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Caring for Old Age. Perspectives from South Asia: An Introduction

The ageing of many societies' populations and growing longevity around the world have resulted in a multitude of narratives and strategies as to how individuals, groups, and societies can respond to such fundamental shifts to "age well." In the past decade, these narratives have been reflected in a diversifying body of qualitative research literature which offers socio-cultural and historical as well as economic contextualization, and allows for a deeper understanding of how such discourses unfold and transculturally influence each other in different localities. However, the perspective of countries outside the group of nations leading the global list of ageing pyramids has not been widely addressed in this corpus, such as the present case of South Asian countries whose populations are currently relatively "young" compared to other greying Asian countries, but whose share of older persons is expanding at an accelerating speed.

For this reason, this volume presents perspectives on old age and related vernacular discourses on place and space, as well as mobilities and narratives from South Asia. Our book rests on the motivation to think about notions as well as experiences of ageing from multiple angles, and South Asian understandings of care have proven to be key vantage points for our considerations. However, in using the term "South Asian" we also want to highlight that we do not wish to suggest a sedentarist approach that confines itself to a cultural relativist or regionalist identification and a conflation of the "cultural" with the "regional" (or the "national"). Instead, we hope to gesture towards the relational and transgressive as well as circulatory nature of concepts, people and institutions across geophysical boundaries. We argue that such a transcultural approach has not yet found entrance into scholarly research on ageing. Predominantly, concepts and methods used to study ageing processes and imaginaries have been based on restricting "container" models of "West" versus "Asian" or "Global North" versus "Global South," "modern" versus "traditional," whereby theorizing would be done in the first and anecdotal examples of deviance would be delivered from the second part of the binary opposition. We propose that theorizing of ageing must be done from and in the Global South, the so-called "periphery" that is too often only considered as reacting rather than acting. But we also suggest that an "Asianist" perspective cannot be the answer either. We rather hope to shed light on relational connectivities—or disconnectivities—on "entanglements" and transculturation rather than "influences" or "hybridities."

We consider care and caring as substantially humanistic and heterogeneous modes of both life-course and ageing that require scholarly attention towards the relevance of place and culture as dynamic and relational. To our understanding, “caring for old age” incorporates several meanings: the implications of demographic shifts across the world have taken many by surprise, be it in countries of the so-called Global North or the Global South. While societies speed up in terms of economic growth and individual flexibility of the majority of social groups, ageing populations are often perceived as a “burden,” “slowing us down”—implying that this “us” is an imagined community of middle-aged productive citizens—and as interrupting the access to progress and wealth or putting economic achievements at risk. There is also a quantifiable need for new institutions for and by older persons since neither states nor cities nor families and the market seem to be able to sufficiently care for those who demand, serve, and define what such care could be. Much of the discourses and narratives around ageing societies have been dominated by the Global North, and while it is not our intention to fall back on the repetitious rhetoric of ageing statistics, they do form an influential backdrop for such discourse. When we look at South Asia in this volume, we propose that it is high time to incorporate vernacular perspectives through “thick descriptions” to disclose the multilinearity and transculturality of narrative flows and, ultimately, to more adequately and self-critically reflect notions and experiences of ageing in all their diversity and fields of tensions.

The need for critical perspectives to contextualize statistics

Despite a growing awareness in South Asian countries of shifting demographics and altering modes of care, the overall interest of qualitative disciplines such as critical and environmental gerontology and anthropology, to name a few, in ageing and related themes in South Asia has remained remarkably small in comparison to large-scale surveys and quantitative data from disciplines like nursing, gerontology, or sociology, which mainly define the field and relate to developmentalist or modernist discourses (see Smith and Majumdar 2011). Seminal ethnographic works have beyond doubt introduced major arguments around understandings of personhood and the life-course, old age as a social construction, and influential discourses of ageing well. Seminal works on ageing in South Asia include Cohen’s writings (1992; 1998), Lamb’s monographies and edited volumes (2000; 2009; 2017), Brijnath (2014), De Jong (2005; 2012) and Vera-Sanso (2004; 2012) for India; Goldstein and Beall (1981; 1983; 1986) and Parker et al. (2014a; 2014b) for Nepal; as well as Risseuw (2012a; 2012b) for Sri Lanka. Works from other disciplines have mainly focused on well-established categories of health and nutrition, but sociocultural aspects and religious differences remain largely neglected. As anthropologists, we care deeply about vernacular narratives and performances of old age which allow us to support

