanaians and in what ways are these effects gendered? What are the roles of women and how

do they intersect with other inequalities such as class, ethnicity and race? Further research could analyse the gendered impacts for local communities, for Chinese miners and their families, and for Chinese women working as sex-workers or in other vulnerable roles.

A similar approach would address the significant gaps in knowledge on how gender structures the practices and experiences of male and female Chinese traders in Accra and across other parts of Ghana. The evidence is a little more developed regarding African women traders in China and their male counterparts, but an intersectional approach would deepen the understanding of how these experiences vary for different women by class, ethnicity or other key characteristics that structure the social environment. It would also be of value to explore in-depth how these issues are experienced by Ghanaian migrants specifically, with little research that aims to understand the experiences of specific regional or national African migrant communities in China, nor whether the gendered experiences of migrants differ significantly within and between these communities.

Finally, as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, evidence emerged that Africans in China faced significant discrimination, including enforced testing and quarantine, forcible evictions and the refusal to provide services at restaurants and on transport (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The abuse was sufficiently severe for several African governments, including Ghana, to complain through diplomatic channels. Similarly, the spread of COVID-19 led to incidents of anti-Chinese discrimination or 'Sinophobia' across many different African countries (Lukamba et al., 2020). The particular challenges faced by Ghanaian migrants in China and Chinese migrants in Ghana, as well as gendered differences in how this affected migrant women and men, have not yet been explored in detail. This represents an important task in its own right. It also serves to highlight the underlying prejudice that many African and Chinese migrants face, strengthening the call above for explicit analysis that draws attention to how gender intersects with race to shape the experiences of both Chinese and Ghanaian migrants.

4. NEPAL-MALAYSIA CORRIDOR

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that on average over 1,100 migrants left Nepal each day to work temporarily outside the country (Shrestha, 2019) and that one quarter of households in Nepal had at least one absent family member (Ghimire et al., 2018). Historically dominated by migration to India, work-related migration to other destinations increased six-fold between 2001 and 2011, mostly involving male migrants heading to Malaysia and the Persian Gulf countries of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Kuwait (Shrestha, 2019). By the end of this period, 0.9 million Nepali men worked across these six countries, accounting for 90% of male Nepali migrants outside of India. Nepali women

represent a smaller but nonetheless significant flow of migrant labour to a similar set of countries. However, as will be discussed in greater detail below, a more restrictive legislative regime for female migrants has resulted in a high proportion of women migrating through irregular rather than official channels (Simkhada et al., 2018; WOREC, 2012).

Emerging in the 2000s as one of the top destinations for Nepali labour migrants, migration to Malaysia peaked in 2013/2014 when over 40% of all migrant labour permits were issued for Malaysia (Government of Nepal et al., 2018). However, in recent years, migration between the two countries has been disrupted by two major events. First, in 2018, Nepali media covered fraudulent hiring practises and artificially high prices charged for visas and medical checks required for working in Malaysia. The revelations resulted in a 16-month long suspension in issuing labour permits for Malaysia by the Nepali government. This froze migration in the corridor until late 2019, when the governments of the two countries signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' setting out employers' responsibility to bear the costs of visas and travel arrangements (Dixit, 2019; Mandal, 2019a, 2019b; Poudel, 2019; Sapkota, 2019; Sapkota and Alhadjr, 2018).

While this demonstrated political will to address some of the endemic problems Nepali workers going to Malaysia face during the pre-departure process, and as migration in the corridor was recovering from the ban, the global spread of COVID-19 in 2020 once again put migration in the corridor on hold. Both countries imposed restrictions on mobility and the entry of foreigners, while reduced production and economic activity led to large-scale redundancies among migrant workers in Malaysia. During the Malaysian 'Movement Control Order' imposed to contain the virus, authorities carried out raids on migrant communities, deporting those without a documented right to stay in the country; while Nepali authorities started repatriating stranded workers back to Nepal via chartered flights (Bernama, 2020a; Al Jazeera, 2020; Khadka, 2020; Razali, 2020). As part of the Malaysian plan for economic recovery, the Ministry of Human Resources issued a freeze on the entry of all new foreign workers until at least the end of 2020 in an effort to address rising unemployment in Malaysia (Bernama, 2020b). As such, migration between the two countries is currently characterised by uncertainty, restrictions and a rapidly evolving policy and legal regime, which may manifest itself in increased informality and migrants having few options beyond undocumented status.

