

**How were Canadian international retirement migrants
affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?
A qualitative exploration**

**by
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Abstract

International retirement migration is the transnational movement of retirees who relocate from their home countries to elsewhere either short-term or permanently. Many older Canadians participate in this practice seasonally, and the United States (US) is their most popular wintertime destination. This seasonal movement was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically by protocols that included land-border closures between Canada and the US and social distancing measures. In this thesis, I present two qualitative analyses that explore how Canadian retirees navigated the shifting landscape of international retirement migration in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first examines how Canadian international retirement migrants were portrayed in mainstream media during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second analyses uses the findings of 31 interviews to uncover the motivations behind Canadian international retirement migrants' decisions to travel abroad, or not, during the 2020-21 winter season.

Keywords: International retirement migration; Canadian; COVID-19 pandemic; qualitative analysis; land-border closure

Dedication

This is dedicated to my family, friends, supervisor, and peers who have encouraged me and provided me with unwavering support.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The practice of international retirement migration involves the transnational movement of retirees in search of warmer climates, affordable living costs, social networking opportunities, and health-promoting lifestyles (Tang & Zolnikov, 2021). Such movement may be permanent or short-term (seasonal) in nature. International retirement migration is considered an embodied experience that is interconnected with transnational mobilities, memory, emotional attachment, as well as changing physical and mental health (Oliver, 2016). Two of these intersections are particularly relevant to my thesis research: transnational mobility and health. Specifically, I qualitatively explore aspects of Canadian international retirement migrants' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recent studies (e.g., King et al., 2021; Pickering et al., 2020) have pointed out that the changing geographies of international retirement migration have created two challenges for this transnational practice in recent years. First, international retirement migration has only grown in popularity, which poses price inflation. For example, the saturation of retirement destinations has resulted in rising prices of retirement properties that are no longer affordable for the average household (King et al., 2021). Second, although life expectancies have increased due to lifestyle change and adherence to physical activity, the result is older adults living longer but not necessarily healthfully (Alidoust et al., 2019). For example, the burden of attaining health care and health insurance in destinations abroad may lead some retirement migrants to avoid paying for health insurance, which poses risks to older adults who are at the age where they are likely managing multiple chronic conditions (Han et al., 2018; Pickering et al., 2019, 2020). Has the global COVID-19 pandemic introduced new challenges to this transnational practice that have yet to be fully considered? Or even, perhaps, introduced new opportunities for international retirement migrants? Such questions are central to the thesis research I present herein. Specifically, my research focuses on how Canadian international retirement migrants navigated the shifting landscape of international retirement migration in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

My thesis is organized around two qualitative analyses. In the first analysis, I present a framing analysis that considers how Canadian international retirement

migrants were portrayed in mainstream media throughout the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (Chapter 2). The second analysis draws on interviews (n=31) to consider the motivations behind Canadian international retirement migrant's decisions to choose to travel abroad or not during the 2020-21 winter during COVID-19 pandemic (Chapter 3). The remainder of this introductory chapter introduces the literature that informs my thesis research, my research rationale and objectives, and the thesis structure.

1.1. Background

The following sub-sections detail the existing research that informs my analyses. I touch on topics that include international retirement migration, international retirement migrants, health geographies of aging, and pandemic geographies.

1.1.1. International Retirement Migration and International Retirement Migrants

Research on retirement migration began in the 1950s (Hoyt, 1954), however the “international” focus of this practice is a more recent phenomena (King et al., 2021). Early research mainly focused on intra-country retirement migration as a practice, where the physical attributes of “place” or destinations held importance (King et al., 2021). As the literature advanced, the emphasis was placed on international retirement migrants themselves, where the social characteristics of “place” held prominent, such as the factors motivating international retirement migrants to engage in this transnational practice (King et al., 2021).

Early studies document that the idea of retirement migration originated from British retirees seasonally relocating to coastal residential resorts along the South Coast, France, Belgium, and other European countries (Brenan 1957; King et al., 2000, p.19-22; Lawrence, 1923). Shortly after the development of retirement migration in Europe, the phenomena began to be observed in the United States (US), with concentrations of retirees in southern California, Florida (Mullins & Tucker, 1985; Smith, 1988; Tucker et al., 1988), Texas, and Arizona (Rush, 1980). This research was heavily focused on older Americans traveling from within the US, though there is some documentation of Canadian retirees in these early studies.

After the 1980s, research shifted to focus on international retirement migrants themselves, where social characteristics were emphasized, including the factors that influenced retirees to participate in this practice. Research on the motivations for participating in international retirement migration have identified a number of important factors, including: 1) warmer climates (Breuer, 2005); 2) health benefits of living in a warmer climate (O'Reilly & Benson, 2015; Rodriguez, 2001); 3) lower living costs (Coates et al., 2002); 4) appreciation of cultural differences (Gustafson, 2002); 5) interest in exploration or adventure (Allman, 2019; Gustafson, 2002); 6) affordable healthcare (Sunil et al., 2007); 7) improved lifestyle focusing on socialising (Longino, 1990); 8) safety and better quality of life (Sunil et al., 2007); 9) affordability and better quality housing (Davies & Hoath, 2016); and 10) favourable economic conditions (Moro, 2006; Schafran & Monkkonen, 2011). These factors motivate both seasonal, or short-term, and permanent international retirement migration.

King et al. (2021) have identified important changes happening within international retirement migration. First, the saturation of retirement migrants has resulted in an increase in the cost of retirement properties due to inflation. Thus, international retirement migrants are increasingly looking in more rural locations to find affordable housing. Second, international retirement migration is no longer a practice solely for the affluent (Bender et al., 2018; King et al., 2021). Seasonal property rentals and the possibility of living in recreational vehicles while abroad have made this practice more widely financially accessible. These are some of the changes that are transforming this particular transnational mobility.

1.1.2. Health Geographies of Aging

The geographies of aging is a sub-discipline of health geography, sometimes also called geographical gerontology, in which researchers are interested in the spatial variables related to the experiences and necessities of aging (Skinner et al., 2015). Within the field of health geographies of aging, health geographers have shifted away from a biomedical emphasis on health as the absence of disease and toward a focus on a more holistic understanding of aging and health in social and symbolic contexts (Wiles, 2018). A topic that health geographers have taken particular interest in is the intersection of aging and resilience (Andrews, 2018), which includes centrally discussing the care needs of an aging population and the ability of aging people to cope with the challenges

of becoming an older adult (Andrews, 2018; Wiles, 2018). Explorations of this intersection are heavily focused on spatial and place-based variables of the social models of health and aging, including referring to people's lives, structural contexts, and social change as they age.

The idea of the social model of health and aging has prompted geographical research that is concerned with understanding the lived experiences of older adults in relation to health, including health and wellbeing, aging in place, health care services, and movement and migration amongst others (Skinner et al., 2015). For example, in recent literature, scholars have focused on "home-like" environments, which include characteristics relating to comfort, safety and well-being (Cohen et al., 2016; Graham & Fabricius, 2019; Skinner et al., 2015), as well as the idea of urban planning, emphasizing infrastructure and health care services that support older adults as they age (Alidoust et al., 2019; Finlay & Finn, 2021). Lastly, scholars have focused on transnational mobility patterns involving short or long-term relocation, often referred to international retirement migration, focusing on the role that mobility plays in experiences of place (Gu & Dupre, 2021). The intersection between health geographies of aging and movement and migration are explored in my thesis, which has to do with the location and seasonal movement of older people later in life.

Understanding the location and movement of older people has become critical for the development of essential supports for older adults, including policies and programmes for health care policy makers (Skinner et al., 2018). Early research on the movement of older people documented that older adults were likely to move abroad year-round in early old age and then return to their original location later in old age to be closer to family due to increasing needs of support (Stoller & Longino, 2001). However, these patterns are changing as life expectancies of older adults are increasing due to increased physical activity and a change in lifestyle (Alidoust et al., 2019). Thus, a variety of transnational opportunities have been opened in old age, including the increasing employment of elderly people that requires movement, resulting in a huge constraint on the availability of support and health care associated with migration (Hall & Hardill, 2016). This makes location and movement an extremely timely area to explore in the new era of the health geographies of aging.

Travel and border restrictions, vaccine access, and public health mandates put in place to manage the COVID-19 pandemic have likely affected the recent transnational movements of older people while also creating new dimensions of the geographies of aging. These impacts on transnational movements pose barriers for older adults who have established place-based attachments to destinations abroad and have been faced with making extremely difficult decisions regarding whether to travel and risk their health, social connections, and finances. My thesis research identifies and explores such impacts in the context of Canadian international retirement migrants' travel during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.1.3. Older Adults and Pandemic Geographies

In March 2020, a worldwide pandemic brought on by an infectious coronavirus disease, COVID-19, was declared (WHO, 2020). The most prominent characterization of the COVID-19 virus is the high mutation rate supporting efficient transmission from person to person (Wang et al., 2020). The pandemic has had a severe impact on a global and local scale, infecting at least 128 million people across 217 countries worldwide (Andrews et al., 2021, p. 1). Geographers have used spatial epidemiology and social theories to untangle the unique characteristics of the virus in regard to space and time (Goel & Emch, 2021). Other researchers have described this as the “geographicalness” of the pandemic, which denotes the spatial expressions and consequences that have characterized the COVID-19 virus (Andrews et al., 2021, p. 2). For example, Andrews et al. (2021, p.3) identify seven geographies of the COVID-19 pandemic, which are:

1. The COVID-19 virus is highly hyperconnected, highlighting the need for global solutions;
2. Location-based responses are continuously evolving;
3. Understanding space in the built environment is critical in addressing transmission;
4. Geographic concepts such as social distancing and placed-based sites are frequently referenced, all of which have meaning in our daily lives;

5. The public is now engrained in spatial epidemiology, keeping up with infection rates, and death rates; and
6. How individuals experience fear and uncertainty along with how they have experienced support and hope differs across space and time; and
7. The physical environment has been replaced with advanced technology allowing for a space to communicate in our working and personal lives.

Each of these geographies in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic shows how our understandings of the role that space and place play in doing things such as mitigating risk or experiencing infection have changed over time.

In all geographic contexts, people who are over 60 years of age are disproportionately affected by the virus due to poor health status, weakened immune function and the likelihood of underlying comorbidities (Dhama et al., 2020). Not only are older adults at an increased risk for severe illness of COVID-19, but strategies to contain the virus have also disrupted the social participation and quality of life for older people (Andrews et al., 2021, p. 319). As such, the experience of older people during the pandemic was increasingly characterized by vulnerabilities and feelings of fear and anxiety, where becoming older was no longer associated with time with grandchildren and opportunities to travel, but with the hardships of social distancing and lack of human connection (Andrews et al., 2021, p. 320). The COVID-19 pandemic has not only highlighted the changing experiences of older adults, but also brought recognition that the current organization of space and place must radically transform on a global level. For example, the current spatial environment for the most vulnerable older adults includes concentrations of people in locations such as care homes and assisted living, which has only influenced social and spatial segregation and is coincidentally the final place of residence before death for several older people (Andrews et al., 2021, p. 321). However, as the pandemic has evolved temporary changes have been enacted where numerous groups have provided continuous support to this cohort including food preparation programs, shopping assistance, and neighbourhood drive-bys (Andrews et al., 2021, p. 320). Future research must look at opportunities for developing home care along with networks in communities that promote social inclusion and spatial integration. These acknowledgements emphasize an important connection to my research given that

it is focused on older Canadians who have navigated the COVID-19 pandemic as a high-risk group and highlights the need for a direct emphasis on geographic gerontology in future research on crisis management for older adults.

Overall, the pandemic has introduced a number of challenges in the lives of older adults, including the risk of acquiring COVID-19, disrupted travel plans, separation from family and friends, less access to basic amenities (e.g., food and medication), pandemic-related losses, and exclusion from social and public activities among others (Finlay et al., 2021). There has no doubt been a profound impact on the quality of life of older adults in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this will likely hold true for future pandemics. Coping strategies that use cognitive and behavioural tactics are being developed by researchers to support aging populations live smoothly through the pandemic and future pandemics. My thesis not only focuses on the vulnerabilities older adults faced in the COVID-19 pandemic, but also includes the challenges faced when international mobility is disrupted.

