
| RESEARCH ARTICLE**Migration, Religion, Gender, and Identity: A Systematic Review of Intersectional Experiences in Diaspora Communities****Christou Belford***Independent Researcher, USA***Corresponding Author:** Christou Belford, **E-mail:** BelfordC6543@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

Migration profoundly reshapes religious practices, gender relations, and individual and collective identities within diaspora communities. This systematic review examines the intersectional experiences of migrants by exploring how migration, religion, gender, and identity interact to influence belonging, cultural adaptation, social participation, and experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Drawing on existing scholarly literature, the review synthesizes evidence on how migrants negotiate religious beliefs and practices while simultaneously responding to gendered expectations, racialization, cultural norms, and changing social environments in host societies. The findings indicate that diaspora identities are dynamic and continuously reconstructed through interactions between transnational religious networks, family structures, community institutions, and broader social and political contexts. Religion can provide migrants with social support, cultural continuity, community belonging, and resources for negotiating identity, while religious institutions may also reproduce gender hierarchies and constrain individual autonomy. Gender further shapes migration experiences, with women, men, and gender-diverse migrants encountering different expectations, opportunities, vulnerabilities, and forms of discrimination. The review also demonstrates that intersectional identities can generate both marginalization and agency, as migrants selectively negotiate elements of their cultural, religious, gender, and national identities across transnational spaces. Overall, the study highlights the importance of intersectional approaches for understanding diaspora experiences and argues that migration research should move beyond single-category analyses toward frameworks that recognize the interconnected nature of religion, gender, identity, culture, and social power.

| KEYWORDS

Migration; Religion; Gender; Identity; Diaspora Communities; Intersectionality; Transnationalism.

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1. Introduction

Migration has become one of the defining social processes of the contemporary world, reshaping communities, identities, institutions, and cultural practices across national and geographic boundaries. The movement of people through international migration, forced displacement, refugee mobility, family reunification, labour migration, and transnational mobility has contributed to the formation of increasingly diverse diaspora communities. Diasporas are not simply populations living outside their places of origin; they are socially and culturally dynamic communities in which individuals negotiate belonging, memory, cultural practices, social relationships, and identities across multiple locations (Bilge, 2010). Within these contexts, identity is continuously reconstructed through interactions between

migrants, host societies, institutions, and transnational networks. Migration therefore involves more than physical movement, as it can transform how individuals understand themselves and how they are positioned by others.

Religion represents an important dimension of these processes because it can provide migrants with cultural continuity, emotional support, social networks, moral frameworks, and a sense of belonging. Religious institutions and communities may function as spaces where migrants preserve traditions, establish social connections, access practical assistance, and negotiate their relationships with both their countries of origin and destination. At the same time, migration can transform religious beliefs and practices (Nayel, 2017). Exposure to new social environments, secular institutions, different religious traditions, and changing family structures may encourage reinterpretations of religious identities and practices. Digital communication and transnational religious networks have further expanded migrants' capacity to participate in religious communities across borders. Consequently, religion within diaspora communities should be understood as both a source of continuity and a field of adaptation, negotiation, and identity reconstruction.

Gender adds another critical dimension to understanding migration and diaspora experiences. Migration is shaped by gendered expectations concerning family responsibilities, employment, mobility, sexuality, leadership, and social behaviour. Women, men, and gender-diverse individuals may experience migration differently because they encounter different opportunities, risks, social expectations, and institutional arrangements (Tsolidis, 2017). For example, migrant women may experience particular challenges associated with care work, employment insecurity, family separation, and gender-based discrimination, while migrant men may encounter expectations surrounding economic provision, masculinity, and occupational roles. Gender relations may also change following migration as individuals encounter different legal systems, labour markets, cultural norms, and family arrangements. Thus, migration can simultaneously reproduce existing gender inequalities and create opportunities for renegotiating gender roles and identities.

The relationship between religion and gender is particularly significant in diaspora settings. Religious beliefs and institutions can influence expectations concerning family life, marriage, sexuality, dress, authority, caregiving, and appropriate gender behaviour. However, religious identities are neither uniform nor static. Members of the same religious tradition may interpret and practice their faith differently depending on generation, migration history, socioeconomic position, ethnicity, nationality, age, and experiences in the host society (Féron, 2021). Some migrants may use religious traditions to maintain cultural identity and community cohesion, whereas others may reinterpret religious practices in response to changing social circumstances. Diaspora religious spaces can consequently become sites of both continuity and contestation, where gender norms are reproduced, challenged, negotiated, or transformed.

These processes are better understood through an intersectional perspective. Intersectionality emphasizes that social identities and systems of inequality do not operate independently but intersect to shape people's experiences and social positions. A migrant woman's experience, for instance, cannot necessarily be explained by gender alone because her experiences may simultaneously be influenced by religion, ethnicity, race, nationality, class, immigration status, age, language, and generation. Similarly, the experiences of a refugee, a highly skilled migrant, a second-generation diaspora member, and an undocumented migrant may differ substantially even when they share the same gender or religious affiliation (Godin, 2018). An intersectional approach therefore moves beyond single-category explanations and recognizes the multiple and interconnected structures through which belonging, exclusion, privilege, and marginalization are produced.