and thicken statistical data with our ethnographic material. Possible reasons for this lacuna are that it is still the family, and not the state, or civil society, which is considered as the pillar institution for solving questions related to the challenges posed by care and old age; a formulation of care and life-course, or intergenerational relations, which builds the backbone, the “glue” of South Asian societies and is often framed as morally superior to narratives of Euro-American individualism and societal fragmentation. Furthermore, current demographic dynamics are not yet as dramatic as they might be in some European countries or Japan, the Asian leader of the international ranking of ageing pyramids. However, statistical prognoses foresee these to change at unprecedented speeds and in view of high social and economic mobilities as well as transnational migration.

The present volume invites the reader to explore themes around ageing and care through the lens of other urgent social themes in South Asia, namely through life experiences in rapidly urbanizing environments, changing mobilities and discourses revolving around care. In this context, what we mean by caring about old age is that we aim to contribute to a more refined understanding of the multi-layered “caring communities” in South Asia as well as our “caring” perspective as researchers from humanities and social sciences to carefully scrutinize and appropriately depict vernacular negotiations and discourses of seemingly global approaches to ageing societies. Therefore, we propose that caring about old age in South Asia includes our rethinking of categories with respect to concepts such as “ageing well,” or “active ageing” and to explore—also collaboratively—methods that help us go beyond “centre-periphery,” “East-West,” or “global-local” binaries. By relating thick, vernacular descriptions to trans-cultural flows of concepts, even paradigms, of old age and the ageing process, we cannot only highlight counter-narratives to globalizing, but also challenge “internationalist” or “developmentalist” responses to population ageing. Moreover, we may come closer to developing more holistic—or comprehensive—understandings of fundamental humanistic concepts like reciprocity, filial piety and care in view of contemporary shifting mobilities, institutions and technologies.

The transculturality of care in South Asia

The authors in this volume, from South Asia themselves or with thorough regional expertise, explore and denominate particular discourses and narratives of the South Asian region by contrasting detailed, small-scale ethnographic perspectives with large-scale ageing discourses and data. For us, care represents a comprehensive key term with which to grasp the multilinearity and vocality of interpersonal and social processes which form relationalities between different generations in families, and more generally, in communities (see also Baldassar and Merla 2014; Brijnath 2014). One significant, multi-layered South Asian moral notion of care is *sevā*: its

meaning of respect towards older persons in the context of moral debts of children towards their parents (gerontocracy, see Lamb 2000; 2009), but also its meaning as social service characterizes the moral and normative roots of a “caring society” or community. Moralities and normative notions of care determine intergenerational relations and offer important guidance in the formulation of new, non-kin “care scripts” (Coe 2017), but also create immense tensions for all sides when clashes between contemporary South Asian life realities and long-performed ways of care make it impossible for the latter to be continued. Renegotiations of care cause highly emotional moral debates because they seem to shake vernacular understandings of family and filial piety to their very foundations, and many South Asians find themselves torn between “traditional” moral systems and neoliberal shifts taking place in their societies and economies which promise progress and more recognition in global hierarchies.

Transculturality is a phenomenon which also serves as an important heuristic lens. If we look at “care” and “caring” as a transcultural phenomenon, both terms reveal a universally valid category that underlines both the increased need to pay more attention to qualitative factors of care and affective relations towards the growing population of people above sixty years. Yet, “care circulation” (Baldassar and Merla 2014) or “global care chains” also point towards a very cultural and socio-specific notion of relations, values and norms that find reflection in gift exchange and depend on body concepts, gender, and class / caste (Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2002). In Asia, they may divert from a service-delivering notion that is increasingly central for the professionalization of caregiving in Euro-American contexts. Transculturality as a concept that is sensitive to often invisible traces of entanglements and multiple, historically rooted aspects of subjectivity and identity formation serves to underline these various forms of encounters and transfer processes, even if they are asymmetrical. Circulation and translocality are constructive tools to address theoretical and methodological implications to care for old age in—and beyond—the Global South.