The suddenness of the Canada-US land-border closure and lockdown decisions around the globe caught many international migrants unprepared and resulted in hundreds of thousands of international tourists stuck in travel destinations abroad (Andrews et al., 2021, p. 122). This brings the practice of international retirement migration during the pandemic into question, which came into query in the context of Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 16th 2020 when Canada's federal government urged Canadians who were abroad to return home (Canadian Snowbird Association, 2020a). This is also the date that marks when Canada and the US announced the closure of their shared land border for non-essential travel to go into effect on March 21st (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2020). Canadian international retirement migrants, popularly known as snowbirds, were intended targets of this messaging to "return home as soon as possible" (Canadian Snowbird Association, 2020b; Tasker, 2020). This land border closure introduced numerous challenges outlined in the first analysis of my thesis, including international retirement migrants who altered their consumer practices, faced uncertainties, and eventually sought out safety and stability (Tate et al., 2022). There is a lack of knowledge in the literature about the perspectives and experiences of international retirement migrants who have lived through the pandemic. Addressing this knowledge gap is the focus of my thesis research, specifically regarding how Canadian international migrants navigated

the shifting landscape of international retirement migration in the context of the pandemic.

1.2. Dissertation Rationale

This dissertation will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Canadian international retirement migrants' complex realities, lived experiences, and how this cohort is making sense of and coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the disruptions that the pandemic has had on international retirement migration over the last three winter seasons, including extreme pandemic protocols (i.e., border closures, social distancing, and quarantine measures), the literature in this area is nascent, which is why it is extremely important and timely to explore. Specifically, I use exploratory qualitative methods to advance our understanding and highlight a new perspective concerning international retirement migration in the context of the pandemic.

I use the perspectives of Canadian print media journalists and the perspectives of international retirement migrants themselves in my analyses to capture the multifaceted experiences of international retirement migration during the pandemic. Gathering the perspectives shared by Canadian print media journalists about the portrayals of international retirement migrants during the pandemic allows for the identification of the potential changes that were occurring in the lives of international retirement migrants from an outsider's point of view. The findings of this analysis show that the pandemic had major impacts on the spatio-temporal realities of international retirement migration, thus pointing us to the ways that migrants experienced challenges and opportunities to seek attachment to their lives at home, which was found to be a coping mechanism for the changed socio-temporal realities. This is extremely important contribution to the literature on international retirement migration because, as King et al., 2021 recently noted, most studies focus on destinations and ignore migrants' lives at home. This awareness pointed us in the direction of a second analysis to gather first-hand experiences of international retirement migrants themselves that considered their lives both at home and in the destinations. The first-hand experiences of international retirement migrants furthered our understand of the changed spatio-temporalities and was extremely important in considering whether the frames used in the first analysis in Canadian newspaper coverage resonated with their lived experiences.

Encompassing both analyses, I believe my research is important in two ways. First, my research can help to identify important policy-related implications of cross-border travel during a pandemic and the particular implications experienced by older people. Second, this research has the ability to support the beginning of future studies to explore crisis management for Canadian international retirement migrants in different contexts (e.g., environmental disasters).

1.3. Research Objectives

My thesis research emphasizes the changing spatio-temporal aspects of Canadian international retirement migrants' transnational lives during the COVID-19, including making new connections to their lives at home and/or finding ways to travel to their destination amidst pandemic restrictions. These changes came with immense challenges that involved developing new spatial and place-based attachments to their environments. Specifically, this dissertation is informed by two objectives, which are: 1) To explore Canadian news media framings of international retirement migrants during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and 2) To understand the factors that encouraged or prevented Canadian international retirement migrants from going to the US for the 2020-21 winter during the pandemic and at a point when Canadians were asked to avoid non-essential international travel.

1.3.1. Case Study Methodology

Overall, my thesis research employs case study methodology, which is considered appropriate when a holistic, in-depth investigation is warranted of a defined case or issue. This involves treating each 'case' much like an 'investigation', where unknowns are the nature of case study methodology (Feagin et al., 1991). Further to this, researchers have suggested that this type of methodology is well suited for producing general, concrete, context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006), which is also well matched to this thesis that discusses a context that has not yet been explored. Case study methodology favours exploring an issue within the context in which it takes place, and this approach is appropriate for my research as context-driven factors such as land border closures, the affordability of travel health insurance during the pandemic, and public understandings of Canadian retirement migrants, play a significant role in

making sense of the findings of each analysis. Case studies also typically rely on multiple methods and/or datasets, and this is true in my thesis where I use two distinct datasets and conduct a framing analysis and a thematic analysis.

1.4. Dissertation Structure Overview

My thesis is structured around two interconnected qualitative analyses underpinning how international retirement migrants' navigated the shifting landscape of this transnational practice in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these analyses is presented in a distinct chapter, which are Chapters 2 and 3. Following this, Chapter 4 draws together some thematic linkages between these analyses and considers the findings of each in relation to my objectives.

1.4.1. Altering consumer practices, facing uncertainties, and seeking stability: Canadian news media framings of international retirement migrants during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Chapter 2 presents the findings of a framing analysis conducted of 187 newspaper articles through the Canadian Newsstream Database, focusing on media framings of Canadian international retirement migrant's during the COVID-19 pandemic. A framing analysis was used to highlight the importance of this transnational practice in the context of the pandemic and involved an analysis of English language print news sources published between January 1st and December 31st, 2020 during the first year of the pandemic. The final search string used included: (1) snowbirds AND Canadian AND (Florida OR Arizona OR "United States" OR US OR USA OR U.S.A. OR California OR America OR Texas OR Carolina OR Mexico OR Costa OR Caribbean) NOT (R.C.A. OR RCA OR royal OR airforce OR "armed forces" OR pilots OR Zamboni OR air force OR pilot OR hummingbird OR moss) and included 400 articles. Once we narrowed down this sample by excluding duplicates and including only the articles that followed the inclusion criteria, we were able to code the dataset to identify the dominant frames. Our analysis identified three dominant frames: 1) Canadian international retirement migrants as consumers, 2) Canadian international retirement migrants as navigating new uncertainties, and 3) Canadian international retirement migrants seeking stability.

1.4.2. “We were leery of going”: Qualitatively exploring Canadian international retirement migrants’ travel-related decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic

Chapter 3 draws on the results of semi-structured interviews with 31 Canadian international retirement migrants who were abroad in the 2019/20 winter season and who did or did not decide to go in the 2020/21 winter season. I conducted these interviews in December 2021 – January 2022. The interviews explored participants’ decision-making regarding whether or not to travel to the US for the winter 2020-21 season, during which Canadians were asked not to partake in non-essential international travel. A thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted using four themes identified in a scoping review published by Pickering et al., (2019) that characterize the main motivations for participating in international retirement migration: the destination, the people, the cost, and the movement. In non-pandemic times, factors related to one or all of these motivations support retirement migrants’ decisions regarding participating in this transnational practice. The analysis presented in this chapter contrasts decision-making factors considered by those who opted to go abroad for the 2020-21 winter versus those who did not as they relate to each of these four main motivations. It identifies some pandemic-specific aspects of these wider motivations that encouraged or discouraged Canadian international retirement migrants’ travel to the US.

1.5. Positionality and Reflexivity

My position in relation to this thesis research is as an outsider: 1) I am not an international retirement migrant (i.e., I am not retired, and I rarely travel abroad for extended periods of time), and 2) I have had no experience interacting with international retirement migrants or particular knowledge of international retirement migration prior to this research. I have done my best to come to this thesis research with an open mind to acquire and construct knowledge about the practice of international retirement migration without being negatively influenced by my own opinions regarding people’s travel behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reflexivity involves critical reflection of how a researcher has constructed knowledge from the beginning to the end of the research process, which also includes recognizing personal factors that may have facilitated the research process such as

positionality and access to resources (Guillemin et al., 2004). I experienced three main enabling factors that facilitated completion of my thesis research. First, I experienced an ease of recruitment for the analysis presented in Chapter 3 as a result of my supervisor's built network of international retirement migrants and immense experience doing past studies with this group. Second, my supervisor's existing knowledge of international retirement migration helped me to understand this practice while she also challenged me to create my own ideas to pursue in this thesis. Third, I was provided access to research funding through my supervisor which allowed me to offer honoraria to research participants, which is something that greatly eased recruitment and yet is not always accessible to graduate students. Each of these factors have influenced my ability to conduct research in ways that have not only provided me an opportunity to learn, but also challenged me to construct knowledge through different research processes that reflected my own ideas.

Chapter 2. Altering consumer practices, facing uncertainties, and seeking stability: Canadian news media framings of international retirement migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic

2.1. Abstract

International retirement migration involves the seasonal relocation of older adults to destinations abroad. For Canadians, this is typically done to escape winter at home in favour of warmer weather elsewhere. In this paper, we explore how Canadian newspapers chronicled the changes associated with managing the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, including border measures and calls to avoid non-essential travel, and how they impacted international retirement migrants and their movements. We specifically present the findings of a framing analysis conducted of 187 newspaper articles published in 2020, identified through the Canadian Newsstream Database. The framing analysis identified three ways in which Canadian international retirement migrants were discussed in relation to the pandemic and the changed spatio-temporal realities that affected their transnational movements. First, they are a group who altered their consumer practices, which had economic impacts at home and in their usual seasonal destinations. Second, they are a group who faced considerable uncertainty with regard to travel and movement, among other things, as the pandemic unfolded in 2020. Finally, Canadian international retirement migrants sought stability in a number of ways, both in terms of their social networks and living arrangements at home and abroad.

2.2. Introduction

In a typical year, hundreds of thousands of retired Canadians choose to spend weeks or months of the winter season living abroad, often from November or December to March or April, in warmer climates to escape the colder weather at home that can limit mobility and social interactions. While there is not reliable tracking of this transnational mobility to give a precise number of travellers or specific destinations, Statistics Canada (2019) estimates that at least 300,000–375,000 older Canadians stay seasonally in the United States (US) or Mexico each year, while others have suggested that 500,000–1,000,000 annually travel to the US alone (Desrosiers-Lauzon's, 2009). This sizeable annual seasonal movement of older people is known as “international retirement migration,” and it is a rapidly growing residential strategy that is participated in internationally (Rodriguez et al., 2004). Canadian international retirement migrants are known popularly as “snowbirds,” which references the cyclical nature of their annual journeys abroad. International retirement migration is not a transnational practice open to all, however, as older people with strong personal and financial resources are usually best situated to have the money, time, and health status needed to be able to live abroad seasonally (Longino et al., 2002). For older Canadians and others who do opt for retirement migration, the costs of maintaining housing at home and abroad while also covering food, health care, transportation, and other expenses are typically offset by the social, cultural, health, and recreational gains brought on by this practice (Pickering et al., 2019). Similarly, for destinations that host retirement migrants, the logistical burdens of a sudden seasonal population influx are greatly offset by economic gains to the service, health care, and housing sectors (Desrosiers-Lauzon's, 2009; Gordon Bennett, 1996; Sastry, 1992).