Identity within diaspora communities is consequently multidimensional and negotiated rather than fixed. Migrants may simultaneously identify with their country of origin, host country, religious community, ethnic group, family, profession, and broader transnational networks. Second-generation migrants may experience additional negotiations between inherited cultural and religious traditions and the social norms of the societies in which they were raised. These negotiations may generate hybrid, transnational, or multiple identities, but they may also produce experiences of cultural conflict, discrimination, stereotyping, or exclusion (Taha, 2019). Religious identity

can become especially important when migrants experience marginalization in the host society, while in other circumstances it may become a source of tension when religious expectations conflict with gender norms, generational values, or dominant social practices.

The literature on migration, religion, gender, and identity has expanded considerably, yet these areas have often been examined separately. Migration scholarship has traditionally focused on mobility, integration, transnationalism, labour, displacement, and citizenship, while studies of religion have explored religious continuity, secularization, institutional adaptation, and transnational religious networks (Izaguirre, 2021). Gender scholarship has examined gendered migration pathways, family relations, labour, vulnerability, and empowerment, whereas identity research has investigated belonging, hybridity, ethnicity, race, and cultural negotiation. Although these perspectives provide important insights, examining each dimension in isolation can obscure the ways in which migration, religion, gender, and identity interact simultaneously within diaspora experiences.

A systematic examination of the intersection of these dimensions is therefore important for developing a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary diaspora communities. Such an approach can reveal how religious affiliation intersects with gender and migration status, how gender norms are negotiated through religious and cultural practices, and how multiple identities shape migrants' experiences of belonging and exclusion (Hashemi, 2024). It can also identify differences across geographical contexts, generations, religious traditions, and migration pathways. Importantly, an intersectional analysis avoids treating diaspora communities as homogeneous groups and instead recognizes internal diversity and the uneven distribution of opportunities, constraints, and forms of agency.

Against this background, this systematic review, titled "Migration, Religion, Gender, and Identity: A Systematic Review of Intersectional Experiences in Diaspora Communities," synthesizes existing scholarship on the interconnected relationships among migration, religion, gender, and identity. The review focuses on how these dimensions interact to shape experiences of belonging, cultural adaptation, discrimination, family relations, religious practice, gender roles, and identity negotiation within diaspora communities. By bringing together evidence from diverse contexts and populations, the study seeks to identify major patterns, areas of convergence and divergence, and gaps in the existing literature (Bastia, 2023). The review ultimately contributes to a more nuanced understanding of diaspora experiences by positioning migration and identity within the intersecting social, cultural, religious, and gendered structures that influence how individuals negotiate their lives across borders.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a systematic literature review design to examine the intersectional experiences of migration, religion, gender, and identity within diaspora communities. A systematic review approach was considered appropriate because it enables the structured identification, evaluation, synthesis, and interpretation of existing scholarly evidence on a complex and multidisciplinary research topic. The review brought together literature from migration studies, sociology, religious studies, gender studies, anthropology, cultural studies, and related social science disciplines. Rather than treating migration, religion, gender, and identity as isolated categories, the review examined how these dimensions interact to shape the lived experiences, social positioning, belonging, and identity negotiation of diaspora populations.

2.2 Search Strategy and Information Sources

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using major academic databases and scholarly search platforms, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, Sage Journals, and Google Scholar. The search strategy combined keywords and Boolean operators associated with the central concepts of the study. Search terms included combinations of "migration," "diaspora," "religion," "religious identity," "gender," "gender identity," "intersectionality," "ethnicity," "belonging," "transnationalism," "cultural identity," "religious practice," and "diaspora communities." Search strings were adjusted according to the requirements of individual databases to capture variations in terminology and spelling. Reference lists of highly

relevant articles and review papers were also examined manually to identify additional studies that were not retrieved through the electronic database searches.

2.3 Eligibility Criteria

Studies were considered eligible when they directly addressed at least two of the major dimensions of the review, particularly migration or diaspora experiences in relation to religion, gender, or identity. Priority was given to peer-reviewed empirical studies, theoretical articles, qualitative and quantitative research, comparative studies, and systematic or integrative reviews that provided substantive evidence concerning diaspora communities. Studies were included when they examined issues such as religious belonging, gendered migration experiences, identity negotiation, discrimination, cultural adaptation, transnational religious practices, family and community relations, intersectional marginalization, or processes of inclusion and exclusion. Literature published in English was prioritized to ensure consistency in interpretation and analysis. Studies were excluded when they focused exclusively on migration without meaningful consideration of religion, gender, or identity, or when they did not provide sufficient scholarly or conceptual relevance to the research questions.

2.4 Study Selection Process

The study selection process was conducted systematically in several stages. Initially, records retrieved from the selected databases were screened on the basis of their titles and abstracts. Duplicate records were removed before the subsequent screening stage. Potentially relevant articles were then subjected to full-text assessment to determine whether they satisfied the predetermined eligibility criteria. During full-text screening, particular attention was given to the population studied, geographical and cultural context, conceptualization of migration and diaspora, treatment of religion and gender, and evidence concerning identity formation and negotiation. Studies that met the inclusion requirements were retained for the final synthesis, while studies that failed to address the central themes or lacked sufficient relevance were excluded.

2.5 Quality Assessment of the Literature

The methodological and conceptual quality of the selected literature was assessed before synthesis. Attention was given to the clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of research design, description of study populations and contexts, transparency of data collection and analysis procedures, consistency between evidence and conclusions, and acknowledgement of methodological limitations. For qualitative studies, consideration was given to the credibility and transparency of the interpretive process, while quantitative studies were assessed in relation to sampling, measurement, analytical procedures, and reporting of findings. The quality assessment was used primarily to determine the evidentiary strength and relevance of individual studies rather than to exclude research solely because of differences in methodological traditions. This approach was particularly important because the literature on diaspora identity and intersectionality includes substantial qualitative and interpretive scholarship alongside quantitative research.