CIRCULATION OF AGEING PARADIGMS

Another transcultural phenomenon can be found in globally circulating ageing paradigms, namely the two most dominant concepts of “successful ageing” and “active ageing” (see Foster and Walker 2015; Katz and Calasanti 2015; Lamb et al. 2017; Lassen and Moreira 2014). Initially formulated and propagated in the USA and Europe, both ageing paradigms inhere some Eurocentric aspects through their primary focus on remaining an independent, healthy, and in some way productive individual in later life—“optimizing” one’s ageing self along these imperatives turns into a veritable project. As the latest body of literature aptly demonstrates, such paradigms strongly influence public imaginaries of later life and are quickly contextualized with “statistical panic” (Woodward 1999) of inverting population pyramids which represent the symbol of shifting demographics

per se. In this context, frailties—earlier perceived as natural companions of ageing—become negative side effects, and on a national scale old age mutates into an object of medicalization and politicization that needs to be regulated. But how are such paradigms interpreted and (re-)negotiated in contexts like South Asian societies which are based upon different notions of personhood, dependence, and intergenerativity? As the chapters of this volume highlight, more focus is needed on the perceptions and aspirations of ageing persons themselves, but transculturality helps us to detect and detangle flows of concepts, paradigms and notions which are used to coin social issues—such as “the problem of aging” (Cohen 1992)—and, in that process, concurrently contribute to shape them.

We underline that a seamless distribution of such paradigms cannot be assumed and, even if so, would not be productive to a South Asian context. We likewise argue that not all “new” or “recalibrating” approaches come from “the West” to be further disseminated or appropriated. For this, a transcultural perspective can be deemed useful. The transcultural approach stresses the fact that we have to be cautious of cultural and national sedentary reifications: neither should we assume clear-cut categories such as an “Indian” way of ageing, nor a “Western” way, though this is often suggested by the terminology used. By no means does this mean that we privilege a universalist or seamlessly homogeneous approach that flattens differences and ignores boundaries. Instead, we propose a relational approach, one that considers a need for multiperspectivity, connectivities and entanglements. With it comes the concept of “translation” that further illuminates how ideas, practices, and knowledge circulate and are altered at different speeds, alongside which different and even new forms of meaning are created (see Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019).

How can we develop counter-narratives?

It is difficult to develop counter-narratives to dominant iconic terms like “active ageing” that have been taken over by the World Health Organization (Active Ageing 2002) and the European Union (European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012) to phrase uniform responses to population ageing, another step to brave demographic shifts from a productivist viewpoint (see Denninger et al. 2014). Such iconic terms quickly became paradigms to guide nations in developing policy frameworks and public health measures, but also in promulgating imaginaries of appropriate lifestyles which ultimately created new markets, following consumerist logic. Cohen’s seminal dissection (1992; 1998) of such ‘internationalist’ strategies and action plans has shown us the importance of conducting such discourse analysis. To look at ageing in a transcultural context allows us to explore a host of globally circulating concepts, social networks, and institutions in particular contexts of appropriation and translation, and challenges relational perceptions of being

old in demography-wise drastically changing social and trans/regional contexts. Discussions on perspectives on and from South Asia consider debates related to critical gerontology as well as critical area studies and propose productive approaches using transculturality as a heuristic lens. Through transculturality, we can take notice of the international increase of socio-economic changes for and national policies regarding older persons while considering particular cultural contexts, albeit refraining from essentializing these as “container cultures.”