For Canadian international retirement migrants, the 2020 calendar year was anything but typical. Following initial circulation of the COVID-19 virus early in the year, on March 11 the World Health Organization officially declared a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). By March 16, Canada's federal government urged Canadians who were abroad to return home as soon as possible (Canadian Snowbird Association, 2020a). Certainly, Canadian international retirement migrants who were wintering in any number of popular destinations were intended recipients of such messaging. On March 16, further escalation occurred when Canada and the US announced the closure of their shared

land border for non-essential travel to go into effect as of March 21 (Government of Canada, 2020; United States Department of Homeland Security, 2020). Anyone abroad for non-essential travel at that point in time who required re-entry by land, including Canadian international retirement migrants under-taking lifestyle-driven travel, needed to return to Canada quite quickly. As of March 25, all travellers arriving into Canada through any type of border were expected to quarantine indoors for two weeks, including international retirement migrants returning home (Government of Canada, 2020). These land border closures and quarantine measures remained in effect for the remainder of the 2020 calendar year and thereafter. In the early months of 2020, the onset of these travel and border measures disrupted the annual winter 2019-20 migration cycle for those still abroad, with many making rushed plans to leave international residences and return home immediately (Penner, 2020). The continuation of these same measures through to late 2020 impacted the 2020-21 annual winter migration of older Canadians, with intended travellers making tough decisions regarding if and how they could go abroad and needing to understand whether or not their movements constituted essential travel (Bresge, 2020; Smith, 2020).

The transnational practice of international retirement migration is inherently geographic. For example, the strong place-based social ties that international retirement migrants typically create in destinations (Pickering et al., 2019) serve to illustrate Skinner et al. contention that older people look to build strong connections to place as a way of enhancing well-being (Skinner et al., 2014). Further to this, Pickering et al. have shown that Canadian international retirement migrants undertake preparatory activities at home (e.g., purchasing international health insurance coverage) that assist them with managing their lives and health while abroad, thereby connecting these distant places through intentional actions (Pickering et al., 2021, p. 202). Meanwhile, in a recent review piece that reflected on the changing geographies of international retirement migration, King et al. pointed out that most research on this practice is heavily focused on migrants' lives in the destination and does not fully consider the transnational links between home and destination countries and the spatio-temporality of this mobility (King et al., 2021). In the current analysis we deeply consider such links and spatio-temporalities as we focus specifically on 2020, when border access, ease of movement, and regulatory environments changed quickly and dramatically for Canadian international retirement migrants due to the pandemic management measures outlined above.

Here we present a framing analysis of Canadian print media coverage of international retirement migrants in 2020, which marked the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Global pandemics and their management can create disruptions in the lives of many, and especially those for whom travel across international borders is necessary (Grépin et al., 2021). It is thus not surprising that the transnational practice of international retirement migration, both by Canadians and others, was unsettled in response (Egidi, 2020; Snyder & Crooks, 2021; Zožal et al., 2020). We specifically present the findings of a framing analysis that explores how Canadian international retirement migrants and their responses to the unfolding pandemic were framed in print media coverage in 2020. Framing analysis is an analytic approach that involves determining how particular issues or groups are characterized in media coverage, particularly in relation to their importance. Identifying and exploring these frames requires explicit consideration of the exceptional spatio-temporalities of Canadian international retirement migrants' lives in 2020 and the transnational nature of this practice that is enabled by movement across borders. Such consideration serves to move the current analysis past much existing international retirement migration research that considers home or destination, but rarely both or the movements between each (King et al., 2021; Pickering et al., 2019). This analysis can also serve as a benchmark for comparison of how public discussions of Canadian international retirement migrants are framed in pandemic versus non-pandemic years to assist with identifying those elements that are truly exceptional in both contexts, while also allowing for media comparisons from elsewhere, including popular destinations for older Canadians.

2.3. Methods

There is a rich tradition of using media coverage as a source of data within the discipline of geography, which the current analysis builds on (eg., Chen, 2020; Henry, 2021; Morgan et al., 2017; Skinner et al., 2014; Sturm & Albrecht, 2020). Such analyses are important because media coverage can legitimize opinions, inform public dialogue about ongoing issues, and support policy initiatives. Because of these impacts, it needs to be examined (Kamenova et al., 2016; Rachul & Caulfield, 2015). Here we specifically explore how Canadian newspaper sources published in 2020 (January 1 to December 31) framed Canadian international retirement migrants' responses to navigating the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, including important decisions and actions undertaken

by this group. Framing analysis is used to understand how particular aspects of an issue, event, or phenomenon become important, and the ideas that frame or inform such importance (Entman, 1993; Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). In reference to media coverage, the frames used in reporting (that also inform decisions on which pieces should and should not be published) determine what people will notice or know about an issue, how they will understand and remember the issue, and how they can choose to act on or evaluate the issue (Entman, 1993). For example, media framings of political candidates may inform what voters think about their platform and abilities.

In March 2021, we searched the *Canadian Newsstream* database for print media related to Canadian international retirement migrants, known popularly as “snowbirds,” and the COVID-19 pandemic. After running several initial searches and following a meeting with a reference librarian, we narrowed our search terms to: (1) snowbirds AND Canadian AND (Florida OR Arizona OR “United States” OR US OR USA OR U.S.A. OR California OR America OR Texas OR Carolina OR Mexico OR Costa OR Caribbean) NOT (R.C.A. OR RCA OR royal OR airforce OR “armed forces” OR pilots OR Zamboni OR air force OR pilot OR hummingbird OR moss). Our search terms included popular international destinations for Canadian retirees while being sure to exclude the Canadian military flight team known as the Snowbirds. The search resulted in 400 articles being identified. We next reviewed the titles of articles to remove duplicates. After the duplicates were removed, we reviewed the titles and summaries (when available) against our inclusion criteria, which were articles that: (1) were published in English; (2) were published in a Canadian print media source; and (3) explicitly discussed Canadian international retirement migrants, although articles did not need to solely focus on this group. A total of 187 articles, which included opinion editorials and letters to the editor in addition to news articles, were ultimately identified for inclusion through this process.

Full texts of included articles were accessed and organized into a shared spreadsheet. Following creation of the spreadsheet, team members each independently reviewed the full text of 50 articles, with different ones being assigned to each reviewer, to develop an initial understanding of the dominant frames. A team meeting was held to discuss the scope and soundness of the emergent frames. Consensus was reached regarding three dominant frames and the interpretation of each, with use of investigator triangulation through independent review followed by collaborative discussion to balance reviewers' subjective interpretations of the articles and potential frames (Flick, 2004).

After consensus was reached, the lead author went through the full dataset to assign articles to their dominant theme and extract illustrative quotes, with the second author troubleshooting any issues that emerged. The illustrative quotes were shared with the team to further confirm interpretation. We include some of these illustrative quotes throughout this article to allow the source articles to “speak” to the identified frames.

2.4. Findings

The 187 articles included in this framing analysis came from 74 small and large newspapers carried across Canada that were based in ten Canadian provinces and territories. For example, some of the newspapers carrying articles included in the dataset were the *Toronto Star* (Ontario), *Penticton Western News* (British Columbia), *Chronicle-Herald* (Halifax), *Montreal Gazette* (Quebec), and *Calgary Herald* (Calgary). Of the 187 included articles, 180 were news pieces, 2 were opinion editorials, and 5 were published letters to the editor. Having included articles from across the 2020 year in this review, sources captured everything from the earliest considerations of the implications of COVID-19 for retirement migrants who were already abroad in early 2020, to human interest stories about older Canadians who had opted to travel abroad in late 2020 despite requests for people to avoid doing so, and everything in between. Articles that considered specific retirement migrant destinations were primarily focused on places within the US that Canadians typically visit by car, although some made mention of Mexico and other countries. Because of this, there was considerable attention given to the Canada-US land border closure for non-essential travel that was implemented on March 21, 2020, and remained in place until the end of the year and thereafter.

Our analysis identified three dominant frames that characterized the ways that Canadian international retirement migrants were discussed by Canadian news sources in 2020. First, some articles framed this sizeable group as consumers who participated in economic activities, had consumer needs, and financially contributed to local communities both at home and abroad in altered ways in 2020. Second, many articles framed Canadian international retirement migrants as those who were facing new uncertainties related to disruptions to their usual routines, some of which brought practical challenges that had to be addressed. Finally, a number of other articles framed Canadian international retirement migrants as being in search of stability, which included

issues around passage back home as the pandemic unfolded and needing to find safe places to stay. In the remainder of this section, we present findings specific to each theme, having identified the dominant frame used to discuss or characterize Canadian international retirement migrants in each of the 187 included media articles.

2.4.1. Canadian international retirement migrants were altering consumer practices

Of the articles we reviewed, 46 predominantly framed Canadian international retirement migrants as consumers who were dealing with altered consumer practices. Many of these articles focused on how these older Canadians were important drivers of business and local economies in the destinations they frequented during the winter months. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel and border measures disrupted contributions to their destinations' tourism sectors. For example, in reflecting on the loss of the influx of seasonal travellers to US destinations, one article explained that: *"It is ever clearer that tourism is one of the most affected sectors by this unprecedented crisis. We need to step up our efforts to safely open borders while supporting tourism jobs and businesses"* (Pradinuk, 2020). An important aspect of this frame was the common acknowledgement that Canadian international retirement migrants were often considered community members, or to be like "locals," in their winter communities. As such, they undertook everyday consumer activities such as grocery shopping and home maintenance that significantly drove the seasonal economies in popular destinations. For example, a Florida restaurant owner interviewed for an article explained that:

Together, snowbirds and short-termers typically spend more than \$6 billion [US\$] in the state [Florida] each year. When they come, they spend, and they really help the local economy here. And they're entrenched in this community—they've been here for years and years, have settled here to some degree, and this is their home away from home. (McCarten, 2020)

Articles underscored that these usual seasonal consumer activities were not undertaken abroad by those who returned to Canada early at the outset of the pandemic, nor by those retirement migrants who opted not to go abroad for the 2020/21 winter season.

Although most of the focus on Canadian international retirement migrants and their altered consumer practices centred on their contributions to destination economies, or lack thereof due to the pandemic, some articles did focus on the financial gains to be

had for specific Canadian communities and sectors. For example, articles highlighted the gains for Canadian winterized recreational vehicle (RV) parks. Some of these RV parks sold out of spaces months ahead of schedule due to unanticipated business from Canadian international retirement migrants returning in early 2020, along with those who needed to park their RVs locally for winter 2020/21 instead of driving to the US. There was also considerable focus placed on the local purchase of goods and services by older Canadians who typically would have travelled to the US or elsewhere for the winter. As an example, an article focused on the financial boom experienced by a seasonal Christmas tree farm:

“We are sold out of live trees,” Hiebert said. “We still have artificial trees, but live trees sold out on the weekend. The last one walked out on Sunday. It was crazy. We bought a lot more this year anticipating more of a demand—all of the snowbirds that normally go south are at home and people are just worried about getting one (tree).” (Speirs, 2020)

Finally, some articles that framed Canadian international retirement migrants primarily as consumers were focused on the implications of the pandemic for Canada's travel insurance industry, both in terms of new opportunities and whether or not this group of consumers would be purchasing packages any time soon.

2.4.2 Canadian international retirement migrants were facing new uncertainties

A group of 73 articles primarily framed Canadian international retirement migrants as facing new uncertainties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated measures used to manage coronavirus spread. Two types of uncertainties were commonly explored in the articles we reviewed, the first of which were those that related to addressing the practical challenges of how, when, and by which routes Canadian international retirement migrants who were abroad at the outset of the pandemic would return home. Many articles chronicled their journeys home following the announcement of the closure of the Canada-US land border to non-essential travellers. These articles told of frantic hotel bookings, taking previously uncharted driving routes to avoid emerging COVID-19 hotspots in the US, and rushed decisions regarding closing up seasonal properties earlier than planned. A particular uncertainty was faced by those who lived in RVs year-round, but seasonally in both Canada and the US. In some Canadian provinces, trailer parks were deemed non-essential services and were thus

closed for long periods of time, which left some returning Canadian international migrants scrambling to find an RV rental pad at home unseasonably early. The mayor of a small, rural Canadian city explained that:

There is a small glitch in the system. That is, you can't tell the snowbirds to come home and if their home is in a trailer park, tell them they can't go to their home. That's the dilemma. These are people that don't have other permanent residences in Ontario. And so they come home, and their home is the park. (McGran, 2020)

This quote shows that some of the uncertainties faced by Canadian international retirement migrants had impacts on others, including elected officials who were sometimes positioned to advocate for the needs of this group.