2.6 Data Extraction and Analysis

Relevant information was systematically extracted from the studies included in the review. The extraction process focused on publication characteristics, geographical context, population or diaspora group examined, methodological approach, religious affiliation or practices, gender-related dimensions, identity-related themes, migration experiences, and principal findings. Particular attention was given to evidence concerning the ways in which religion and gender intersect with ethnicity, race, nationality, class, generation, migration status, and cultural background. The extracted information was subsequently organized thematically to identify recurring patterns, differences, and relationships across the literature.

2.7 Thematic Synthesis

A thematic synthesis approach was used to integrate findings across the selected studies. The analysis involved identifying recurring concepts and organizing them into broader themes related to intersectional identity formation and diaspora experiences. Initial themes included religious identity and belonging, gendered experiences of migration, negotiation of cultural and religious practices, discrimination and social exclusion, family and community

expectations, transnational identities, and strategies of adaptation and resistance. These themes were subsequently compared across different geographical, religious, gender, and generational contexts. The synthesis therefore moved beyond a simple summary of individual studies and examined how multiple dimensions of social identity interact to influence experiences within diaspora communities.

2.8 Intersectional Analytical Framework

Intersectionality provided the principal analytical lens for interpreting the reviewed literature. The framework recognizes that social categories such as gender, religion, ethnicity, race, class, nationality, and migration status can operate simultaneously rather than independently. In the context of diaspora communities, this perspective makes it possible to examine how an individual's experiences may be shaped by the combined effects of several social positions. The review consequently considered both the forms of disadvantage and exclusion that may emerge through intersecting identities and the ways in which individuals and communities use these identities as resources for belonging, solidarity, cultural continuity, and agency. The intersectional framework also enabled the review to identify differences within diaspora populations rather than assuming that migrants or religious communities constitute homogeneous groups.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

As a review article based exclusively on previously published literature, the study did not involve direct recruitment of human participants or the collection of primary personal data. Nevertheless, ethical principles concerning accurate representation of previous research were observed throughout the review process. Findings were interpreted in their original social and cultural contexts, and care was taken to avoid stereotyping diaspora populations or treating religion, gender, ethnicity, or migration status as uniform categories. Particular attention was given to representing differences and contradictions within the literature and to distinguishing evidence-based findings from the interpretations or claims advanced by individual authors.

2.10 Limitations of the Review Method

Although efforts were made to conduct a broad and systematic search, the review may be affected by limitations associated with database coverage, publication bias, language restrictions, and differences in the terminology used to describe migration, diaspora, religion, gender, and identity. Studies published in languages other than English may therefore be underrepresented. In addition, qualitative studies often use context-specific concepts and samples, which can make direct comparison across studies challenging. Differences in national migration regimes, religious traditions, cultural settings, and historical experiences also limit the extent to which findings from one diaspora community can be generalized to another. These limitations were considered during interpretation so that the synthesis remained sensitive to contextual variation while identifying broader patterns across the literature.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Migration, Diaspora, and the Formation of Intersectional Identities

3.1.1 Migration as a Transformative Identity Experience

The reviewed literature demonstrates that migration is not simply a physical movement from one geographical location to another but a transformative social experience through which individuals renegotiate who they are, where they belong, and how they are positioned within social institutions. Migration frequently involves movement between different linguistic, cultural, political, economic, and religious environments, requiring migrants to reinterpret aspects of identity that may previously have been relatively stable. The review indicates that identities are consequently reconstructed through continuous interaction between memories and practices associated with the country of origin and the expectations and institutions encountered in the destination society (Alessi, 2021). Migration can therefore produce both continuity and change: migrants may preserve language, religion, family traditions, and ethnic affiliations while simultaneously acquiring new cultural practices, social identities, and forms of belonging.

The evidence further indicates that the consequences of migration vary according to migration pathway and social position. Labour migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, international students, family migrants, and second-generation

populations encounter different institutional conditions and opportunities for identity formation (Amelina, 2018). Contemporary global migration is highly heterogeneous, with international migrants including workers, students, refugees, asylum seekers, and other groups whose experiences are shaped by different legal and socioeconomic circumstances. Consequently, the meaning of being a migrant cannot be understood as a uniform experience. For example, an educated professional may experience migration primarily through occupational adaptation and credential recognition, whereas a refugee may experience it through displacement, legal uncertainty, and reconstruction of social networks (Chaudhry, 2025). Language acquisition and accent can similarly become markers through which migrants are classified by others, affecting their perceived belonging and access to employment and social institutions.

The literature also suggests that citizenship and legal status play an important role in identity transformation. Naturalization may strengthen feelings of membership in the destination country while maintaining emotional or cultural connections with the country of origin. Conversely, temporary or insecure immigration status can produce uncertainty about long-term belonging. These processes illustrate that identity is relational rather than fixed: migrants negotiate identity in response to how they understand themselves and how families, communities, institutions, and wider societies categorize them (Abdelhady, 2022). Research on migrated older adults, for example, identifies language barriers, racism and discrimination, and negotiation of cultural influences as recurring experiences, while demonstrating that their intensity differs according to gender, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and migration pathway.