Despite migration in the corridor being extensive and, in recent times, also quite volatile, the specific characteristics of migration between the two countries are not often addressed directly. Thus, in the academic literature, Nepali migration to Malaysia is most often studied as part of a wider and more generalised focus on international migration from Nepal or on foreign workers temporarily migrating to Malaysia. We will briefly review some of this material, including work exploring its

gendered characteristics, before focusing more specifically on the Nepal-Malaysia corridor.

MIGRATION FROM NEPAL

Nepal regularly appears as one of the top national receivers of migrants' remittances (Ratha et al., 2019). For 2017, the World Bank estimated that remittances to Nepal amounted to US\$ 6.9 billion, constituting 27.5% of the country's GDP (World Bank, 2017). Though exact data is lacking, a number of studies have addressed the impacts of these remittances on poverty and rural development in Nepal (Maharjan, Bauer, and Knerr, 2013; Seddon et al., 2002; Shrestha, 2017), often framing international migration as vital for rural livelihoods yet indicative of deprivation and a fragile environment (Sharma, 2008). While Malaysia is generally seen as one of the most significant sources of remittances to Nepal (Bhandari, 2016), the World Bank estimated the value of remittances from Malaysia to Nepal at just US\$ 190 million in 2017 – or roughly 3% of total received remittances. However, these estimates are based on host and origin incomes as well as estimated migrant stocks, not officially recorded data. As a result, they are likely to reflect incomplete data on migrants (not least the high number of undocumented migrants in Malaysia) and do not take into account the many informal channels migrants rely on for sending and carrying their money, meaning the actual amount is likely to be higher (Seddon, Adhikari, and Gurung, 2002).

While international migration is an important source of income in Nepal, another set of studies have highlighted the very real risks to migrant workers' health and lives (Adhikary, Keen and van Teijlingen, 2018; Adhikary et al., 2017; Adhikary et al., 2018; Aryal et al., 2016; Joshi, Simkhada and Prescott, 2011). Adhikary et al. (2018) find that over 13% of returning Nepali migrants in the construction industry suffered from poor physical health and nearly a quarter suffered from mental health issues. Every year more than 1,000 Nepali deaths are registered while working abroad, of which over 10% are suicides (Aryal et al., 2016). Moreover, a concerning number of deaths are caused by cardiac arrest, often related to poor working conditions such as excessive working hours and heat stress (Aryal et al., 2016). Health and safety measures in workplaces are often inadequate and the risk of injury is further compounded by poor communication with employers, unreasonable work pressure and risk taking by workers (Adhikary, Keen, et al., 2018). Furthermore, Nepali migrants returning from the Gulf States, Malaysia and India have reported working conditions characteristic of forced labour, including deceptive recruiting, working under duress and difficulty in leaving their employer (Mak et al., 2017).

GENDER AND MIGRATION IN NEPAL

International migration from Nepal is a highly gendered phenomenon (Grossman-Thompson, 2019; Maycock, 2017; Sharma, 2008; Zharkevich, 2019).

Among other things, this is reflected in the distribution of men and women who migrate and the types of work they do, as well as in official legislation and regulations governing migration in Nepal. Men make up about 95% of officially registered migrants and are most frequently employed in the security, manufacturing, construction, plantations, agriculture and service sectors (Government of Nepal et al., 2018). In contrast, women are overwhelmingly employed in domestic work, primarily in the Middle East (Abramsky et al., 2018; Government of Nepal et al., 2018). While Nepali men face very few restrictions on which countries they can migrate to and what kind of work they are allowed to undertake, women face a much more complex and shifting legislative landscape (ILO, 2015).

