



Anthropology & Aging

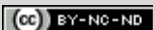
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Book Review

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In *Care Across Distance*, Azra Hromadzic and Monika Palmberger, anthropologists based at Syracuse University and the University of Vienna respectively, have brought together an edited volume focused on what are arguably two of the most significant phenomena of contemporary life: ageing and migration. As with much current anthropological work, care is the analytical and empirical thread that grounds these anthropological investigations of ageing and migration. The volume consists of eight ethnographic chapters that provide fruitful ground upon which to enhance our conceptualization of care in ways that account for cross-cultural continuities and complexities.

The book opens with a short introduction by the editors, followed by the ethnographic chapters. These chapters are in turn grouped into four specific thematizations of “care across distance”: “Materialities and Technologies”, “Spirituality and Intergenerational Care”, “Communities” and “Failures”. The final chapter, written by anthropologist Sarah Lamb, is titled “Epilogue”, but provides such a solid conceptual framing of the volume’s content that it could as well have been included as an introductory chapter.

The introduction maps the volume’s core concepts – “ageing”, “migration” and “care” – to be further theorized in different ways across the ethnographic chapters. This is also the book’s strength: it brings together a wide range of ethnographic cases, drawn from various global settings, where ageing unfolds in diverse migratory contexts and where care is differently embodied, enacted, and circulated. In this review, then, I focus on five threads from across the book’s chapters that can contribute to a more “glocal” (Appadurai 1996) theorization of care across experiences of migration and ageing: heterogeneity and malleability of care networks, care as a moral and biopolitical issue respectively and failures of state policies to meet social challenges on the convergence of ageing, migration and care.

Across the volume’s chapters, care circulates in a myriad ways, ranging from intimate, “relational care” (Kleinman and van der Geest 2009), within family, kin, and social networks, to “anonymous care” (Stevenson 2014), offered by states, NGOs, and other bureaucratic actors. For instance, among the Nepali-Bhutanese refugees that Retika Desai writes about (Chapter 1), the money circulated within transnational families is a form of kin-based care, as for other trans-migrant families in this book. On the other hand, also “anonymous care” is at work in this relational network: as evident marriage dissolution is a means for refugee women to be deemed eligible for assistance within this humanitarian regime. In Chapter 3, Susan Rasmussen describes how Tuareg kin networks articulate care through negotiations over inheritance to account for family members’

absence due to migration. In this case, as for the case of middle class Tanzanian migrants to the U.S. discussed by Andrea Patricia Kaiser-Grolimund (Chapter 2), migration is often experienced as upsetting expectations of care across generations, precisely because kin-based care presupposes physical copresence. Also Namgyal Choedup's chapter illustrates well how migration can result in kin-based obligations going unmet. Rasmussen and Choedup respectively show how Tanzanian and Tibetan elders expect their adult children to return from abroad in order to attend to rituals necessary to ensure a "proper departure" (89). These two chapters, on "Spirituality and Intergenerational Care", also point to the ways in which cultural anxieties about ageing harbor existential dilemmas about dying. Issues of death and dying merit greater exploration in these, as well as other, ethnographic investigations of ageing in cross-cultural and migratory contexts.

While breakdowns in care are paramount in this volume, equally important are the ways in which families and networks in different settings creatively respond to migration by fostering novel care relations across borders and beyond physical absence: web-based communication technologies, remittance transfers, and even healthcare technologies enable transnational families to continue caring in familiar ways. Chapter 2, for instance, documents how Tanzanian migrants living in the U.S. supply blood glucose meters to ageing parents in Tanzania. In Chapter 5, Monika Palmberger describes the innovative social networks, developed by elderly Turkish migrants in Vienna, wherein local migrant associations operate as surrogate kin and foster new social relations of care. In this and several other chapters, the authors' analyses coalesce around the idea that care is a fundamentally *moral* practice, which exists in, and emerges from, intimate relationships between people. In Chapter 7, Yvon van der Pijl therefore argues that, while social institutions and kinship are important, "questions of subjectivity and morality" should be central to our research on ageing and care (150).

Other chapters focus more on the *biopolitical dimensions* of care. Desai (Chapter 1) argues that English as a Second Language classes are a form of biopower, insofar as refugees in the U.S. must attend these classes to be deemed deserving of state resettlement assistance. States are also powerful mediators in the access to social care through distributions of pensions (Chapter 2 and 8), thus regulating worthy and unworthy elderly citizens. These chapters only indirectly raise questions of citizenship and belonging, while pursuing this question further might have allowed for an analysis of hierarchies of deservingness and access to social care as these inequalities intersect with social values, such as (in)dependence, able-bodied-ness, or productivity.

The two chapters in the final part of the book, "Failures of Care", show how there is no one-to-one causal relation between breakdowns in care and migration. In Chapter 8, Azra Hromadzic uses the powerful metaphor of the "suffering, bruised, blood-stained, and swollen" body of an elderly Bosnian woman (165) to illustrate the absence of care, where both family and state have failed to adequately protect the life and health of older adults. This case, specifically, addresses the failures of a socialist state to deliver on its promises of securing the welfare of its citizens through a social contract fractured by state retrenchment and expanded migration flows. This chapter thus raises broader but vital questions about what social care that fulfills the needs of older adults and transnational families might look like in an era wherein both the social phenomena of ageing and migration undergo crucial changes. The chapters in this volume indirectly pose the question of how we might imagine states supporting health and wellbeing in ways that strengthen intimate social relations, rather than undermining them.

To conclude: this ethnographically-rich and comparative volume is of importance for scholars of migration, ageing, and care. It should be accessible for upper-division undergraduate

and graduate courses in these subjects. The book could have been further strengthened by offering readers a stronger conceptual framing for the three main concepts (care, migration, and ageing), either in an expanded Introduction, or in introductory remarks prior to the book's four thematic sections. Whereas the complexity of this volume's chapters invites us to continue to push our conceptualization of care within cultural anthropology, *Care across Distance* might have further probed the socio-cultural dimensions of ageing. In her thought-provoking final chapter, Sarah Lamb critiques the global Active Ageing discourse by situating the meanings of older age within specific cultural contexts. Overall, however, the authors in this volume seem to take 'ageing' as a given, synonymous perhaps with biological age. Inspired by Lamb's critiques, the authors might have considered the ways in which social meanings of age are historically contingent, shifting across settings marked by transnational mobilities and by inequalities in access to care.

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