The second kind of uncertainty that articles framed Canadian international retirement migrants as facing pertained to the unknowns surrounding if and when they could return to seasonal residences or stays abroad. For example, a Canadian travel insurance broker interviewed in an article said that *“he's hearing from local snowbirds as they debate the pros and cons of heading for their winter homes during the pandemic”* (Sobanski, 2020). Many articles pointed out that Canadian international retirement migrants who owned seasonal properties in the US or elsewhere were particularly anxious about the uncertainties regarding when safe travel would be possible given the need to maintain their residences. Articles also chronicled the frustrations brewing among some who believed that crossing the land border to maintain a property in the US should be considered an allowable reason to travel despite the border closure to non-essential travel. In many ways, articles pointed out that some of these older Canadians felt entitled to circumvent border restrictions and the uncertainties they caused. There were also those who were anxious to know when travel would resume so that they could reconnect with their social networks in destinations, but were admittedly uncertain about when such reunions would happen. A Canadian international retirement migrant was saddened by *“not being able to get to favourite destinations like Sedona, Ariz., to meet up with fellow mobile families”* (Spurr, 2020), with such sentiments reinforcing the social nature of this transnational mobility.

2.4.3 Canadian international retirement migrants were seeking stability

Perhaps not surprising given that Canadian international retirement migrants were engaging in new consumer practices and facing uncertainties brought on by the pandemic, some newspaper articles framed this group as being in search of stability. In fact, 67 articles primarily framed these older Canadians as seeking stability. This frame touched on topics such as some Canadian international retirement migrants choosing to stay abroad despite land border closure measures or choosing to travel abroad for the 2020/21 winter despite requests to avoid non-essential travel. In both instances, such choices were made out of a desire to live a familiar life in places they deemed safe. For some Canadian international retirement migrants, there was a sense that if they were to endure lockdowns and closures they may as well choose *“to bunker down in Florida where they can at least enjoy a warmer climate”* (Woo, 2020).

In some instances, decisions to seek stability left some Canadians—including this author of a letter to the editor published by a local newspaper—referring to Canadian international retirement migrants as selfish:

I cannot imagine the selfish attitude of a snowbird talking about going to their “winter home.” Our government has closed the Canadian border until Sept. 21, for obvious reasons, and will hopefully keep it closed until the United States gets COVID-19 under control. (Butchart, 2020)

As such, several articles that framed Canadian international retirement migrants as seeking stability positioned this group as made up of privileged or entitled people who sometimes made risky decisions to achieve the comfort and stability they sought at the expense of others or the greater good. Demonstrations of such privilege included discussions of retirement migrants choosing to disobey quarantine orders upon return to Canada to purchase groceries and other supplies (e.g., Lowrie, 2020), self-advocacy by these travellers to be exempted from quarantine and travel restrictions upon returning to Canada (e.g., Selley, 2020), and the potential for becoming vaccinated while abroad sooner than they would have if they stayed in Canada (e.g., McGregor & Somos, 2020). Most of the articles that framed Canadian international retirements as feeling entitled to seek stability despite the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic focused on considering the impacts of their decisions for Canada and other Canadians, rather than the impacts for their seasonal destinations abroad.

2.5. Discussion

Through our review of 187 Canadian newspaper articles published in 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, we found that discussions of Canadian international retirement migrants consistently used one of three frames. In the first instance, some articles framed these older Canadians as participating in consumer practices that were altered as a result of the changed realities brought on primarily by measures put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 into Canada. Second, many articles framed Canadian international retirement migrants as people who were facing new uncertainties as a result of disruptions to their usual seasonal transnational migratory routines. Finally, a number of articles framed these older Canadians as people who were in search of stability despite the pandemic-related changes going on around them. Some journalists consulted directly with Canadian international retirement migrants when writing these articles. As shown in the quotes in the previous section, it was also quite common for the opinions of those whose businesses or professional roles were positively or negatively impacted by changes to these older Canadians' seasonal movements to be sought. The comments from restaurateurs, insurance brokers, mayors, and Christmas tree farmers in home and destination communities serve to highlight the networked impacts stemming from changes to the predictability of these older Canadians' annual movements. In the remainder of this section, we discuss the findings and draw out their significance for understanding the spatio-temporal dimensions of international retirement migration by Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic, as characterized by newspaper coverage from 2020.

The three dominant frames identified in this analysis sometimes conceptualized Canadian international retirement migrants, including their roles and activities, in quite contradictory ways throughout the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to initial border restrictions and calls for Canadians abroad to return home in early 2020, some articles conceived of these older Canadians as a vulnerable group in need of understanding given the quickly changing spatio-temporalities as they rushed home (e.g., Theodore, 2020), while other articles from this same period considered some to be risk-takers for not strictly following quarantine measures upon return or opting to stay abroad despite the land border closure (e.g., Butchart, 2020). Interestingly, such contradictions were not only evident in how Canadian international retirement migrants

and their lives were conceptualized at specific periods of time, but also within specific frames identified in the analysis. For example, the most common frame identified was that of these retirement migrants facing new uncertainties, and while some articles conceptualized these uncertainties as causing despair and frustration for intended travellers (e.g., Sobanski, 2020), others positioned uncertainties as the impetus for these older Canadians' resilience and adaptation (e.g., Dunn, 2020). A recent study by Pickering et al. (2021), which explored how Canadian international retirement migrants prepared to manage their health while abroad, observed that while international retirement migrants are often thought of as a relatively homogeneous group, there are actually important differences among them. The contradictions captured in Canadian newspaper coverage of this group in 2020 underscore this point. Very important differences emerged in the socio-spatial strategies adopted to address the COVID-19 pandemic as it related to these older Canadians' seasonal travel, such as the differences between those who took the risk of going abroad for winter 2020/21 versus those who did not and instead adapted their winter routines by staying in Canada.

The results of our framing analysis show an interesting dualism, in that the impacts of the changed spatio-temporal realities Canadian international retirement migrants faced in 2020 posed both challenges and opportunities. Many articles highlighted how changes to Canadian international retirement migrants' annual transnational movement patterns introduced challenges for destination communities and their businesses. However, the same challenges that negatively affected businesses in destinations as a result of altered consumer practices brought new opportunities for businesses in Canadian communities. This dualism of destination-economic challenge and home-economic opportunity serves to illustrate some of the integrated ways in which home and destination communities support different aspects of retirement migration. At home, these older Canadian travellers typically undertake preparatory types of economic activities such as purchasing travel health insurance, having RVs serviced, and buying goods that they plan to take abroad (Canadian Snowbird Association, 2019; Pickering et al., 2021; Snowbird Advisor, 2021). Economies in popular destinations support accommodation, recreational, health, social, and other needs brought on while living abroad and undertaking activities associated with the retirement migration lifestyle (Desrosiers-Lauzon's, 2009; Gordon Bennett, 1996; Hoffman et al., 2017; Sastry, 1992). While this separation of economic activities between

home and destination communities may work well under normal travel and border access circumstances, the COVID-19 pandemic served to show the vulnerability of those communities that rely on seasonal visits from older Canadians to changed travel inflows. The lived experience of these vulnerabilities was heavily captured in the media articles reviewed through interviews with business owners and political figures.

Andrews et al. (2021) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought several major geographies to the fore, one of which is that it has introduced new spaces of hope, fear, uncertainty, and community, and that our understanding of these spaces is influenced by others, including the media. Although our analysis has not considered the wider influence of the newspaper coverage examined herein, it is very likely that the frames we have identified shaped how others view this group based on what was revealed. In relation to this, it is important to identify what the frames did not consider. While the COVID-19 pandemic at its core is a global public health crisis (Andrews et al., 2021) there was little consideration given to Canadian international retirement migrants' health in the articles we reviewed as opposed to their roles as economic and social actors. For example, there was only limited acknowledgement that the age of most of these seasonal travellers put them at risk of greater severity of COVID-19 if contracted (Liu et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). Furthermore, Canadian international retirement migrants were rarely explicitly considered to be potential transmission vectors. Instead, they were often discussed as escaping, fleeing, or avoiding COVID-19 exposure risks instead of potentially contracting and spreading the virus. Although outside the temporal focus of this analysis, considerable public scrutiny of this group did emerge in early 2021 when it became clear how many had opted to go abroad for the 2020/21 winter despite the travel and border measures in place. Two specific points of concern that focused more explicitly on health were equity issues surrounding these older Canadians becoming vaccinated while abroad and pushback from some retirement migrants who believed they should be exempted from hotel quarantine measures put in place on February 22, 2021 (e.g., Harris, 2021; Wilton, 2020). A newspaper headline from February 2021 indicated that there was "no sympathy for snowbirds" (Gilmore, 2021) who had opted to go abroad in winter 2020/21, which was a very different sentiment from the newspaper frames from 2020 identified in our analysis.

The findings of our framing analysis raise a number of implications for future research about Canadian international retirement migrants. First, all three frames clearly

show that the practice of international retirement migration has important implications for older people's home communities and their lives at home. As King et al. (2021) have observed, much of the current research is focused on international retirement migrants' lives in destinations. The media articles we reviewed show the important role that Canadian international retirement migrants' home communities, social networks, and lives played in coping with the changed socio-temporal realities brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue is certainly worthy of dedicated research exploration. Second, it would be very useful to document Canadian international retirement migrants' first-hand experiences of travelling transnationally, or not, during the COVID-19 pandemic through in-depth interviews. This would allow for consideration of whether and how their own narratives resonate with the frames used in the 2020 Canadian newspaper coverage of this group. Such research would also facilitate exploration of whether or not they were aware of how those who engage in this transnational mobility were portrayed by the media during the pandemic, and if this had any significance for their decisions and lives. Finally, participation in international retirement migration is greatly facilitated by the ease of unrestricted movements across national borders (Pickering et al., 2019). This analysis has shown how changes to border access and cross-border movements in the context of a crisis disrupt not only international retirement migrants' transnational movements, but also the economies that depend on them. With this in mind, it would be very useful to identify other types of disruptions that can impact border access and cross-border movement, such as natural disasters and political unrest, and consider their potential implications for these older travellers' health and well-being, the maintenance of their social networks, and the economies that rely on them as consumers through research.

2.6. Conclusion

We set out to explore how Canadian international retirement migrants' lives, activities, and actions were framed in Canadian newspaper coverage published in 2020, which was the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Conducting a framing analysis of 187 articles, we identified three dominant frames that were used to discuss this fairly sizeable group of older Canadians. First, some articles framed them as engaging in altered consumer practices as a way to address the rapidly shifting spatio-temporalities brought on by pandemic-related travel and border measures put in place. These altered

consumer practices had significant implications for retirement migrants' home and destination communities alike. Second, many articles framed Canadian international retirement migrants as facing new uncertainties, particularly those related to if and when they could engage in their routine seasonal travel. These uncertainties were particularly pronounced at two points in time: (1) in early 2020 when the Canada–US land border closed to non-essential travel and all Canadians abroad were encouraged to return home, and (2) in late 2020 when older Canadians needed to ultimately decide whether or not to go abroad for winter 2020/21. Finally, some articles framed these older seasonal travellers as being in search of stability, both in terms of residential location and connecting with established social networks. This search for stability in residential location was heavily driven by a desire for safety and familiarity, and for some that came from altering their routines and staying in Canada for the winter, while for others that came from the usual routine of going abroad. Interestingly, these frames were quite explicitly focused on Canadian international retirement migrants' social and economic roles rather than on their individual needs to protect their health during a pandemic or the risks they may have posed in relation to spreading COVID-19 or contracting it while abroad.

The seasonal international retirement migration undertaken annually by older Canadians has a defined temporality, to the point that businesses and economic sectors both at home and abroad have emerged in response to this seemingly predictable, reliable transnational movement. The taken-for-granted temporality of this mobility is likely one of the reasons why much existing research, including that undertaken by geographers, has not fully explored the spatio-temporality of international retirement migration (King et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted not only the predictable seasonal temporality of this practice by older Canadians, it also disrupted the spatiality of this practice by heavily limiting the ease of travel and border access for most of 2020. What remains to be seen are the lessons Canadian international retirement migrants take from the exceptional spatio-temporalities experienced in 2020 for their continued involvement in this transnational mobility, including the vulnerabilities and uncertainties they went through and the opportunities and safety they found. We call for future researchers to explore this and other issues that can offer transferrable insights into crisis management more broadly for Canadian international retirement migrants.