From the 1980s onwards, the Government of Nepal has introduced, lifted, and reintroduced various bans and conditions based on either the gender of migrants, the country of destination, or the employment sector involved. In the Foreign Employment Act 1985, which first defined the rules on labour migration from Nepal, women were required to obtain the consent of their guardian (specified in the Second Amendment of the Act in 1998 as their parents in the case of unmarried women, and their husband in the case of married women) before migrating abroad for work. Following the widely reported death in 1998 of Kani Sherpa, a domestic worker in Kuwait, the government officially banned women from migrating to the Gulf States. Since then, the regulations on women's migration have shifted regularly, ranging from a total ban on women's migration, to the introduction of age limits for female migrants, bans on specific countries and restrictions for particular employment sectors such as domestic work. The current rules, introduced in 2017, ban all Nepalis from taking 'housemaid jobs' in Gulf countries. When challenged on the rules by researchers and women's rights groups, the government has defended the current legislation by noting that it applies to both men and women. However, in practice the ban affects women to a far greater extent, since it is overwhelmingly women who migrate for employment as domestic workers (Grossman-Thompson, 2019; ILO, 2015; Mandal, 2021; Pyakurel, 2018). The regulations on women's migration have not, however, deterred women from migrating. Rather, they have contributed to a large number of women migrating through irregular channels, with some studies estimating that as many as 90% of women migrating from Nepal do so without an official permit, often through the open border to India and onwards to Gulf countries (Pyakurel, 2018; Simkhada et al., 2018; WOREC, 2012).

Several studies have highlighted the relationship between male out-migration and the organisation of agricultural production in sites of origin. Most studies find that male out-migration contributes to the 'feminisation' of agriculture and additional workloads for women who are left behind. However, this is not necessarily leading to greater decision making for women nor more control over household resources (Gartaula, Niehof, and Visser, 2010; Jaquet et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2019; Maharjan, Bauer, and Knerr, 2012, 2013). Further, Lama et al. (2017) find that women engage

less in activities outside the home, mainly due to 'time poverty' resulting from the additional workload of having an absent spouse, thus highlighting the relationship between international migration and everyday mobility.

As gender norms and practices are inherently spatial they are reflected in everyday mobilities (Holmelin, 2019). Zharkevich (2019), for example, argues that the international mobility of men in Nepal is predicated on the immobility of women and that marriage is the central institution for understanding gendered differences in mobility. While marriage often enables men to migrate abroad, marriage for women means taking care of the household while husbands are away, including raising children, taking care of the fields, and caring for elderly in-laws. The additional workload caused by the absence of a migrating family member have been found to increase the expectation that wives of migrants work in their in-laws' household (Zharkevich, 2019). However, a rigid dichotomy between mobile men and immobile women may obscure women's often higher degree of everyday mobility in comparison to their husbands, who frequently experience severe restrictions on their ability to move freely while working abroad (Hill, 2012; Mak et al., 2017; Sharma, 2008; Zharkevich, 2019). For example, companies in Malaysia are known to confiscate passports of migrant workers to deter them from leaving their employment, thus making the workers extremely dependant on employers for their movement and vulnerable to raids on undocumented migrants, even for migrants with a documented right to stay in the country (Hill, 2012; Verité, 2014). Furthermore, some migrants have expressed feeling harassed by local Malays and being targeted for robberies in public spaces, thus leading many to avoid leaving the workplace as far as possible (Hill, 2012).

The importance of understanding social constructions of gender and their intersections with migration is further highlighted by Sharma (2008) in his study of migrant masculinities. International migration in Nepal is imbued with gendered narratives of migration often associating positive migration choices with masculinity, while questioning the femininity and morality of female migrants (Abramsky et al., 2018; Maycock, 2017; Sharma, 2013; Zharkevich, 2019). Women's migration for work is frequently associated with stigmas including perceived linkages to sex work and sexual exploitation, and this is partly perpetuated by the restrictive legislation on women's migration (Abramsky et al. 2018; ILO, 2015). Contrarily, men's migration is more often seen as a respected livelihood strategy and a 'rite of passage' into mature manhood (Sharma, 2008).