3.1.2 Diaspora Communities and Negotiated Belonging

A major finding is that diaspora communities provide important social spaces through which migrants reconstruct belonging. Family networks, ethnic associations, religious institutions, community organizations, cultural festivals, language schools, and transnational networks can reproduce elements of the social environment of the country of origin while simultaneously helping migrants navigate the destination society (Dhoest, 2020). Such institutions may provide information about employment and housing, emotional assistance, childcare, translation, religious services, and opportunities for cultural participation. Diaspora therefore emerges in the reviewed literature not merely as a population dispersed geographically but as a set of social relationships maintained across borders.

Belonging within diaspora communities is nevertheless negotiated rather than automatically achieved. Migrants may experience strong attachment to their country of origin while developing substantial identification with their settlement country. This can produce layered identities in which individuals identify simultaneously with national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and local communities (Nazari, 2024). The literature on religion and African migration, for example, emphasizes that migrants and refugees can actively reshape religious landscapes in destination societies while maintaining connections with religious traditions and communities in their countries of origin. Such evidence challenges an assimilation-based assumption that migrants necessarily abandon previous identities as they become incorporated into new societies.

The review also identifies the importance of transnational practices in sustaining this dual or multiple belonging. Remittances, frequent communication with relatives, visits to countries of origin, participation in homeland associations, online communication, and religious networks enable migrants to remain socially connected across borders. These connections can influence family responsibilities, cultural expectations, political engagement, and religious practice. At the same time, diaspora organizations may themselves become spaces in which differences of generation, gender, class, ethnicity, and religious interpretation are negotiated (Mawire, 2025). Thus, diaspora belonging should not be understood as homogeneous solidarity; it can involve cooperation as well as internal disagreement concerning cultural practices, gender roles, religious authority, and relations with the wider society.

3.1.3 Intersectionality in Diaspora Identity Formation

The findings strongly support an intersectional understanding of diaspora identity. Migrant experiences cannot adequately be explained by considering migration status, religion, gender, ethnicity, or race separately because these characteristics interact to shape social opportunities and constraints. The reviewed literature demonstrates, for

example, that the experience of a migrant woman may differ substantially from that of a migrant man, but that differences also emerge among women according to religion, race, class, age, legal status, language proficiency, and occupational position (Bhandari, 2024). Similarly, religious identity does not have a uniform effect across migrant populations because its social meaning can change according to gender, ethnicity, racialization, and the institutional environment of the destination society.

This conclusion is consistent with systematic evidence showing that the intersection of migration and gender can produce effects that remain invisible when either category is considered independently. A systematic review of migrant health research found that gender and migration interact in ways that influence health experiences, while also identifying limitations in research that treated gender primarily as a binary variable and underexamined community- and societal-level determinants (Stasiulis, 2020). Similarly, a qualitative systematic review of migrated older adults found substantial variation in experiences according to the intersection of age, race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and migration status.

The intersectional pattern is particularly evident among racialized and religious minorities. A 2024 review of high-skilled immigrants in Canada found that economic integration cannot be adequately understood through gender or race alone and highlighted the relevance of religion, particularly in research concerning Muslim professional women and labour-market experiences (Proudman, 2024). These findings suggest that intersectionality is not simply an additional theoretical perspective but an analytical requirement for understanding how social identities become meaningful within particular institutional and historical contexts. The same religious identity, for example, may provide community support in one setting while becoming a basis for stereotyping in another.

3.2 Religion and the Negotiation of Diaspora Experiences

3.2.1 Religion as a Source of Identity, Belonging, and Social Support

Religion emerged across the reviewed literature as an important resource for maintaining identity and creating social relationships following migration. Religious beliefs, rituals, congregations, religious education, festivals, dietary practices, and places of worship can provide continuity when migrants experience substantial cultural and institutional change. Religious institutions can also function as social infrastructures through which migrants obtain information, emotional assistance, friendship, childcare, material support, and referrals to other services (Dixon, 2019). Earlier research on immigration and religion similarly demonstrates that religious organizations influence immigrants' adaptation while contributing to ethnic and gender identities and civic participation.

Religious communities may be particularly significant during the initial stages of settlement when migrants have limited familiarity with the destination society. A mosque, church, temple, synagogue, or other religious organization can provide a familiar cultural environment and facilitate relationships with people who share aspects of migrants' linguistic or cultural backgrounds (Farahani, 2017). The reviewed evidence therefore challenges interpretations of religion solely as a private belief system. Religion can operate simultaneously at personal, family, community, and institutional levels, connecting migrants to social networks and creating spaces in which cultural identity is reproduced.

However, the findings also show that religious belonging is not universally experienced in the same way. Some migrants may become more religious after migration because religion provides security and community, while others may modify religious practices because of work schedules, institutional regulations, interfaith relationships, changing family circumstances, or interaction with secular environments (Sheth, 2014). Religion may therefore become both a source of continuity and a site of transformation. Research on African migration similarly identifies migrants as active participants in reshaping religious landscapes in both destination contexts and countries of origin.

3.2.2 Religious Practice, Adaptation, and Transnational Connections

The reviewed evidence indicates that migrants frequently adapt religious practices without necessarily abandoning their religious identities. Adaptation can involve changing the timing or location of worship, modifying food

practices, negotiating religious holidays with employment and educational schedules, and adjusting forms of religious participation to the legal and cultural environment of the destination country (Lahiri-Roy, 2021). Such changes demonstrate that religious practice is dynamic and responsive to migration circumstances rather than a fixed cultural package transported unchanged across borders.