Chapter 3. “We were leery of going”: Qualitatively exploring Canadian international retirement migrants’ travel-related decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic

3.1. Abstract

Background: International retirement migration has grown in popularity in recent years. These retirees are motivated by the promise of warmer winter climates that are conducive to participating in health-promoting recreational and social activities. Ease of cross-border travel facilitates this transnational practice. However, border closures and other travel-related measures put in place to manage the spread of COVID-19 disrupted travel, including for older Canadians who typically winter in the United States (US). During the 2020-21 winter, for example, Canadians were advised not to engage in non-essential international travel and the land border between Canada and the US was closed to all but essential travellers. Nonetheless, retirement migration remained a significant draw for many Canadian retirees. Here we qualitatively explore the factors that Canadian international retirement migrants considered when deciding whether or not to travel to the US for the 2020-21 winter during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Methods:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 31 Canadian international retirement migrants who had wintered in the US prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and were in the US at the outset of the pandemic in late winter 2020. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically analyzed to decipher what factors were most important to their travel-related decision-making during the pandemic. We structure the thematic results around four factors previously identified to motivate older people to become international retirement migrants and thus inform decision-making: the destination, the people, the cost, and the movement. **Results:** The previously identified factors that motivate older people to participate in international retirement migration include: the destination (e.g., climate and amenities), the people (e.g., social networks), the cost (e.g., health insurance and living costs), and the movement (e.g., ease of travel). These factors informed how international retirement migrants made decisions to travel abroad or not in the 2020-21 winter season. For example, destination-based factors included a lack of public health measures and high case counts, people-based factors comprised of less opportunities to engage in social activities, cost-based factors involved maintaining

property investments and the inaccessibility of travel health insurance with COVID-19 coverage, and movement-based factors included challenges in ease of access when travel was viewed as essential or non-essential. All of which disincentivized or motivated international retirement migrants to travel abroad in the 2020-21 winter season during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Conclusions:** The results of this study support the need to create tailored decision-support tools for international retirement migrants to make informed travel-related decisions during crisis events so as to protect their health and wellbeing. More research is needed to explore perceptions of risk, especially health risks, among international retirement migrants and how they differently affect their travel-related decisions.

3.2. Introduction

Retirees travel abroad seasonally to enjoy warmer climates and their associated benefits to health and wellbeing, such as participating in outdoor recreational opportunities and creating social networks. This practice, known as international retirement migration, is growing in popularity (Legido-Quigley & McKee, 2012). A recent scoping review indicates that people are motivated to become international retirement migrants for four main reasons: the destination (e.g., health promoting opportunities); the people (e.g., opportunities to create new social networks); the cost (e.g., affordability of the destination); and the movement (e.g., travel options) (Pickering et al., 2019). These motivating factors inform decision-making regarding whether or not to participate in international retirement migration as well as destination selection. Two noteworthy factors that further support retirees participating in this practice are having the financial resources to allow travel while maintaining two residences (whether owned or rented) along with travellers' personal health status (King, 2012; Longino et al., 2002). The financial costs of wintering abroad are sometimes partially offset by lower costs of living in some destinations, though even in such cases other new seasonal expenses are still introduced such as those associated with purchasing travel health insurance policies and/or transportation (Pickering et al., 2019).

Hundreds of thousands of older Canadians are among those retirees internationally who travel abroad for the winter, typically for stays of weeks or months between November and April (Statistics Canada, 2019). The United States (US) is a popular destination for them due to its proximity and the ease of travelling there by vehicle (Statistics Canada, 2019). The southern states of Florida, Texas, Arizona, and California are particularly popular among older Canadian retirement migrants (Coates et al., 2002; Longino Jr & Biggar, 1981; Pickering et al., 2020). Many residential communities in these states actively seek to attract Canadian retirees through offering appealing amenities such as seniors recreational complexes, hospitals and health care clinics with geriatric expertise, year-round security, and organized social activities (King et al., 2002; O'Reilly, 2000; Rodriguez et al., 2004).

Although Canadians enjoy access to publicly funded medically necessary health care at home, this coverage is not portable internationally, creating a barrier to international retirement migration (Ontario Health Insurance Program, 2017). Thus,

many Canadian international retirement migrants purchase private travel health insurance in order to protect their health while wintering in the US (Pickering et al., 2020, 2021; Shariff et al., 2021). Canadian international retirement migrants have reported that these policies can be costly, sometimes prohibitively so, and complex to navigate in terms of fully understanding care inclusions/exclusions (Pickering et al., 2021). The challenging complexity of these policies has also been acknowledged by administrators and clinicians working at hospitals in popular US destinations for older Canadians (Pickering et al., 2020). For example, navigating the Canadian travel medicine insurance policies has proven to be a significant challenge for international retirement migrants where they have reported having to wait for insurance approvals from Canada which many health care professionals are unfamiliar with (Pickering et al., 2020). Other challenges to obtaining travel health insurance is language barriers, a lack of trust in health care systems abroad, along with migrants perceived need of health care while abroad (Julchoo et al., 2021).

The global COVID-19 pandemic, which was officially declared in March of 2020 by the World Health Organization, affected the travel and movements of intended international retirement migrants, including Canadians, for many reasons. For example, Canadian international retirement migrants were among those who were requested to return home quickly at the outset of the pandemic in March, 2020 before border closures or other public health measures restricted their transnational movements (Canadian Snowbird Association, 2020; Tate et al., 2022). By March 21st the shared land border between the US and Canada had closed to all non-essential travel and by March 25th quarantine orders were put in place for Canadians returning from abroad, including returning retirement migrants (Government of Canada, 2020; United States Department of Homeland Security, 2020). This border closure measure remained in effect until November, 2021 when the shared land border reopened and vaccinated Canadians could once again travel by vehicle to the US for recreational purposes (Harris, 2021). The land border closure lasted a total of 19 months and spanned the entirety of the 2020-21 winter season when hundreds of thousands of older Canadians would typically have travelled to the US (primarily by land) for weeks or months as retirement migrants. It is this winter season that serves as the focus of our paper, where we explore what motivated experienced Canadian international retirement migrants to travel to the US or not during the height of the pandemic when non-essential travel was restricted.

Here we present a qualitative analysis exploring which factors influenced Canadian international retirement migrants in their decision-making about the possibility of travelling to the US for the 2020-21 winter season, which was at a point in the COVID-19 pandemic when Canadians were advised not to engage in non-essential travel due to personal and public health risks. We specifically present the findings from 31 semi-structured one-on-one interviews with older Canadians who regularly wintered in the US, were abroad at the outset of the pandemic in late winter of 2020, and who were faced with deciding whether or not to return to the US for the 2020-21 winter. We thematically explore the factors participants considered related to their participation in this seasonal travel during the COVID-19 pandemic, which are organized around the four main motivations that drive older people to participate in international retirement migration – the destination, the people, the cost, and the movement. As we point out in the discussion, understanding factors important to international retirement migrants' travel decision-making during a global health crisis can be useful in developing tailored decision-support tools for this group of travellers that can be used in other crises that affect travel and movement and have personal and public health implications (e.g., environmental disasters). The development of such tools is critical because as Pickering et al. (2021) recently found, there is little information available that is tailored to Canadian international retirement migrants in particular to support them in making informed travel-related decisions that will ultimately protect their health and wellbeing.

3.3. Methods

An exploratory case study approach was used to examine the decision-making factors motivating Canadian international retirement migrants to winter in the US, or not, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Case study methodology was selected as it allows for the comprehensive exploration of an idea or issue within a specific context which is undertaken through multiple sources. In addition to the current analysis, we also examined Canadian newspaper articles discussing the portrayal of international retirement migrants and their travel throughout the pandemic in mainstream Canadian print news media as part of the case study (Tate et al., 2022). Given that international retirement migrants' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic have been influenced by a range of contextual factors, such as changing border regulations, case study provides the tools to understand these complex situations through a focus on context

(Sibbald et al., 2021). To get a deeper understanding of Canadian international retirement migrants' travel-related decisions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, one-on-one interviews were conducted as they allow for gaining in-depth insights (Stevens et al., 2013). These interviews, the findings of which are presented herein, were conducted over a two-month period at the end of 2021.

Participant recruitment started following approval of this study from our institution's research ethics board. Given the exploratory nature of this study, we aimed to conduct at least 20 phone interviews with eligible Canadian international retirement migrants. The inclusion criteria were: 1) having been in the US for the 2019/20 winter season (i.e., at the outset of the pandemic), 2) having gone abroad or not gone to the US for the 2020/21 winter season; and 3) being able to participate in an English-language phone interview. Multiple recruitment strategies were employed simultaneously. They included: 1) posting in popular "Canadian snowbird" Facebook groups, along with replying to social media threads on Twitter, Facebook, or news articles featuring issues salient to the participant group; 2) advertising the study on Kijiji and Craigslist; 3) reaching out to known contacts from previous studies who opted to be informed about further studies; 4) our own personal and professional networks; and 5) inviting existing participants to share study information with eligible others. Prospective participants who reached out were sent a follow-up email that included study details and information on the consent process. Those who were still inclined to participate were asked to reply to the first author by email to confirm eligibility and were asked to send potential interview dates and times. Upon confirmation of eligibility, interviews were scheduled based on participants' availability.

The phone interviews were approximately 1 hour in length, all of which were conducted by the first author to enhance consistency. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim upon completion. A semi-structured interview script was used to guide the interviews that prompted discussion of experiences of returning to Canada from the US at the outset of the pandemic in early 2020 and probed decision-making regarding going abroad the following winter (2020-21), including sources of information to support decision-making. Specific interview prompts were informed in part by a scoping review of motivations for participating in international retirement migration that identifies decision-making factors (see Pickering et al., 2019) and by the newspaper article analysis that contributes to the current case study (see Tate et al., 2022). At the

end of the interview, each participant was invited to discuss any relevant experiences that were not already touched on in the conversation. After the interview participants received a CAD\$25 e-gift card to a retailer of their choosing to acknowledge their valuable contributions to the study.

After completion of interviews and verbatim transcription, each author independently reviewed five unique transcripts in preparation for analysis. Following independent review, a team meeting was held to identify emergent themes and discuss any outliers in preparation for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). We reached consensus about three distinct emergent meta-themes central to the narratives participants shared, one of which centred around travel decision-making and is presented herein. We contrasted these three emergent meta-themes against the relevant existing literature, which is an important step in thematic analysis (Alhojailan, 2012), to assist with defining the scope and scale of each. Our next step was to create a coding scheme to assist with organizing the data relevant to each meta-theme to identify sub-themes. A scheme was developed collaboratively and implemented by the first author with any uncertainties in interpretation being resolved by the second author. Coding was conducted manually, with excerpts relating to each code in the scheme being extracted from the transcripts and organized using a synthesis table shared via GoogleDocs. It was at this point we agreed that the four motivating factors identified in the Pickering et al. (2019) scoping review served as a meaningful framework for exploring the sub-themes connected to the travel decision-making meta-theme and so we integrated them into the synthesis table for the current analysis. Upon completion of coding, we independently reviewed the synthesis tables to confirm the interpretation of the coded excerpts and the analytic scope. Overall, rigour was built into our analytic process through the use of investigator triangulation throughout that allowed for the confirmation of findings through differing perspectives (Carter et al., 2014; Flick, 2004).

3.4. Findings

We interviewed 31 Canadian international retirement migrants who were abroad in the 2019-20 winter season at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic and who did or did not return to the US for the following winter season. With regard to the 2020-21 winter season, 42% of participants chose to winter in the US while the majority remained in Canada. Participants resided in three different Canadian provinces, and all were

experienced retirement migrants who typically wintered in the states of Florida or Arizona with their marital partners. Eighteen participants owned seasonal properties in the states of Florida or Arizona, while 13 typically rented accommodations seasonally or drove to the US in their personal motorhomes.