As all contributions in this volume illustrate, intensifying, accelerated global entanglements of neoliberal economies and communication, flows of media imaginaries, people, care, and medical options have profoundly impacted vernacular perceptions of old age. Through increasing age segregation (i.e. shrinking intergenerational co-presence) and institutionalization of later life (e.g. medical and care arrangements, policy), imaginaries of old age developed static images of set life stages, for instance dividing older persons into groups of “young-old” and “old-old,” or employment vs. retirement (see Fry 2010)—imaginaries which attempt to grasp growing longevity. Another result of such changed life realities are isolated and somewhat patronizing representations of older persons as being detached from their social, urban, or kin environment. As shown above, demographic statistics proved to be a double-edged sword: while national ageing and health policies require certain databases, the same data have been employed by media to create “statistical panic” (Woodward 1999), promoting a “discourse of burden [German *Belastungsdiskurs*]” (Kruse 2013) of older persons on contemporary societies and their neoliberal economies.

The eleven chapters of this edited volume explore different issues of ageing and care through the lens of transcultural phenomena of spatiality, mobility, and narrativity. Their common point of departure is South Asia in its transgressing connectivities and entanglements with other locations, concepts, people, and institutions. By taking such a transcultural perspective on the lived everyday contexts of older persons, the individual chapters present nuanced ethnographic insights into current South Asian understandings and negotiations of care (see Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019). In one chapter, a South Asian scholar’s look into changing European approaches towards institutional care carries forward the transcultural perspective. In addition to its transcultural approach, which has not yet received much attention in ageing studies, this volume assembles much-needed close-up ethnographic research focusing on social dynamics such as ageing in North India’s and Nepal’s rapidly expanding metropolitan areas and megacities which profoundly change its urban fabrics and socialities, and how the mobilities of people from North and South India and Sri Lanka, in many cases across continents, affect and transform forms of “doing family”. This also affects the making, altering, and unmaking of other social relations, often marginalized because of an overemphasis on family relations, but increasingly important also for transnational labour contexts, friendship, cohabitation, and care practices. These dynamics also

reflect in the manifold ways how lived experiences of care and ageing are narrated and framed.

The chapters of the first book section focus on lived experiences of ageing in particular localities. These localities comprise particular places, such as care homes as particular institutions for older persons, and spaces, in this case existing and emerging elderscapes that are enmeshed in urban transformations in South Asia. The first three chapters combine approaches from anthropology, environmental gerontology, and urban studies and look at the specific dynamics of ageing in two heavily urbanizing areas in North India and Nepal. In her chapter on the interrelations of space and power in the National Capital Region of Delhi, *Annika Mayer* investigates how middle-class senior citizens respond to and engage in neoliberal processes of urban reorganization, juxtaposing diverse settings such as in an older middle-class neighbourhood, a condominium, and a senior living project. Chapters two and three are based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, one of South Asia's most rapidly expanding urban regions whose more or less non-colonial past led to a different state institutional and administrative environment for spatial restructuring, also with regard to ageing. Along the notion of elderscapes, *Roberta Mandoki's* chapter explores how contemporary social trajectories related to ageing and care translate into Kathmandu's suburban space. Using this concept, she highlights the active and creative role of older persons from the middle classes in such urban place-making processes. In conversation with the first two chapters, *Christiane Brosius* looks at the intersectionality of "ageing in place" and urban transformation in the historical city of Patan where the locality's spiritual landscape and its distinct private and public spaces constitute important resources for older people to dwell in, shape and care for their and other groups' urban habitat. In her chapter on institutional care in Goa, India, *Deborah Menezes* continues to underline the agency of older persons to partake in place-making practices by carefully examining the complex, sometimes subtle articulations of power, agency and resistance between residents and staff in a controversially debated locality.