A notable aspect of the gendered discourse on migration is the figure of the Gurkha warrior which regularly appears as a respected masculine ideal in accounts of international migration from Nepal (Yamanaka, 2000; Zharkevich, 2019). Gurkhas – the Nepali soldiers that have been recruited by the British and Indian armies since the end of the Anglo-Nepali war – are widely associated with admirable qualities such as bravery, fierceness, loyalty and discipline (Chisholm, 2014). The recruitment

of Gurkhas by the British army laid the foundations for the modern remittance economy in rural areas of Nepal and created what has been termed a ‘culture of emigration’ among some ethnic groups in Nepal (Yamanaka, 2000). Continuing to present times, the practice has spread to all parts of Nepali society and fostered a tradition for male workers to ‘leave their wives behind’ as contemporary labour migrants (Yamanaka, 2000). The Gurkha narrative reflects a distinctive masculine ideal which is famous globally, not least in Malaysia where their reputation contributed to Nepalis being the only group of foreigners allowed to work as security guards. However, it also fits well with the perception of the ‘ideal’ migrant worker more generally. Drawing on the Gurkha figure, notions of Nepali male workers are associated with characteristics such as being hard working, resilient in demanding working conditions, unlikely to protest and willing to undertake dangerous work. As described by Trần and Crinis (2018) in their account of a shift in Malaysian foreign labour recruitment away from Indonesian and Bangladeshi migrants towards Vietnamese and Nepali migrants, it is exactly these traits that employers and the Malaysian government perceive as favourable but which themselves help perpetuate exploitative and unsafe conditions (Trần and Crinis, 2018).

MIGRATION TO MALAYSIA

At the other end of the migration corridor, Malaysia has historically been a destination for labour migration, both forced and voluntary, dating back to the establishment of rubber plantations by the British colonial administration in what was then Malaya. Substantial numbers of Chinese and Indian workers were recruited to work in the plantations along with the presence of Nepali Gurkha soldiers deployed by the Imperial army to maintain colonial dominance and fight insurgencies (Kambang and Kharel, 2019). The Malaysian economy has, since the 1970s, pursued an export-oriented development strategy that has been heralded as a development success and it is popularly understood to be a next generation ‘tiger economy’ (Hill, 2012). Primarily driven by the export manufacturing industry, this strategy is heavily dependent on a steady flow of low- and medium-skilled workers from abroad (Devadason and Meng, 2014). As a result, Malaysia is home to the largest population of non-citizens in Southeast Asia (Devadason and Meng, 2014; Nah, 2012).

While central to this period of economic expansion, foreign workers have throughout inhabited an ambivalent position in the Malaysian society as both an indispensable contribution to national development as well as ‘undesirable others’ (Healey, 2000). The so-called ‘race riots’ of 1969 which saw deadly clashes between Malay and Chinese groups in Kuala Lumpur had lasting impacts on Malaysian political discourse and still shape attitudes towards migrant populations today. Thus, a nationalist public discourse, unfolding not least in state media, portrays migrants as ‘unwanted but necessary’ - a notion rooted in a post-independence concern with

maintaining the 'ethnic balance' by keeping Malays in the majority in relation to the large minorities of Indians and Chinese (Healey, 2000; Gurowitz, 2000).

However, contrary to the more established position of the Indians and Chinese who arrived during colonial capitalist expansion, the attitude towards low-skilled foreign workers as the 'new undesirables' is shaped by a re-imagined national identity of Malaysian pre-eminence in relation to its poorer regional neighbours (Healey, 2000). This imaginary is "profoundly ethno-nationalist, class-based, sexualized and gendered" (Healey, 2000, p 222) in the way that it portrays foreign workers, particularly women in domestic work. Surveying Malaysian media in the period 1996-1998, Healey (2000) documents how low-skilled foreign workers were increasingly gendered and sexualised in public debates through, for example, being suspected of breaking up Malaysian families by seducing husbands or of marrying daughters to get a visa. Other public debates cast doubt on the values foreign domestic workers convey to the children they are taking care of through their work, especially in the case of migrants from non-Muslim countries. Ultimately, these public and political discourses construct gendered, racialised and class-based ideas of the 'alien immigrant' in which the motives, trustworthiness and morality of all foreign workers coming from poorer countries to Malaysia are brought into question, dehumanising the 'foreign other' and undermining their claims to better working conditions and human rights (Healey, 2000).