As noted in the introduction, winter 2020-21 was a point in the COVID-19 pandemic at which Canadians were advised to avoid international travel, including to the US, unless it was considered essential, and the Canada-US land border was specifically closed to non-essential travel. In the remainder of this section, we explore what motivated participants to either travel to the US or stay at home in Canada for the 2020-21 winter season in light of these and other public health measures put in place to lessen the spread of COVID-19. We organize these motivations around the four factors that Pickering et al.'s (2019) scoping review found were most important in informing decision-making regarding participating in international retirement migration: the destination (e.g., climate and amenities), the people (e.g., social networks), the cost (e.g., health insurance and living costs), and the movement (e.g., ease of travel). In the sub-sections that follow we consider each of these factors in relation to participants' motivations to travel during the COVID-19 pandemic. In each sub-section we contrast the perspectives of those who opted to go abroad for the 2020-21 winter against those who did not.

3.4.1. The Destination

Participants saw their usual retirement migrant destinations in two distinctly different ways during the 2020-21 winter. For those who opted to winter in the US, their usual destinations were viewed as safe and health-promoting places to spend time during the pandemic. This was generally consistent with how they understood these same winter destinations in non-pandemic years and the potential they offered for engaging in what was considered a healthier lifestyle in a warmer climate than what they would experience at home in Canada. Wintering in the US provided an important perceived benefit for most who opted to travel. Being in a warmer climate was thought to have protected them from COVID-19 transmission risks as they were able to engage in outdoor socialization and recreation opportunities that were not available at home. For example, a participant who opted to go to the US explained the importance of this decision-making factor:

Well do we go down south [to the US] and enjoy the warm weather and be outdoors in our own yard and just take care that we don't go anywhere? Or do we stay in the apartment building [in Canada] with 71 other apartments where you're walking common property where people are sneezing, and sniffing, and coughing, and touching things, and you're indoors over the crappy winter? And we said, 'no, we're going south.'

A destination-based amenity that motivated some participants to travel during the pandemic was the potential to access COVID-19 vaccines while in the US earlier than they could at home in Canada, with some reporting they were able to access their first vaccine “*immediately*” upon arrival in the US. Outside of this opportunity, participants who opted to travel generally viewed the usual destination-related motivations for engaging in international retirement migration including a warmer climate that offers health benefits as protective factors for wintering abroad during the pandemic.

For participants who did not go abroad in the 2020-21 winter, their typical retirement migrant destinations were commonly characterized as risky settings. Such assessments were often made by watching or reading local news reports while home in Canada and connecting with friends to learn about protective practices, such as mask wearing, and the general local sentiment about the state of the pandemic. These concerns weighed heavily throughout decision-making regarding winter travel, as one participant explained:

We were leery of going down [to the US]. Even friends that we have that live in Florida permanently in the [residential] park, they were hesitant about going out and going anywhere. So, the more we heard from even the locals...it was, "*Nope, we don't want to go.*" The other thing was, the park, while they did implement a number of [COVID-19 related] restrictions, they were certainly a lot less than what we would've seen up here [in Canada].

Many participants who were motivated to stay at home for the winter closely followed COVID-19 case counts in their usual destinations. “*Canada wasn't the best, but we had better numbers and it was safer to be home. And the people here, I think, were more responsible. So that was the big thing.*” Another common concern among participants who opted not to travel was the perception that pandemic-related public health measures, such as mask wearing mandates and business closures, were inadequate in their US destination. Overall, destination-based factors such as the

absence of public health measures, high case counts, word-of-mouth from friends, and local news coverage of the pandemic served as both disincentives from travelling and motivators to stay in Canada.

3.4.2. The People

Participants who opted to travel to the US for the 2020-21 winter were commonly drawn to do so to maintain their usual winter social networks. Though they recognized that fewer Canadian international retirement migrants would likely be in the destination, it was thought that there would be greater opportunities for socialization abroad than at home. Some opted to travel abroad for the winter because their usual destination had fewer pandemic-related measures or restrictions in place that would inhibit social interactions relative to their home communities in Canada. For example, one participant explained:

There were only two of us that came down. All the rest of the Canadians stayed home. But once we arrived there, it was like, oh my god, a whole new world opened up to us because everything was open. People wore masks down there, but it was none of this 50% capacity for restaurants... I mean, at our stage in life to be locked down, you're not living, you're surviving.

Overall, even in their more limited form, the potential for socialization in public and community settings, such as recreation centres and restaurants, was a significant decision-making factor for those who opted to travel to the US for the 2020-21 winter when pandemic-related travel restrictions were in place in Canada.

Participants who opted to stay in Canada for the 2020-21 winter generally acknowledged that they were sacrificing the social lives and networks they enjoyed while normally wintering in the US. One participant remarked that *"In one way, we have good friends down there [in the normal US destination]. We enjoyed it down there. But the bottom line is things have changed. COVID has changed."* Concern was not raised by these same participants, however, that social relations with their usual wintertime friends could not be resumed once travel restrictions were eased and retirement migration was possible again. Thus, the loss of social interactions for the 2020-21 winter was viewed as temporary as opposed to permanent and many participants reported looking forward to resuming friendships in their usual wintertime destinations once non-essential travel was allowed again.

3.4.3. The Cost

For participants who owned properties in the US, a significant factor in their decision-making about whether or not to go abroad in the 2020-21 winter was the need for household maintenance. For some, their winter homes were seen as an investment that could not be abandoned or disregarded, even in a time of crisis. A participant explained that their seasonal home *“it’s just not something that you oddly leave.”* This perspective drove some participants to make the decision to go abroad for the winter. An important financial enabler for travel was the ability to access affordable travel health insurance that covered COVID-19-related treatment. *“My husband has a policy...and they do insure for COVID, they did allow COVID insurance. We’re pretty healthy, we don’t really have any pre-existing conditions, so we felt we were pretty safe coming down then.”* Participants who opted to travel generally also identified economic incentives for wintering abroad during the pandemic, such as the lower cost of food and goods in the US that could offset higher travel health insurance policy costs.

While some participants were able to afford the high cost of travel health insurance during the COVID-19 pandemic, others found this insurance to be inaccessible. Having private travel health insurance is not a requirement for Canadians travelling abroad. However, participants who felt these policies were important to hold quite consistently remarked about the costs of such insurance during the pandemic or the fact that policies were not available to them at all. For example, one participant explained that they were unable to purchase policies because they had had COVID-19 too close to when they wanted to depart for the US. Another remarked that the idea of not being adequately protected against the potentially high costs of being treated for COVID-19 while in the US *“scared us”* even if they were able to afford a travel health insurance policy. Such possibilities weighed heavily in these participants’ minds when deciding whether or not to travel to the US for the 2020-21 winter.

3.4.4. The Movement

Although all participants were aware of the Canada-US land border closure and request for Canadians to avoid non-essential travel during the 2020-21 winter, some suggested there were *“inconsistencies”* in how these measures were enforced. These inconsistencies enabled some participants to circumvent restrictions through creativity,

such as by flying to their US destination while also shipping their personal vehicle or recreational vehicle through a freight transportation provider across the land border. For example, one participant explained that *“when the land border closed and we decided to ignore the recommendation that came from the government, we ended up flying that year... I think as long as we could get a flight to go to our home in Phoenix [Arizona] and we felt very safe.”* Another inconsistency came in relation to interpretations of what constituted non-essential travel. Participants who opted to travel to the US for winter 2020-21 consistently viewed their travel as being essential due to factors such as owning a property in the destination that needed to be maintained or the personal health benefits they experienced from being in a warmer climate for the winter months. Understanding one’s own seasonal travel to be ‘essential’ was an important decision-making factor considered by these participants.

The participants who did not opt to travel abroad collectively agreed it was their responsibility to follow the Canadian government’s request to avoid non-essential international travel and viewed their wintertime stays abroad as non-essential. By avoiding their usual transnational movements during the peak of the pandemic, they were doing what they could to protect their health and support the general safety and wellbeing of others. Participants who opted not to travel to the US reported thinking very carefully about their decisions, often weighing multiple factors. Even if some factors supported decisions to travel, *“in the end, we just decided, no, it wasn’t safe”* or was not essential for the participant, all things considered. It was also acknowledged that there were exceptional costs related to travel during the pandemic, such as shipping personal vehicles or purchasing COVID-19 tests that were required upon re-entry into Canada, that served as an additional barrier to transnational movement.

3.5. Discussion

Every winter tens of thousands of Canadian retirees temporarily relocate to international destinations, typically having been motivated to do so by destination-, cost-, people-, and movement-related factors (Pickering et al., 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this transnational movement as a result of land border closures and preventive public health measures that had a profound impact on older Canadians’ seasonal travel-related decisions (Tate et al., 2022). Among these impacts were the sometimes-challenging decisions Canadian international retirement migrants needed to make about

whether or not to winter in the US during the pandemic. Our interviews with 31 of these older Canadians revealed a range of factors they took into consideration when coming to a decision about the possibility of engaging in seasonal travel, which are synthesized in Table 1. This synthesis table contrasts the findings of this analysis against the usual motivating factors for participation in international retirement migration previously identified by Pickering et al. (2019). As shown in Table 1, the four broad motivations identified by Pickering et al. (2019) were salient to older Canadians' decision-making about wintering in the US during the pandemic, but they informed decisions both to travel and also to stay at home among participants. Different factors also emerged to shape travel-related decision-making during the pandemic relevant to each of these broad motivations. For example, participants spoke little about the general cost of living (e.g., less expensive groceries) as motivating their travel to the US during the pandemic while instead focusing greatly on the need to travel to maintain costly investment properties despite advisories to avoid doing so.

Table 3.1. Analytic Synthesis

	How this factor usually motivates people to participate in international retirement migration (as per Pickering et al., 2019)	How this factor motivated Canadians to participate in international retirement migration during the COVID-19 pandemic	How this factor deterred Canadians from participating in international retirement migration during the COVID-19 pandemic
The Destination	Having access to a preferred climate that brings health benefits and associated amenities	Having access to a preferred climate that brings health benefits and associated amenities	Local news reporting framing the destination as risky; High COVID-19 case counts; Lack of preventative protocols
The People	Developing new social networks; The potential for participating in new cultural practices; Spending time with people from home while abroad	Maintaining established social networks in the destination; Greater opportunities to socialize safely in a warmer climate	Protecting their health and those of other Canadians by avoiding travel abroad during the closure of the land border and requests to avoid non-essential international travel
The Cost	Affordable cost of living, including accommodations and health care, in the destination	Maintaining property investments in the destination	Inaccessibility of affordable travel health insurance that included COVID-19 coverage
The Movement	Ease of travel and few or no barriers to long-stay visits	Viewed their travel as essential despite land border closure and requests to avoid non-essential international travel	Viewed the closure of the land border and requests to avoid non-essential international travel as absolute barriers to travel

All participants in this study shared the experience of having been in the US at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of the 2019-20 winter season, often having to navigate unexpected returns home to Canada. Yet, despite this common experience, the findings shared above show that participants had very different understandings of the risks associated with traveling to the US for the 2020-21 winter. For example, while some who were unable to access affordable travel health insurance covering COVID-19 infections viewed this as an absolute barrier to travel, others felt comfortable in staying in the US for the winter season without any such coverage. This finding echoes a Pickering et al.'s (2021) recent analysis of the strategies that Canadian international retirement migrants use to manage their health while abroad. That study found that while it was not uncommon for these older travellers to opt not to purchase travel health insurance policies, in some cases they would make the decision to do so in

an uninformed or haphazard manner without having conducted adequate research or consulted with experts, such as their own physicians.