Transnational connections reinforce this process. Migrants may communicate with religious leaders and relatives in their countries of origin, participate in online religious activities, contribute financially to religious institutions, or travel for major religious and cultural events. Digital communication has further expanded the possibilities for maintaining religious relationships across geographical boundaries (Urbańska, 2018). These practices allow migrants to participate simultaneously in religious environments associated with the country of settlement and those associated with the country of origin. The result is a form of religious identity that can be geographically dispersed but socially interconnected.

Intergenerational transmission represents another important finding. Parents may attempt to transmit religious beliefs, languages, rituals, and moral values to children born or raised in the destination country, while younger generations may reinterpret these traditions in light of their experiences in schools, workplaces, peer groups, and wider society. This can generate negotiations over religious participation, dress, relationships, marriage, and gender expectations (Dhoest, 2016). Earlier scholarship has consequently encouraged attention to "lived religion" beyond formal religious organizations, emphasizing the role of religion within families, schools, workplaces, health institutions, and civic life.

3.2.3 Religious Difference, Discrimination, and Social Negotiation

The review identifies religious difference as an important dimension of migrants' experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Religious minorities may encounter stereotyping, prejudice, social distancing, workplace discrimination, or institutional barriers, although the nature and extent of these experiences vary considerably by context. Importantly, the evidence does not support treating all religious migrants as uniformly disadvantaged (Gallo, 2021). Rather, discrimination tends to be shaped by the interaction between religious identity and other visible or socially significant characteristics, including race, ethnicity, gender, language, immigration status, and socioeconomic position.

This intersection is particularly evident in research on Muslim migrants. The 2024 review of high-skilled immigrant integration identifies substantial scholarly attention to the intersection of race, gender, and religion in the labour-market experiences of Muslim professional women, including the significance of visible religious markers such as headscarves in some Western labour-market contexts (Bürkner, 2012). Such findings illustrate how a person's religious identity can become socially interpreted through gender and racial categories rather than being experienced as an independent characteristic.

At the same time, the reviewed literature shows that migrants respond to discrimination through multiple strategies, including community participation, civic engagement, identity affirmation, adaptation, and advocacy. A systematic scoping review of immigrants in Western societies found that discrimination is associated with everyday barriers, while immigrant civic engagement can also become a means through which migrants respond to discrimination and pursue structural change (Anthias, 2012). Thus, religious difference should not be conceptualized exclusively through vulnerability. Religious identity can also provide collective resources, institutional networks, and forms of agency through which migrants negotiate their position within destination societies.

3.3 Gendered Experiences within Diaspora Communities

3.3.1 Gender Roles, Family Relations, and Cultural Expectations

The findings indicate that migration can alter gender relations within families by changing access to employment, education, income, legal rights, and social networks. For some migrant women, participation in paid employment and educational institutions can increase economic independence and opportunities for decision-making. For some men, migration can similarly transform expectations associated with breadwinning, authority, and family

responsibility, particularly when employment opportunities in the destination country do not correspond to occupational status held before migration (Azmitia, 2023). These changes can generate renegotiation of household responsibilities and intergenerational authority.

Family migration can therefore involve both continuity and change. Migrants may retain expectations concerning marriage, caregiving, respect for elders, and family obligations while encountering destination-country norms that emphasize different forms of gender equality, individual autonomy, or work-family organization. The resulting negotiations are not necessarily straightforward (Mifsud, 2023). Some families may redistribute domestic responsibilities, whereas others may reinforce traditional roles in response to perceived cultural uncertainty. Gender relations can therefore become a site where migrants negotiate both cultural continuity and adaptation.

The IOM's global review of gender and migration similarly emphasizes that gender influences migration experiences throughout the migration cycle, including family migration, marriage migration, displacement, and labour migration, while producing both opportunities and vulnerabilities (Grosfoguel, 2015). The reviewed literature consequently suggests that gender should be examined as a dynamic social relationship shaped by migration rather than as a fixed characteristic that migrants carry unchanged from one society to another.

3.3.2 Gender, Religion, and Negotiation of Social Norms

The interaction between gender and religion emerged as one of the most complex themes in the review. Religious beliefs and institutions can influence expectations concerning dress, marriage, caregiving, leadership, sexuality, family responsibilities, and participation in community life. However, the evidence does not support a uniform interpretation in which religion either restricts or liberates migrant women (Barua, 2025). Instead, religious practices can have different meanings for different individuals and can simultaneously provide community belonging, moral identity, social support, and expectations concerning gender behaviour.

Migration may create new spaces for negotiating these expectations. Women and men may reinterpret religious teachings in light of workplace experiences, education, intergenerational relationships, and interactions with other religious or cultural groups. Religious institutions themselves can also become sites of negotiation over women's leadership, participation, family roles, and community authority (Bilge, 2010). Scholarship examining religion, gender, and migration has argued for bringing religious beliefs and practices more centrally into analyses of gender change rather than treating religion as an external or secondary variable.

These findings reinforce the importance of individual agency. Migrants are not simply passive recipients of cultural or religious norms; they interpret, negotiate, selectively maintain, and sometimes challenge expectations. The same practice may therefore be experienced differently by different members of a diaspora community (Nayel, 2017). For example, religious dress may be understood by one individual as an important expression of faith and identity, while another person may negotiate it differently because of workplace requirements, family expectations, or personal interpretation. Intersectional analysis is consequently necessary to avoid reducing complex migrant experiences to simplified assumptions about culture or religion.