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS IN MALAYSIA

Such gendered, sexual, ethnic, and class-based concerns are reflected in policies aimed at keeping migration strictly time-limited, such as forbidding foreign nationals in the country to get married (with Malaysian citizens as well as non-citizens), to have children and to own property (Devadason and Meng, 2014; Hill, 2012; Nah, 2012). Moreover, in line with the ambivalent attitude towards migrants, the Malaysian state has since the 2010s invested significantly in enforcement capacities to increase deportations of undocumented migrants (Low and Mokhtar, 2017). Controversial laws have also been introduced to manage irregular migration, such as the introduction of whipping as punishment for entering Malaysia illegally (Nah, 2012). Enforcement of these laws is carried out inconsistently and with the involvement of non-state actors, which often further undermines migrants' rights (Devadason and Meng, 2014). Regulation and disciplinary power have largely been delegated to employers and recruitment agencies as well as a paramilitary volunteer corps, RELA (Ikatan Relawan Rakyat Malaysia, 'People's Volunteer Corps Malaysia'). Originally established to monitor communist insurgencies, RELA was in 2005 awarded powers by the government to detain foreigners on suspicion of working illegally and have been criticised by NGOs and migrants' rights organisations over unlawful and abusive practises (Amnesty International, 2011; Hill, 2012; Kudo, 2013; Nah, 2012; Tenaganita, 2008).

The division between documented and undocumented status is often extremely thin and blurred, especially for sectors such as domestic work that primarily employ women (Healey, 2000). As a result, women are also more vulnerable to laws aimed at foreigners without legal rights to stay in the country. Moreover, studies on transnational migrant communities in Malaysia have found that the social stigma associated with women's migration in origin countries often exclude women from the social networks available for male migrants in the destination country. Thus, in comparison to their male counterparts, who can more easily draw on established transnational networks to find new jobs, women are more likely to stay with exploitative employers or enter into undocumented status (Dannecker, 2005).

However, despite a highly gendered labour market and a range of gendered concerns regarding the status of migrant women and men, migrants in Malaysia are rarely addressed as part of a gendered analysis, neither in the academic literature nor in the work of NGOs. Despite an increasing feminisation of migration to Malaysia, organisations advocating migrant workers' rights primarily adopt a universal rights-based framework (Elias, 2010). Some organisations have been successful in focusing on the specific problems faced by women, primarily in the domestic work sector, but the universal labour rights frame often results in a gender blind perspective. While universal labour rights are strongly associated with the public sphere, private households are both legally and in popular discourse constructed as non-economic. Moreover, Malaysia has not yet ratified the Domestic Workers Convention which sets labour standards for domestic workers (C189) and, as a result, foreign domestic workers, who are overwhelmingly women, are not recognised as employees in the same way as other migrant workers. As human rights rely on states as the primary mechanism for enforcing rights, mediated by state-centric institutions such as the United Nations, these rights are in practice interpreted through exclusionary notions of citizenship and often result in gender blind approaches (Elias, 2010)⁵.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDAS

Migration in the Nepal-Malaysian corridor remains understudied, especially from a gender perspective. While a body of literature that addresses migration from Nepal includes studies analysing migration as highly gendered, studies on migrants in Malaysia more rarely adopt a gender perspective. However, as suggested by the literature above, the position of Nepali women and men working in Malaysia should be understood in relation to a public discourse on migrants imbued with gendered, ethnic and class-based ambivalence towards migrants as 'unwanted but necessary'. Women in domestic work face particular prejudice which is further heightened for

⁵ Malaysia has also not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families which aims to reaffirm the rights of migrant workers and their families and establish basic norms, protections and principles that apply irrespective of nationality and citizenship.

those with undocumented status. The highly gendered notions surrounding migration in Nepal, not least the social stigma and restrictive legislation associated with women's migration as well as the masculine ideal of Gurkha warriors, also fundamentally shape migration in the corridor. Moreover, while the impacts of COVID-19 remain to be assessed, they are likely to result in increased informality adversely affecting female migrants at a time when attitudes towards migrants are further deteriorating in Malaysia and migration in the corridor is more uncertain than ever.