Another important difference that emerged among participants pertained to their views of whether or not they considered their winter travel to be essential. One of the strongest justifications for viewing their travel as essential during the pandemic was home ownership in the destination community. Gibler et al. (2009) created a logistic regression model that explored home preferences among international retirement migrants. The affordability and practicality of home maintenance is an important enabling factor in their model. They contend that once retirement migrants are not able to maintain their homes properly due to health, financial, or other reasons they are more likely to consider selling/moving. Interview participants who justified their travel to be essential due to home ownership - despite the Canadian government's request not to engage in non-essential international travel during winter 2020-21 - may have been grappling with an awareness that if they were unable to keep up with routine maintenance due to a lack of access this may negatively affect their abilities to continue as dual property owners (i.e., at home and abroad) into the future. Such acknowledgement may have supported some homeowners' justification of the decision to take the risk of international travel during a global public health crisis.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was unsettling for many Canadian international retirement migrants who were abroad at its outset due to stressful journeys back to Canada along with quickly needing to navigate their newly disrupted lives (Snyder & Crooks, 2021; Tate et al., 2022). This same group had to then make important travel-related decisions regarding whether or not to go abroad the following winter (i.e., winter 2020-21) based on insights from their personal networks and other information that was available to them, which was described by participants as "*inconsistent*". This analysis shows that Canadian international retirement migrants did not commonly have access to reliable third-party information to support informed decision-making about travel during the pandemic. Others have found similar informational gaps. For example, Hatz et al. (2020) contend that global travel-related disruptions caused by public health measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic were done on an unprecedented scale and there was a general unpreparedness with regard to providing practical information for international travellers. It was evident that participants were impacted by this lack of preparedness and had to, quite independently, identify sources of information

to support their decision-making about wintering in the US during the pandemic that they deemed reliable. Suh & Flaherty (2019) argue that older travellers greatly benefit from having access to tailored information that can support their health while travelling, which is what participants lacked. Meanwhile, Pickering et al. (2021) contend that such tailored information to support the health-related travel decisions of Canadian international retirements generally does not exist. Given the potential for future pandemics, environmental disasters, and/or other crises to cause similar travel disruptions, it would be useful for public health officials in retirement migrants' home and destination communities to prepare and/or assemble relevant decision-support information. Such an informational tool can meaningfully cover details related to: travel health insurance; property access and maintenance; interpreting travel advisories; local resources to ensure health and wellbeing; and details on reliable sources of information.

The findings of this analysis hold a number of implications for further research, three of which we highlight. First, it has been suggested that the mobility disruptions and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic hold parallels to other types of crisis events at the local or regional level, such as environmental disasters (Engemann, 2020; Geiger et al., 2021). As such, there is great potential to learn from international retirement migrants' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic so as to identify transferrable points that can assist with better supporting this group in other crisis events. Such research has the potential to inform the types of informational tools we call for above. Second, Pickering et al. (2019) identified ease of travel as a dominant motivation for participating in international retirement migration and that much research on this practice is focused on travel between countries with few entry or exit requirements. The current analysis has shown that when ease of travel is disrupted there are significant consequences for international retirement migrants. Outside of our focus on pandemic-related disruption, considerable discussion is emerging in the policy community about how British retirees who winter in European Union countries (e.g., Spain, France) are likely to encounter new types of travel disruptions as a result of changed border access brought on by Brexit (Giner-Monfort & Huete, 2021; McCarthy, 2018). Future research should deeply explore the types of expectations and assumptions retirees hold about continuing ease of access to destinations when incorporating international retirement migration into their plans so as to begin to identify opportunities for supporting realistic planning. Finally, this analysis identified that obtaining affordable travel health insurance can be an important

determining factor to enable or prevent Canadian international retirement migrants from travelling abroad, at least in a global public health crisis situation. The role that travel health insurance plays in supporting (or preventing) international retirement migration tends to be mentioned peripherally in existing research (Pickering et al., 2019), and so future research should more meaningfully explore the complex relationship between insurance providers and retirement migrants in the travel decision-making process.

3.6. Conclusion

This analysis has aimed to qualitatively explore international retirement migration by Canadians to the US during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically related to the travel-related decisions they were faced with in the 2020-21 winter season. At that point in the pandemic Canadians were asked to avoid non-essential international travel and the US-Canada land border was also closed to non-essential travellers. Through thematic analysis of thirty-one interviews, we identified a number of factors that were important to international retirement migrants in making travel-related decisions both supporting decisions to travel and not to travel. Anchored around the four motivations for participation in international retirement migration identified in a scoping review by Pickering et al. (2019), in the current analysis we contrasted motivations for travel and deterrents against travel – all of which are summarized above in Table 1. Factors that supported decisions to go abroad despite travel advisories to the contrary included the desire to maintain social networks, engage in outdoor recreation, and maintain owned properties abroad. Factors that supported decisions to stay in Canada for the 2020-21 winter included a desire to follow public health messaging to avoid travel so as to protect one's own health and the lack of affordable travel health insurance packages that included COVID-19 coverage. The ways in which these and other factors were considered and the resulting decisions highlight arguments in recent studies that point to the fact that international retirement migrants are not a homogenous group, despite often being characterized as such (King et al., 2021; Pickering et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings of this analysis show that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the practice of international retirement migration by creating challenges associated with travelling amid a global health crisis. These challenges included disrupted land border access, struggles in obtaining affordable and/or adequate travel health insurance, and most significantly, the absence of third-party information needed to support informed

travel-related decision making by Canadian international retirement migrants. We thus call for the development of decision-support tools tailored to the informational needs of international retirement migrants to use in other global or local crises that similarly impact both health and mobility so as to support this group in making informed travel-related decisions.

Chapter 4. Conclusion

4.1. Overview

International retirement migration involves the seasonal relocation of older adults to destinations abroad, either short-term or permanently, who are typically motivated by lower living costs, ease of movement, warmer climates, and the social aspects of living in international retirement migrant communities (Pickering et al., 2019; Tang & Zolnikov, 2021). However, findings from my research indicate that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this practice for older Canadians through preventive measures including social distancing and land-border closures that served as access barriers, thereby rapidly changing the spatio-temporal patterns of international retirement migration. More specifically, my analyses highlight these spatio-temporal dimensions and the evolving realities for Canadian migrants participating in international retirement migration. The changing spatio-temporal dimensions are characterized by a lack of border access, disruptions in ease of movement, and changed regulatory environments. Considering the lack of literature that focuses on these types of changing spatio-temporal factors, my thesis contributes to addressing this knowledge gap by qualitatively exploring the changed spatio-temporalities of international retirement migration in the pandemic environment.

In this thesis I applied exploratory qualitative methods to identify the knowledge gaps in the current international retirement migration literature to examine the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Canadian international retirement migrants. It was organized around two separate analyses: 1) a framing analysis that explored how Canadian international retirement migrants were portrayed in Canadian news sources throughout the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (Chapter 2); and 2) a thematic analysis that presented the findings of interviews with Canadian international retirement migrants (N=31) that aimed to identify the factors that shaped their decision-making process regarding whether or not to travel abroad during the 2020-21 winter (Chapter 3). Taken together, findings from these analyses provides information on evolving needs of international retirement migrants in the context of COVID-19 that health policymakers and future researchers have the potential to consider when implementing crisis management protocols for older adults in preparation for similar contexts (e.g.,

environmental disasters that alter the ease of travel associated with international retirement migration). The remainder of this concluding chapter will revisit my research objectives identified in Chapter 1, discuss 3 three themes that crosscut my analyses, and identify future research directions.

4.2. Revisiting Objectives

My thesis research offers explorative insight into the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadian international retirement migration and allows for future researchers to further explore these factors and how they can be managed in similar crises. My objectives were to:

- (1) explore news media framings of Canadian international retirement migrants during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic; and,
- (2) understand the factors that encouraged or prevented Canadian international retirement migrants from going to the United States for the 2020-21 winter.

In this section I revisit these objectives and also reflect on the findings from both analyses presented in Chapters 2 and 3. By linking the objectives with the findings, I highlight how this research contributes to the disciplines that underpin my thesis research.

4.2.1. Objective 1: How were Canadian international retirement migrants portrayed in mainstream media during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Objective 1 specifically informed the design of the analysis presented in Chapter 2 by encompassing the exploration of news media framings of Canadian international retirement migrants during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in print news articles. To achieve this, my collaborators and I implemented a framing analysis that allowed us to understand the different ways that international retirement migrants were portrayed or framed by print news sources. I believe a qualitative, framing analysis was a valuable method to explore the portrayal of international retirement migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to develop an initial understanding of the experiences of this group from both insiders' and outsiders' perspectives. Framing analyses inform us

about how people understand and remember an event and how those events frame or inform their importance (Entman, 1993; Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Specifically, we looked at which aspects of the practice of international retirement migration during the COVID-19 pandemic was covered in news sources, and how those aspects were framed in mainstream media. We believe the frames identified in the media about international retirement migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic aligned with how the public viewed this group and also informed the opinions they formed about them.

To address this objective, we first searched a database that would yield Canadian print media. The Canadian Newsstream database served this purpose to find relevant newspaper articles related to Canadian international retirement migrants, known as “snowbirds,” and the COVID-19 pandemic. We collaboratively identified three dominant frames in the media framing international retirement migrants as: 1) consumers, 2) those who were facing uncertainties, and 3) those in search of stability. Identifying the three frames consistently used in Canadian newspaper articles discussing Canadian international retirement migrants in the COVID-19 pandemic allowed us to achieve Objective 1 by understanding how public media portrayed this group in the time frame of January 1st, 2020, to December 1st, 2020.

Chapter 2 provided insights into the changing spatio-temporalities for older Canadians abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic, three of which I highlight here. First, to my knowledge, this framing analysis offers one of the first exploratory analyses focusing on international retirement migration in the COVID-19 pandemic. International retirement migrants were categorized in specific periods of time-space and within specific frames, pertaining to spatio-temporal dimensions. Second, this exploration offered insight into not just the challenges of cross-border travel to destination communities, but also the unexpected changes in Canadian communities that shaped domestic responses to international retirement migrants. Finally, this analysis offered accounts from Canadian newspaper sources that captured public opinion on the topic of international retirement migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing us to formulate a benchmark for understanding international retirement migrants in relation to this specific spatio-temporal event. Early literature discusses the substantial impact public opinion has on social decision-making (Lasswell, 1957), such as through coverage of people and events by media sources. Did the articles we reviewed that

shaped such public opinions of international retirement migrants during the first year of the pandemic match with these older Canadians' lived experiences? This was a question that drove us to design a second analysis that would involve interviews with Canadian international retirement migrants.

4.2.2. Objective 2: What factors motivated or prevented Canadian international migrants from going to the United States for the 2020-21 winter?

This objective was addressed in Chapter 3 where my collaborators and I aimed to understand what factors motivated or prevented Canadian international retirement migrants from going to the United States (US) for the 2020-21 winter, which was informed by a qualitative case study approach (Feagin et al., 1991; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are effective qualitative tools because they allow for open-ended questions and a level of flexibility in the interview guide, eliciting in-depth responses about participants' detailed narratives, which is why this interviewing technique was employed in this analysis (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Lowe, 2005; Whiting, 2008). In the remainder of this section, I will synthesize the findings from Chapter 3 and conclude by offering three insights that this analysis has to offer.

The thematic analysis in Chapter 3 explored the factors that Canadian international retirement migrants considered when deciding whether or not to travel to the US for the 2020-21 winter season, which was the first full winter of the COVID-19 pandemic. To organize this analysis, we used a conceptual framework identified by Pickering et al., (2019) outlining the main motivations for participating in international retirement migration: 1) the destination, 2) the people, 3) the cost, and 4) the movement. One of the aims of our analysis was to determine if the factors motivating international retirement migrants' pre-pandemic applied post-pandemic, or if new motivating factors emerged that informed decisions regarding whether or not to go to the US for the winter. Leading this analysis allowed me to achieve Objective 2 by not only understanding the factors that motivated international retirement migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic but also gaining nuances pertaining to the factors also preventing them from going abroad.