Expanding the scope of the book, the chapters of the second section explore how caring mobilities translate into the everyday of South Asian transnational families. By following people, objects, and financial flows across borders, but also tracing the effects of national regulations and policies on individual migration decisions and agency, the three authors explore transnational mobility and care on a variety of scales. In chapter five, *Michele Gamburd* scrutinizes the impacts of Sri Lanka's "Family Background Report" policy and its moralized family discourse on different generations of women from rural working families, taking a differentiated view on the intersections of female mobilities, intergenerational support and cultural construction of class identities. Following migrated nurses from Kerala, India, and their parents at home, *Tanja Ahlin's* chapter illuminates the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a crucial part of the care collective of geographically dispersed families

beyond being mere tools, allowing for a nuanced understanding of mobility and care over distance. In the last chapter of this section, *Bianca Brijnath* employs the concepts of kinship, capital, and technologies as a lens to reflect upon ethnographic approaches to transculturally conceptualize care in transnational Indian families.

The third book section introduces the narrativity of care and caring relations from a variety of viewpoints. These narratives highlight how transcultural flows of images, concepts, and people inform and alter local understandings of care. Four authors explore in the local contexts of India, Nepal, and North America how their interlocutors and texts frame and contextualize lived experiences and narratives of ageing, care and illness against social transformation. In chapter eight, *Roma Chatterji* offers a rare South Asian long-term perspective onto altering care narratives in the Netherlands and their direct impact onto a care institution which reflect a neoliberal commodification of care, clashing with the institution's original orientation as a liberal, innovative space. *Axel Michaels* traces the textual roots of a powerful South Asian narrative idealizing the institution of the joint family, demonstrating that this narrative ultimately serves as an epitomization of South Asian identity and a subaltern moral standpoint against transcultural notions from "elsewhere". In her chapter on three Indian short stories which follows the narrative turn in gerontology, *Ira Raja* explores literary articulations of being an older person in the light of dementia, illness, and end of life and highlights the potential of literature as a space for negotiating cultural understandings of and approaches towards the fragility of health in later life. The final chapter of this volume by *Sarah Lamb* carefully dissects transcultural flows of narratives and imaginaries of ageing, care, and personhood in India and North America and offers a differentiated view of the complexities and cultural notions of care and ageing well in a neoliberal world.

Which alternative approaches towards old age informed our aim to express much-needed counter-narratives for the South Asian context in particular and which perspectives allowed us to incorporate ageing persons' concerns and viewpoints? In recent years, researchers from different disciplines suggested alternative approaches which look at old age through the lens of the person's life-course (Poser and Poser 2014; Danely and Lynch 2013) which highlight their individual life histories and their interests and experiences, but also crucial aspects of "ageing in place." Given the extent of global urbanization, one crucial lacuna which has been largely addressed by sociologist Phillipson (2010; Buffel, Handler, and Phillipson 2018) is to adequately look into the specific conditions of ageing in urban environments, but the focus on Asia, and in particular, South Asia, is still dominated by public health-driven studies (see the first book section, "Caring Spaces and Places"). Other authors (see e.g. Coe 2017; Vanderbeck and Worth 2015; Baldassar and Merla 2014) direct our focus towards the continuous meaningfulness and importance of affective and caring intergenerational relations, both within and beyond the

biological family, for developing novel living and care arrangements as an age-inclusive response to demographic change (see the second book section, “Caring Mobilities”). To change the above-mentioned “discourse of burden” into a more adequate representation of older persons, gerontologist Kruse (2013) advocates for a balanced perspective of old age which carefully weighs “potentials” and “vulnerabilities” of older persons (see the third book section, “Narratives of Care”).

The following three book sections (I. Caring Spaces and Places, II. Caring Mobilities, and III. Narratives of Care) address current, inter-related key debates on the topic of ageing in a transcultural context and add views from North and South India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and a South Asian perspective on institutionalized care in Europe. They relate to global urbanization trends and urban experiences of older people that are often coined by increasing mobility on both local and global levels, involving transnationally operating families and a profound impact of contemporary communication technologies. Entangled with these global categories of shifting social relations and spatial experiences and concepts are on the one hand media practices and representations, and on the other hand global care institutions and networks, as well as transnational networks that deliver and alter care as they circulate through global media- or policy-scapes, for instance, cinema (see Pearson 2008), or the work of INGOs like HelpAge International, and dwell in new localities in manifold ways that ought to be studied closely.