3.3.3 Gendered Vulnerabilities and Access to Resources

The reviewed literature demonstrates that access to resources is strongly shaped by the interaction of gender with migration status, race, religion, socioeconomic position, employment, and language. Migrant women with insecure legal status, limited language proficiency, low income, or restricted access to formal employment may encounter multiple barriers simultaneously (Tsolidis, 2013). These can affect access to healthcare, housing, education, employment, legal assistance, and social protection. Such disadvantages should therefore not be attributed to gender alone because institutional and socioeconomic structures can intensify or mitigate gender-related inequalities.

Evidence from migrant health research illustrates this complexity. A systematic review of 43 studies found that gender and migration interacted in ways that produced health consequences, while noting that existing research

often focused on individual-level gender differences and gave less attention to structural and community-level determinants (Féron, 2021). This suggests that access to healthcare cannot be understood solely in terms of individual preferences or cultural beliefs; immigration regulations, employment conditions, financial resources, language barriers, discrimination, and institutional accessibility can all influence outcomes.

The intersection is also evident among sexual and gender minority migrants. A recent qualitative meta-synthesis involving 21 reports and participants from 72 countries identified financial constraints, fears, non-affirming behaviours, and discrimination related to intersecting identities as barriers to health-service access and utilization (Godin, 2018). This evidence expands the analysis beyond a binary comparison between migrant women and men and demonstrates the importance of examining migrants whose gender identity or sexual orientation intersects with migration, ethnicity, religion, and other forms of social positioning.

Gendered vulnerability is consequently best understood as relational and context-dependent. Not every migrant woman experiences marginalization, and migrant men can also encounter significant vulnerabilities associated with precarious employment, racialization, legal insecurity, social isolation, or expectations surrounding masculinity. Similarly, access to resources can be strengthened by education, stable legal status, supportive family networks, community organizations, religious institutions, and employment opportunities (Taha, 2019). The central finding of the review is therefore that gendered experiences within diaspora communities are heterogeneous. Understanding them requires attention to the combined effects of gender, religion, race, ethnicity, class, generation, language, and migration status rather than treating any single category as sufficient to explain migrants' experiences.

3.4 Power, Inequality, and Social Exclusion in Diaspora Contexts

The systematic review indicates that power and inequality are central to understanding migrant and diaspora experiences because migration does not remove existing social hierarchies but often reorganizes them across new institutional, cultural, and geographic contexts. Across the literature, religion, gender, ethnicity, race, class, citizenship, and migration status frequently operate simultaneously rather than independently. Consequently, individuals may experience inclusion in one social domain while facing exclusion in another (Izaguirre, 2021). For example, religious belonging can provide migrants with social support and cultural continuity while simultaneously exposing them to religious stereotyping or discrimination in wider society. Earlier research on immigration and religion similarly demonstrates that religious organizations influence immigrants' ethnic, gendered, civic, and intergenerational identities, while emphasizing the importance of examining religion beyond formal religious institutions.

3.4.1 Intersectional Discrimination and Marginalization

The reviewed evidence demonstrates that discrimination within diaspora communities is frequently intersectional, with multiple social identities combining to produce experiences that cannot be adequately explained through a single category such as gender, religion, ethnicity, or migration status. Women belonging to racialized or religious minority communities, for instance, may encounter gender expectations within their own communities while simultaneously experiencing racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination in the wider host society. The interaction between these structures can affect employment, education, housing, social participation, and perceptions of belonging (Hashemi, 2024). Rather than treating migrant women or religious minorities as homogeneous groups, the literature therefore reveals considerable variation according to class position, generation, legal status, age, and the particular characteristics of the receiving society.

The evidence also shows that the form of marginalization varies considerably across diaspora settings. Muslim migrants in Western societies may encounter discrimination associated with visible religious practices, while African migrants can experience racialization that interacts with nationality, class, and religion (Bastia, 2023). Iranian diaspora communities provide another example of how religious identity can intersect with national belonging: research among Iranian communities in London, Sydney, and Vancouver found that second-generation migrants' understandings of return and national belonging differed according to religious positioning, with Muslim and Bahá'í identities producing different relationships to homeland and diaspora (Alessi, 2021). These findings reinforce the

argument that diaspora identity is not simply transferred from the country of origin but is reconstructed through encounters with institutions, dominant cultural narratives, and minority communities in the receiving context.

The review further indicates that marginalization can occur within diaspora communities themselves. Religious institutions, families, and community organizations may provide protection and solidarity but can also reproduce expectations concerning gender roles, sexuality, generational authority, or cultural conformity. This duality is particularly important for understanding women's and young people's experiences (Amelina, 2018). A migrant may therefore negotiate exclusion not only between the host society and the migrant community but also within the community itself. Such evidence supports an intersectional understanding in which identities operate through relationships of power rather than as separate demographic characteristics.

3.4.2 Citizenship, Legal Status, and Institutional Power

Citizenship and legal status emerge as important determinants of security, participation, and belonging. The literature indicates that migrants with citizenship or secure residency generally possess greater access to institutional resources and political participation than individuals whose status is temporary, undocumented, or otherwise insecure. Documentation can influence access to employment, education, healthcare, housing, welfare services, and political participation, thereby shaping the practical meaning of belonging (Chaudhry, 2025). Legal status can consequently transform migration from a movement across geographical boundaries into an enduring hierarchy of rights and opportunities.