Chapter 3 provided insight into the first-hand lived experiences of Canadian international retirement migrants themselves, three of which I highlight here. First, and most significantly, all international retirement migrants in the dataset were abroad at the onset of the pandemic, pointing us to the fact that each participant had some degree of experience with managing their lives in the US in the face of COVID-19 travel restrictions to inform their decisions about travel during the 2020-21 winter. Second, many factors motivating international retirement migrants to travel or not in the COVID-19 pandemic fit the normal motivations for partaking in international retirement migration, however new considerations emerged. For example, the destination proved to be a dominant motivation for travelling abroad in the COVID-19 pandemic; however, in this context the destination was associated with safety. Lastly, this analysis offers insight into the vastly different ways that international retirement migrants access and process information that pertains to their health and wellbeing, pointing us to important differences among international retirement migrants.

4.3. Crosscutting themes

The most significant theme consistent across my two analyses are the changing spatio-temporalities that shaped the experiences of Canadian international retirement migrants and informed geographical patterns in relation to space and time in the COVID-19 pandemic that are identified. In both analyses, international retirement migrants navigated the rapid changes occurring as a result of COVID-19 protocols that heavily guided travel and movement and thus had a significant impact on the transnational practice of international retirement migration. These spatio-temporalities focus specifically on border access, ease of movement, and regulatory environments that quickly changed for Canadian international retirement migrants as a result of pandemic preventative measures being put in place by governments and public health officials. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, existing research regarding international retirement migration is typically focused on destinations abroad and sometimes the home, but not the movement between them. My analyses shed light on the nuance of this movement during the pandemic and the temporal dimensions that relate to the changes occurring within the same period of time. For example, in Chapter 2, international retirements were heavily characterized spatially as they either travelled home quickly or opted to stay abroad, with great consideration given as to when and how they travelled. In relation to

these quickly changing spatio-temporal dimensions in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, specific factors either motivated or prevented them from travelling abroad in the 2020-21 winter season, which also has a spatial-temporal dimension. In Chapter 3, Canadian international retirement migrants made travel-related decisions based on the factors motivating or deterring them from travelling abroad amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. These travel-related decision-making factors directly intersect with spatio-temporal dimensions as the decisions that international retirement migrants ultimately made varied spatially within similar temporalities. For example, international retirement migrants made decisions to either follow the government's request to stay in Canada or opted to travel abroad in the 2020-21 winter season. Both analyses emphasize that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic international retirement migrants' experiences were not only shaped in space and time, but they also experienced space in varying ways depending on their travel-related decisions in particular timeframes.

Due to the changed spatio-temporal patterns in the COVID-19 pandemic, including a lack of border access, disruptions in ease of movement, and shifting regulatory environments, Canadian international retirement migrants needed to navigate how they would make connections to their lives at home. Hence, a second crosscutting theme in both analyses is the importance of the home community in coping with the changed spatio-temporalities of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Chapter 2, one of the frames identified included international retirement migrants' seeking out stability in their home communities or destination communities despite land border closure measures. Seeking stability in their home communities involved building new connections to their home environments, which was a difficult task for those who had already built strong connections to their lives abroad. In Chapter 3, international retirement migrants who stayed in Canada for the 2020-21 winter season discussed the ways they coped with not being able to participate in travelling abroad by finding new opportunities in Canadian communities. For example, coping mechanisms included finding new 'destination' communities in Canada to visit or spending time and money on home renovations to adapt their homes appropriately for the winter season. My thesis research highlights how crucial home communities are in supporting international retirement migrants in times of crisis and serves to be a dominant theme throughout both analyses.

The third crosscutting theme is concerned with the misrepresentation of international retirement migrants in earlier literature as a homogenous group (King et al.,

2021). Historically, retirees who participated in international retirement migration were often viewed as a cohort that shared similar characteristics including a high socio-economic status, earlier retirement, increased life expectancies, and those who desired a change in lifestyle (King et al., 2002; O'Reilly, 2000). However, the findings in my analyses show the significant differences among international retirement migrants as a heterogeneous group. Firstly, most international retirement migrants in Chapter 3 were in fact blue-collar workers many of whom finding cost-saving plans when migrating abroad most often including living in mobile homes year-round or not opting to purchase travel health insurance plans. Secondly, in Chapter 2, the differences among international retirement migrants are apparent in the three frames that migrants were categorized in throughout Canadian news articles. For example, these framings highlight different understandings of risk and urgency held by different retirement migrants in the face of the pandemic. In Chapter 3, the discussions with international retirement migrants point to the different ways that these older Canadians access and process information in making travel-related decisions based on how they interpreted the information related to COVID-19 pandemic measures. Important differences also emerged among those who were homeowners in their usual destination communities and viewed travelling abroad during the pandemic as a necessity in order to maintain their properties versus those who rented or drove recreational vehicles abroad who often understood the necessity of their potential travel in different ways.

4.4. Future research directions

The research from my thesis uses two different qualitative techniques for exploring international retirement migration in the COVID-19 pandemic, with the objectives drawing heavily from frameworks in health geography. Future research can continue to use multiple methods of data collection and analysis to explore international retirement migration as different research approaches can reveal different aspects of reality and elicit the potential for knowledge gain (Sibbald et al., 2021).

Coping mechanisms and the role of the home community in the COVID-19 pandemic has been studied in relation older adults (Finlay et al., 2021). This existing work is consistent with the findings in my thesis regarding the role of the home community in how international retirements migrants coped with the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic environment, specifically where they found new opportunities in

their home communities in building new social networks and finding Canadian destinations to rely on for travel purposes. Future research should more deeply explore the importance of the home community and related contexts to understand the practices of international retirement migrants in varying environments.

Consistent with literature pointing to the differences among international retirement migrants as a heterogeneous group (King et al., 2021; Pickering et al., 2021), Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted the different ways that Canadian international retirement migrants interpreted the risks of the COVID-19 pandemic. These perspectives point to the differences in the interpretation of risk amongst international retirement migrants. Future research is needed to explore these differences and what implications they carry for older Canadians specifically in crisis contexts.

The media played a large role in spreading travel-related communication on a global level, which was seen as a powerful resource for gaining information about travel during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some media outlets also spread false and misleading information regarding travel-related practices in the COVID-19 pandemic and resulted in misinformation (Anwar et al., 2020; Gallotti et al., 2020). Chapter 3 shows the inconsistency and lack of information that was available for international retirement migrants to decide whether or not to travel in the 2020-21 winter season. The perspectives I gathered from international retirement migrants, such as the inability to navigate the conflicting information from various sources or not knowing how to maintain their properties abroad if they chose to follow travel restrictions, point to the usefulness of documenting Canadian international retirement migrants' suggestions about what resources would have helped them come to an informed travel-related decision. This is particularly true with regard to accessing travel health insurance policies during the pandemic and the necessity of having COVID-19-specific coverage. Future research could facilitate the development of an informational tool to provide international retirement migrants with guidance on decision-making in similar contexts that impact border access and cross-border movement.

4.5. Importance

There are few studies discussing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international retirement migration (e.g., Zoğal et al., 2020), pointing to the importance of

this work in building a wider understanding of transformations to this practice brought on by this global public health disaster. My research contributes to the interests of health geographers in understanding how space and time are related to the experiences and necessities of individuals later in life (Skinner et al., 2015). My thesis adds nuance and builds upon these understandings, highlighting the spatio-temporal dimensions in relation to the needs of Canadian international retirement migrants in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scholars in the international retirement migration domain primarily discuss the role that mobilities play in the experience of “place” for aging adults (Gu & Dupre, 2021). In this thesis, “mobilities” and “place-based” factors are related to travel-related decision-making in the COVID-19 pandemic context. Thus, my thesis contributes to international retirement migration literature by highlighting how international retirement migration has evolved, specifically in the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, I believe there is the potential for the transferability of my findings to other disaster contexts, such as environmental disasters that may limit the travel and movement of Canadian international retirement migrants. This holds significant value for future crises and for public health officials to plan to address the unique needs of this group of older transnational travellers.

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Appendix.

Semi Structured Interview Guide

Getting to know you:

1. Tell me a bit about you?
 - a. Whereabouts do you live in Canada?
 - i. How long have you been retired for?
 - ii. How long have you been going to the US for winters?
 - b. What are some of the main reasons you started to winter in the US?
 - i. Do you go on your own? With a partner? With others?
 - c. Where in the US do you relocate to during the winter months?
 - i. How did you choose that destination?
 - ii. Do you own a home there? Rent? Travel in an RV?
 - iii. How do you normally travel there (fly, drive)?

2019-20 winter:

2. I know you were in the US for the 2019-20 winter when the COVID-19 pandemic first started.
 - a. Tell me about how things changed where you were, if at all, as the pandemic started to unfold.
 - b. How did you decide when to return to Canada?
 - i. What factors informed this decision?
 - ii. Was anything out of the ordinary or unusual relative to your usual plans to return to Canada at the end of the season?

- iii. What was memorable about your return to Canada that season?
 - 1. What about your travel plans? Your route? Crossing the border? People's response once you had returned home?

2020-21 winter:

- 3. Did you opt to return to the US last winter?
 - a. What factors influenced your decision making?
 - i. Did you at all consider the impacts on the US destination community when coming to a decision?
 - 1. If so, how?
 - a. E.g., in relation to the financial impact on the destination community if you did not go abroad
 - b. E.g., in relation to the availability of health system resources to treat you, an international visitor, if you were to contract COVID-19 (particularly in relation to the resources available to treat local people)
 - ii. Did you at all consider the impacts on your home Canadian community when coming to a decision?
 - 1. If so, how?
 - a. E.g., in relation to the financial impact on your home community if you stayed for the winter
 - b. E.g., on the potential for you to be treated by your local health care providers if you contracted COVID-19
 - b. What sources of information did you consult to come to this decision?
 - i. For example, friends, family, media, or snowbird associations

- c. If they did go abroad:
 - i. Did you purchase travel health insurance? Were there any COVID-19 related complexities (e.g., increased cost, additional requirements)?
 - ii. How did you factor the pandemic and the potential of contracting COVID-19 abroad into your planning?
 - iii. Based on your experiences of going to the US for a 'typical' winter, did you have to have any special considerations regarding:
 - 1. When you travelled?
 - 2. How you travelled?
 - 3. Where you travelled?
 - 4. The activities you undertook while abroad?
 - 5. Who you spent time with or where you spent time while abroad?
 - iv. Do you think you experienced any particular benefits of wintering in the US during the pandemic? And what about any particular challenges?
 - v. Overall, were you satisfied with your decision to go to the US last winter?
- d. If they did not go abroad:
 - i. Do you think you experienced any particular benefits of wintering in Canada, versus going abroad, during the pandemic? And what about any particular challenges?
 - ii. Overall, were you satisfied with your decision not to go to the US last winter?

Coverage of Snowbirds:

4. Since the outset of the pandemic there has been a particularly strong media and public focus on snowbirds at different points in time.
 - a. Have you read, listened to, or watched any of this media coverage?
 - i. What is your response to the perspectives shared in this coverage?
 - b. Did you feel a personal connection to any of the issues being covered? Or were you surprised by any of these issues?
 - i. What about to how the Canadian public, including members of your family and social networks, have responded to issues snowbirds have faced throughout the pandemic?
 - c. Do you think any of this media coverage or public interest in snowbirds has changed how people you know think about Canadian snowbirds? Or their attitudes towards snowbirds?
 - i. Do you think there are any differences in these changed attitudes between your home community versus US destinations for snowbirds?

Looking ahead:

5. Do you intend to continue travelling to the US for the winters?
 - a. If so: are there any experiences, you have had over the past two seasons that will result in you making changes to your 'normal' plans?
 - b. If not: how, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic factored into this decision?

Closing & wrap up:

Are there additional matters that we haven't touched on yet that are important to what we're talking about today that you'd like to discuss? Or any other experiences that

you would like to share regarding the factors that influenced your decision in travelling abroad or how your social responsibilities played a role in decision making?