5. CONCLUSION

This working paper has reviewed existing evidence on gender and South-South migration in three migration corridors: Haiti-Brazil, China-Ghana and Nepal-Malaysia. Where possible it has explored the intersection of gender with other social inequalities such as race and class, and how this contributes towards the challenges and inequalities migrants face. All three corridors are dominated by migration for work, although with very different characteristics. Thus, Haitian migration to Brazil expanded in the wake of the earthquake in 2010 and, while women are in a minority, their numbers have increased over time. Nonetheless, in comparison with men they remain less visible within the labour market as most work in domestic settings or in the informal service sector, contributing towards their wider invisibility in society as a whole. Migration between China and Ghana occurs in both directions and is dominated by traders and entrepreneurs looking to import goods from China to Ghana. Women are once again in a minority, but those who are active as traders – whether Chinese or Ghanaian – must have access to at least some capital. In contrast, Chinese miners in Ghana are almost exclusively men, and the existing literature explores gender-related inequalities primarily in regard to Chinese or Ghanaian women providing services in mining encampments. Finally, migration from Nepal to Malaysia is once again dominated by men, especially in formal channels, with Nepali labour laws designed to 'protect' women often pushing them into informal migration routes and employment. Social norms relating to migration in Nepal promote masculine ideals that help shape these dynamics, as do public discourses around female migrants in domestic work in Malaysia that are shaped by gendered, ethnic and class-based prejudice.

Our review of the existing literature shows that although research on all three migration corridors is growing, studies informed by explicit gender and intersectional concerns remain very limited. Findings on gender are often one element of broader studies on the migration flow as whole or on specific thematic concerns such as trade and entrepreneurship. As a result, they are rarely systematic in considering gender relations between women and men, either at origin or destination. Where such studies do exist – for example, in the case of migration from Nepal – they offer valuable insights but in the Nepali case do not often consider migrants heading to

particular destinations, such as Malaysia, in detail. Studies that focus specifically on migrant women are rare in all three settings and those that do are often isolated from broader reflections on the gendered nature of migration drivers, decision making and migrant experiences. These limitations can also be extended to a lack of a concern with gender relations between migrant and non-migrant women and men, and how migration affects masculinities as well as femininities.

The specific, thematic focus of studies that do explore gender relations and migration across the three corridors largely reflects the character of labour migration within each context. Thus, in Haiti-Brazil, studies have explored the experiences of downward social mobility among Haitian migrant women who have previously been self-employed and now find themselves in domestic work or in precarious jobs in the informal sector. Other studies incorporate wider concerns around access to health and education services as well as the role communication technology and religion play in Haitian migrant women's social lives and their engagement in the public sphere. However, although both the thematic and geographical focus of studies has expanded in recent years, there are a lack of studies connecting local experiences to more general, macro-structural concerns. Also, most studies do not attempt to explicitly analyse the intersecting disadvantage that Haitian women face in the context of the racialised legacy of slavery in Brazil and its historical association with domestic work.

In the China-Ghana corridor, studies on the experiences of Chinese and Ghanaian traders once again focus primarily on men and, while there are exceptions, these often involve individual case studies and rarely explore the experiences of female traders in full. Chinese researchers have sought to explore social and community relations among Africans living in China, but without an explicit gender focus, and often addressing the African community as a whole rather than the specific experiences of either male or female Ghanaian migrants. Even less has been written on female Chinese migrants in Ghana, with only one author who has addressed this in any detail. Further, not only is most research gender blind, but intersectional concerns are rarely addressed directly. Thus, discussions of xenophobia and ethnicity generally do not encompass an explicit consideration of race and racism, and class is only given superficial consideration. In relation to Chinese mining, there are no existing studies in English of 'left-behind' families in China, and in research on male Chinese migrants only a small number of recent studies briefly address gender relations between Chinese miners and Chinese and Ghanaian women living and working in those communities.