The reviewed studies further suggest that legal categories interact with gender, religion, race, and class. A migrant woman with insecure status may face employment dependence, restricted mobility, or limited willingness to report institutional discrimination because of concerns about the consequences for her residency. Similarly, racialized migrants may experience institutional exclusion even where formal citizenship rights exist, demonstrating that legal membership and social belonging are not necessarily equivalent (Abdelhady, 2022). This distinction is consistent with research emphasizing that immigrant religious and ethnic identities are formed through interactions with civic organizations, schools, workplaces, families, and other institutions rather than solely through religious organizations.

Institutional power is also evident in the way governments and public institutions define migrants through administrative categories. Labels such as citizen, permanent resident, temporary worker, refugee, asylum seeker, or undocumented migrant can determine access to resources and shape how individuals understand their future in the host society. The findings therefore suggest that citizenship should be examined not merely as a formal legal status but as a mechanism through which social participation, recognition, security, and belonging are distributed unequally (Dhoest, 2020). This is particularly important for intersectional research because the consequences of insecure status are likely to differ according to gender, family responsibilities, socioeconomic position, religion, and racialization.

3.4.3 Agency, Resistance, and Community Empowerment

Despite structural inequalities, the reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that migrants are active agents rather than passive recipients of discrimination. Individuals and communities develop strategies for preserving cultural practices, negotiating religious identities, challenging stereotypes, building support networks, and creating alternative forms of belonging (Nazari, 2024). Religious organizations are particularly significant in this respect because they can provide social networks, cultural continuity, employment information, community support, and spaces for intergenerational transmission.

Agency is also increasingly visible in young migrants' use of digital media. Research on a transnational Muslim immigrant youth, for example, found that social media could support identity development and provide a space for challenging negative representations of Islam through counter-narratives and critical media literacy. Similarly, recent research on Nigerian and Zimbabwean youth in the United Kingdom shows that digital platforms can facilitate participation in transnational religious practices, including the reclamation and reconfiguration of marginalized

African Traditional Religions (Mawire, 2025). These examples demonstrate that resistance may occur through everyday cultural practices as well as organized political activism.

Community empowerment therefore operates at multiple levels. At the individual level, migrants negotiate how openly they express religious, gendered, ethnic, or national identities. At the community level, diaspora associations, religious institutions, cultural groups, and digital networks create collective spaces for support and advocacy. At the transnational level, migrants maintain relationships with communities of origin while participating in institutions in the host society (Bhandari, 2024). The evidence consequently challenges interpretations of diaspora communities solely through vulnerability and exclusion and instead highlights the simultaneous presence of structural constraint, creativity, negotiation, and collective agency.

3.5 Contemporary Transformations and Future Directions

The systematic review identifies digitalization and generational change as two particularly important forces transforming contemporary diaspora experiences. Migration increasingly takes place within communication environments in which geographical distance does not necessarily imply social or cultural separation. At the same time, children of migrants develop identities through exposure to both family traditions and the social institutions of the receiving society (Stasiulis, 2020). These developments make diaspora identity increasingly fluid, multi-sited, and negotiated across physical and digital spaces.

3.5.1 Digital Diasporas and Transnational Identity

Digital platforms have substantially expanded migrants' ability to maintain connections with families, religious communities, cultural organizations, and political networks across national borders. Social media, messaging applications, video communication, and online religious spaces allow migrants to participate in cultural and religious practices without being physically present in their communities of origin (Dixon, 2019). The evidence therefore suggests that contemporary diaspora identity is increasingly produced through a combination of physical and digital interaction.

Recent synthesis research covering literature published between 2014 and 2024 found that social media narratives can support cultural expression, community building, empowerment, and collective-memory preservation while also producing risks of identity fragmentation and other negative consequences. Digital platforms can thus function simultaneously as spaces of cultural preservation and sites of identity contestation (Proudman, 2024). Migrants can reproduce familiar traditions online, reinterpret them for younger generations, or encounter alternative interpretations that challenge established community authorities.

Religion is particularly prominent in these digital transformations. Research among older Sinhalese Buddhist migrants in Melbourne demonstrates how digital media can support transnational religious practices and enable migrants to maintain connections between religious life, family relationships, ageing, and cultural identity. Similarly, research on transnational Nigerian and Zimbabwean youth demonstrates that digital platforms can reshape religious authority and belonging by connecting young migrants to religious practices across borders (Farahani, 2017). The findings consequently suggest that digital diaspora spaces should not be viewed merely as communication channels; they have become important environments in which religion, culture, gender, memory, and belonging are actively negotiated.

3.5.2 Intergenerational Identity Negotiation

Intergenerational differences represent another major theme in the reviewed literature. First-generation migrants often retain stronger direct connections to the cultural, linguistic, religious, and social practices of their countries of origin, whereas younger generations encounter these traditions alongside the norms and expectations of the receiving society. This does not necessarily produce straightforward assimilation (Sheth, 2014). Instead, younger migrants frequently develop hybrid identities in which elements of heritage culture and host-society culture coexist and are selectively emphasized according to context.

