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## Book Review

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*Contemporary Narratives of Ageing, Illness, Care*.  
New York: Routledge. 2022. pp. 216. Price: \$177  
(Hardback); \$52 (Paperback)

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This collection of essays *The Contemporary Narratives of Ageing, Illness, Care*, edited by Katsura Sako and Sarah Falcus, offers an overview of how different media can be used to analyse narratives of aging, illness, and care across different societies. Refusing to consider care as a burden, the contributing authors look at care as a deeply human activity for thinking about different aspects of our lives. The collection can be divided into three parts. It examines care practices first through photography and theatre (Chapters one to three), then in films and music (Chapters four to seven) and finally in literature (Chapters eight to ten). The contributors use a feminist re-interpretation of the longstanding theoretical framework of 'social interdependence.' The latter integrates the authors' individual perspectives within contextualised narratives of aging, illness and care. This approach raises important questions about what good quality care entails and what it means to provide such care across different societies. Notably, the authors use the concept of care to encompass both practical assistance with daily tasks and a broader sense of moral responsibility towards others. As such, they see care as a moral imperative rooted in compassion and empathy, which they identify as key values to being human.

Part one uses photography and theatre as its primary medium. Shirley Jordan (Chapter one) opens the collection with a critical examination of French photographer Martine Franck's collection "Le Temps de Vieillir" (1980). Despite being a significant photographic documentation of elderly life, Franck's work has seen minimal critical engagement in visual gerontology. Jordan argues for a re-evaluation of Franck's contributions to visual gerontology, noting how her photography reshapes societal perceptions of older adults by stressing the active role they can exercise in society. Then, Bridie Moore (Chapter two) draws on her experiences using improvisational performance techniques with her father to show how theatre methods can support the interdependence between individuals with cognitive impairments and their caregiver(s). She explores how theatre and acting reinforce the mutually beneficial nature of caregiving. To conclude part one, Janet Gibson (Chapter three) argues that acting can empower older adults to adopt new roles and create their own narratives, transforming perceptions of ageing and expanding possibilities within care environments; as such, she argues that theatrical storytelling creates agency and challenges stereotypes of older adults in care settings.

In part two, through the medium of films and music, Amir Cohen-Shalev (Chapter four) explores the notion of caring for someone who has dementia through analysing two films on this topic. Cohen-Shalev emphasizes how caring for someone who is affected by cognitive impairments requires not only compassion and empathy but also adapting to the stages of the illness in the person's life, including through shared activities, humor, and sensory experiences. In Chapter five, Raquel Medina compares

care taking and aging approaches between the two documentaries. The first documentary focuses more on older adults' decline and physical deterioration, whereas the other film takes a more nuanced approach, examining the subjective experiences of aging in adults, while they maintain independence and prioritize important social relationships. Maohui Deng (Chapter six) analyses the film "Summer Snow" (1995) – portraying a man with dementia forging new familial relationships and delving into the meanings attached to care and aging in the complex context of colonial erasure in Hong Kong. Concluding part two, is Simon Buck's (Chapter seven) exploration of American singer Glen Campbell's late music and his experience living with Alzheimer's disease. Buck argues with Campbell being one of the most popular American anglophone musicians, many Americans were drawn to learn more about Alzheimer's disease because of his diagnosis. While Campbell was living and experiencing Alzheimer's, his music said nothing of transitioning to institutional care, tensions between family members about his care, or the physical abuse endured by his wife during the worst stages of his illness. This was only revealed in the memoir that his wife published after his death, highlighting the complexities and the unsaid in narratives of aging, illness and care.

In the third part of the collection, focused on the medium of literature, Elizabeth Barry (Chapter eight) provides an analysis of contemporary short stories on aging in North America. These short stories reflect an imminent sense of closure and human progress's precariousness in the face of climate change. The portrayal of older protagonists in these stories, Barry argues, highlights their resilience amidst a world exhausted by its own pursuits. In Chapter nine, "Old Friends," Sally Chivers uses as case study Helen Garner's novel *The Spare Room* (2009) to highlight the need for friendship and social connection especially among older adults, which was amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ending part three, Katsura Sako and Sarah Falcus then analyse in Chapter ten the anachronistic and idealistic views of familial care in Japan as reproduced in picture books for children. These books emphasize intergenerational responsibility and the duty of children to care for older relatives, thereby reflecting adults' anxieties around aging populations and shortages of caregivers. Moreover, despite promoting relational care positively, Sako and Falcus argue that these picture books reveal some complexities around aging in Japan, including how older generations feel guilty about their dependency on younger generations.

The contributing authors to this volume reveal how cultural representations of aging and care not only reflect, but also shape societal perceptions and attitudes towards older adults and illness. Each of them analyse how different media can challenge prevailing stereotypes on aging and can provide insights into caregiving relationships' complexities. These cultural narratives stress the need for empathy and accounting for lived experiences of aging, illness and care. Through engaging with different mediums and cultural representations, the authors ultimately call for more inclusive and compassionate societies that do not consider older adults merely as a burden.

As Sako and Falcus argue in their introduction, however, the authors do not want to sound idealistic" (7). Throughout this collection, contributors recognise that caregiving challenges extend beyond cultural representations to encompass systemic issues within healthcare systems and broader societal, economic and political structures. They show how care distribution across different societies remains unequal, influenced by power dynamics that perpetuate inequalities based on gender, race, and class. Moreover, they highlight how the privatization of care has shifted the burden onto informal caregivers, who frequently lack sufficient support and resources. As a result, the authors recognise that globally the burden of care disproportionately falls on marginalized groups, particularly women and immigrants, who are often expected to provide unpaid caregiving labour.

In the introduction, Sako and Falcus problematize the discourse around successful aging, which imposes unrealistic expectations on older individuals, emphasizing productivity and independence while overlooking the systemic barriers they face. Ageism, both implicit and explicit, directed the allocation of resources and shaped public discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic, perpetuating stereotypes that portrayed older adults as expendable or less deserving of medical attention. Sako and Falcus reveal the problematic nature of how the language employed in media and public discourse worldwide has continued to play a significant role in perpetuating ageist narratives. Ultimately, Sako and Falcus point out, the pandemic laid bare the inadequacies of neoliberal approaches to healthcare, which prioritize economic interests over the well-being of vulnerable populations.

The main strength of this edited collection lies in its diversity of mediums and geographical scope. The essential message the authors put forward is a reminder of what it means to care in the age of neoliberal capitalism and in a precarious world of global competition, where aging populations are often dismissed as inactive agents. Yet, as Joan Tronto (2005, 130) points out, “care offers a perspective from which to think about human life.” Therefore, the kind of care we envision, and practice, tells us who we are and what we value as humans. This collection is a timely reminder of this, raising awareness on how the humanities can play a significant role in helping society understand what care, autonomy, and dependence mean.

Importantly, this edited collection also highlights the need for interdisciplinary and culturally sensitive approaches to address the complex challenges surrounding aging, illness, and care. Through collective action and cultural transformation, the authors suggest, we can build a society that values the inherent worth and contributions of every individual, regardless of age or dependency. Beyond the field of aging studies, scholars and students in the field of social and medical anthropology, medical sociology, and gerontology would particularly benefit from reading this collection.

## References

Tronto, Joan. 2005. “Care as the Work of Citizens: A Modest Proposal.” *Women and Citizenship*. Edited by Marilyn Friedman. Oxford: Oxford UP: 130-145.