Finally, while a substantial body of literature in Nepal has explored the gendered dynamics of migration from the perspective of origin communities, very few studies have examined this in relation to the Nepal-Malaysia corridor specifically. Nonetheless, the existing literature on gender and migration in Nepal does highlight some important concerns regarding gendered inequalities in the opportunities to

migrate, shaped by social norms that favour male migrants and restrictive legislation 'protecting' women. The consequences for left-behind family members have also been explored in some detail, including the additional burden of work and care that wives of migrants must cope with. In Malaysia there have also been attempts to explore gendered attitudes towards migrant workers, but the particular challenges facing male and female Nepali migrants have not been studied in detail. This includes how issues of gender intersect with race, class and religion to shape public attitudes to Nepali migrants and promote or restrict their access to both formal and informal employment opportunities and rights.

In summary, across all three corridors, there has been insufficient attention to the gendered migration dynamics playing out within each corridor and – with the partial exception of Haitians in Brazil and Chinese in Ghana – a lack of attention to how migrants from specific countries fare in comparison to the experiences of labour migrants in general. In identifying future research agendas, we have suggested a number of areas above that would benefit from further study. This includes an expanded geographical focus within countries of destination and studies that connect local experiences in specific cities or regions with macro-structural concerns. This may, for example, be especially important where migrant women beyond those in domestic work are concentrated in particular industries and localities, such as in Malaysia. In these cases, they may be missed completely if efforts are not made to include these sectors and locations in research projects. Similarly, researchers need to adopt innovative approaches to address the invisibility of many migrant women and – in some cases – the challenges involved in gaining access to them. Exploring the issue of gender with male migrants may also require a creative approach from researchers if underlying – often unspoken – attitudes, behaviours and experiences are to be revealed.

Beyond a wider sectoral and geographical approach, another important set of issues highlighted above is the gendered networks that migrants have access to at origin and destination. The example of female traders in Ghana demonstrates how crucial these are but how – in that case – women generally became entrepreneurs later in life than men, because of their more limited access to sources of capital and resources and the domestic and gendered responsibilities that often make international travel very difficult, especially for younger women. Other important dimensions of migrants' gendered networks that could be explored further include the use of communication technology at origin and destination; the role of religion in the social lives and employment networks of migrant women and men; and how networks shape migrants' engagement with the public as well as private sphere, including access to employment but also to education, health, housing and other key services.

Finally, building on the analysis in our previous literature review (Izaguirre and Walsham, 2021) we would also highlight issues that remain largely invisible within

the current literature on the three corridors. These include sexuality among migrants, which is often ignored or studied through a moralistic or heteronormative lens, and the intersection of gender with disability, understood both in terms of migrants with disabilities as well as caring responsibilities for family members with disabilities. Further, although research in the China-Ghana corridor does acknowledge the relative privilege of some of the migrants concerned, there is very little evidence on the experiences of skilled migrants in South-South contexts more generally or in these corridors specifically. The intersection of relative privilege with gender is clearly a topic of interest in relation to inequalities between migrants and non-migrants. As the examples within the China-Ghana corridor suggest, the relative privilege of traders should not obscure the very real challenges they face. For example, Chinese women navigating the highly male-dominated landscape of international business and social elites in Ghana – including gendered attitudes towards nationality and race – face very different challenges to their male peers.

Finally, there is a need to understand all these issues in relation to the very significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and their families at origin. While the full significance of these impacts is far from clear at present, it is nonetheless obvious that COVID-19 has exacerbated many existing vulnerabilities and highlighted the inequalities and fault-lines that underpin migration regimes across every region of the world. Not only the high degree of informality, but also a lack of protection for even those migrants who have moved through official channels, characterise many destination contexts across the Global South. Further, these effects are not only unequally distributed between the Global North and South (although confined to neither), but also between migrant women and men and non-migrant women and men at origin and destination. Attempting to understand how the pandemic has heightened existing inequalities, created new vulnerabilities and changed the migration experience for women and men across the Global South can help illuminate the underlying, gendered inequalities inherent in existing migration regimes. Ultimately, therefore, addressing all these concerns will contribute to informing a much deeper understanding of the nature of migration and gender inequalities across these three corridors and the Global South more generally. This includes how gender intersects with other categories of disadvantage as well as advantage, and how these contribute to produce, reproduce or reduce inequality between different groups of migrants and between migrants and non-migrants in communities of both origin and destination.

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