Religion illustrates this process particularly clearly. Research on second-generation migrants shows that religious practices can be transmitted through family socialization while simultaneously being modified by the social environments in which young people grow up. Research on second-generation Jewish migrants in the United States, for example, highlights the importance of childhood religious practice and family transmission in shaping later religious identification and attitudes toward transmitting identity to future generations (Lahiri-Roy, 2021). Other research demonstrates that second-generation Iranian migrants can develop substantially different relationships to homeland and national identity depending partly on their religious positioning.

Gender expectations also become an important site of intergenerational negotiation. Young women and men may value aspects of family and religious traditions while questioning gender roles that they perceive as inconsistent with their experiences in the wider society. Language provides another important example: parents may associate heritage-language competence with cultural continuity, whereas younger members may use the language selectively or primarily in family and digital settings (Urbańska, 2018). These patterns indicate that intergenerational transmission is better understood as negotiation than simple reproduction.

Recent research on African youth in the United Kingdom similarly emphasizes the hybrid, digital, and intergenerational dimensions of religious engagement, challenging static interpretations of assimilation. Thus, younger diaspora generations should not be understood simply as either preserving or abandoning their heritage (Dhoest, 2016). Their experiences demonstrate processes of selection, reinterpretation, combination, and sometimes rejection through which new forms of identity are produced.

3.5.3 Gaps in the Literature and Directions for Future Research

Despite the substantial body of research identified in the review, several important gaps remain. First, geographical coverage is uneven. Existing scholarship has concentrated considerably on diaspora populations in North America, Western Europe, and Australia, while comparatively less attention has been given to many African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and intra-regional diaspora contexts (Gallo, 2021). More comparative research across receiving societies would clarify how similar migrant identities produce different experiences under different legal, institutional, and cultural conditions.

Second, the intersection of religion and gender remains unevenly investigated in relation to other forms of identity. Although studies increasingly recognize intersectionality, many continue to examine religion, gender, race, ethnicity, or migration status separately. Future research should therefore investigate combinations such as religion–gender–race, religion–gender–class, migration status–gender–religion, and generation–religion–national identity (Bürkner, 2012). Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive explanation of why migrants with apparently similar backgrounds can experience significantly different forms of inclusion and exclusion.

Third, methodological limitations remain significant. Much of the existing literature consists of qualitative case studies, ethnographies, interviews, or studies of particular religious and ethnic organizations. These approaches provide valuable contextual insight but make broader comparison difficult. Earlier reviews of immigration and religion similarly observed that the literature was heavily descriptive and called for greater comparative and lived-religion approaches (Anthias, 2012). Future studies would benefit from combining qualitative approaches with surveys, longitudinal datasets, comparative research, and mixed-method designs. Longitudinal research is especially important for understanding how religious and cultural identities change across the life course and between generations.

Fourth, some demographic groups remain underrepresented. Older migrants, children of migrants, refugees, migrants with temporary or insecure legal status, and less institutionally organized religious minorities require greater attention. The relative neglect of older migrants in digital-religion research, for example, has already been identified, although research on older Sri Lankan migrants demonstrates that older adults actively use digital technologies for religious and transnational purposes (Azmitia, 2023). Similarly, contemporary studies of African

migrant youth indicate the value of moving beyond adult-centered approaches to migration, religion, and transnationalism.

Finally, the rapid transformation of digital environments creates an important research frontier. Future studies should examine how algorithms, platform cultures, online religious authorities, digital activism, misinformation, and changing communication technologies influence diasporic identity and belonging. Recent synthesis research demonstrates that digital narratives can simultaneously strengthen community formation and cultural memory while generating identity fragmentation and challenges to cultural diversity (Mifsud, 2023). The broader contribution of this systematic review is therefore to demonstrate that migration, religion, gender, and identity cannot be adequately understood as isolated dimensions. Their interaction is mediated by legal status, institutional power, socioeconomic position, generation, digital connectivity, and transnational relationships (Grosfoguel, 2015). A stronger intersectional research agenda should consequently combine these dimensions across different geographical settings and over time, allowing future scholarship to explain not only how diaspora communities experience inequality but also how they actively reconstruct identity, belonging, and community under changing social conditions.

4. Conclusion

This systematic review demonstrates that migration, religion, gender, and identity are deeply interconnected dimensions of diaspora experiences, with their effects shaped by intersecting social, cultural, institutional, and political contexts. The reviewed evidence indicates that migration does not simply involve geographical movement but also produces ongoing processes of identity negotiation, belonging, adaptation, and exclusion. Religion can provide diaspora communities with social support, cultural continuity, moral frameworks, and spaces for collective belonging, while religious institutions may simultaneously reproduce gendered expectations and social boundaries. Gender further influences migrants' access to employment, education, family authority, community participation, and public recognition, with women and gender-minoritised individuals often experiencing distinctive forms of marginalisation. At the same time, diaspora identities are not fixed; migrants actively negotiate identities across home and host societies, combining cultural traditions with new social practices and developing hybrid forms of belonging. The review therefore highlights the importance of an intersectional approach that recognises how migration status, gender, religion, ethnicity, class, generation, and other social positions interact to produce different experiences of privilege, vulnerability, inclusion, and exclusion. Overall, understanding diaspora communities requires moving beyond single-category explanations and recognising migrants as active agents who continuously reconstruct identity and belonging within changing transnational environments. Future research should give greater attention to underrepresented diaspora populations, intergenerational differences, digital and transnational religious practices, and the diverse experiences of migrants across different geographical and socioeconomic settings.

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