Caring spaces and places—topographies of care?

Ageing studies have only recently begun to address the importance of place and space (Rowles and Bernard 2013) and the entanglements of urban environments and demographic change. Relating space and place-making to old age is thus a recent approach in gerontology and social sciences (Buffel and Philippson 2015; Buffel, Handler and Philippson 2018). Yet, the challenges of producing research on or from Asia have yet not received sufficient attention (Chong and Cho 2018; Rajan, Risseuw, and Perera 2011). The concepts of “spatiality of aging” or “ageing in place” (both in Rowles and Bernard 2013; see also Mayer, in this volume) are of central importance and follow the proposition that places impact the ways in which people live together, interact and feel “at home” or—in the reverse sense—“out of place,” and “homeless,” also underlining a sense of choice. Substantial changes in social relations—be it, for example, families, gender models or working conditions, have altered spatial habitats through transnational and in-bound mobilities and transforming education and labour markets in terms of residential, educational and professional patterns, intergenerational relations and the prospect of prolonging old age—something that also affects notions of well-being and participation in the life-course. This leads to new spatial infrastructures and contributes to the creation of new places, such as old-age homes, day-care centres, and clubs for senior

citizens. Even though they both study old age and urban transformations in Kathmandu, Mandoki's and Brosious's "worlds of ageing" reveal the synchronicity of quite distinct forms of defining and experiencing their interlocutors' notion of being senior citizens, and their ideal of participation in their lifeworlds and the infrastructures of care they have, or do not have, access to (in this volume). This underlines the importance of ethnographic fieldwork since such diverse notions and practices can hardly be uncovered through quantitative surveys. Yet, they speak of the importance of factors such as caste and class, as well as ethnic and gendered qualities of ageing in South Asia. "Ageing in place" is multidimensional and requires particular attention to the qualitative methods of scaling, mapping and historicizing ageing. But we similarly have to consider places such as new gated residential neighbourhoods and housing estates that emerge in Asia (Chong and Cho, 2018; Lamb 2016, 2005; see also Mayer, in this volume); suburban settlements that have come to shape new topographies where old age can 'take place' and be seen as a challenge in terms of quality and quantity. In this context, much attention has been paid to how to cope with the growing calls for such new care institutions and services, to policies of safety provision, health care, and opportunities for participation in public life and other effective structures and services responding to concrete needs of older populations. Spearheading initiatives have been coined by the World Health Organization with respect to active ageing in contemporary urban settings worldwide, in particular the "Global Age-friendly Cities" initiative developed by Alexandre Kalache and Louise Plouffe (2007). Seeing older people as an important "resource for their families, communities and economies," they demand that city administrations and local organizations expand their responsibilities to the aged by providing services and following certain guidelines, such as age-friendly public transport and barrier-free buildings (Kalache and Plouffe 2007, 1).

We propose that there is an exigent need to re-think urban design and policies in regard to the requirements and experiences of older people (Buffel and Phillipson 2015, 315; Rowles and Bernard 2013) which goes beyond the debate around globalized criteria for "age-friendly cities" (Thang 2015). "Age-friendly" relates the urban environment to the relevance of recognizing life-course processes, that is, intergenerational relations and forms of place-making under conditions of urban transformation. Even though the age-friendly city-model considers situations in the Global South, it remains predominantly western-centric, on the one hand by applying criteria through which "development" and "modernity" seem to be measurable. On the other hand, many cities in South Asia, for instance, have not yet incorporated the categories in their plans for urban redevelopment. But, as Mandoki and Mayer (both in this volume) stress, there is as much of a need to recalibrate urban models through age- and place-sensitivity as there is potential in reconceptualizing gerontological epistemologies and methods for their often either universalist or culturally relativist take on life-course and old age. For instance, a certain quality and

role of the nation-state and of civil society may be pre-supposed, as well as different concepts of well-being, precarity and independence, to name a few. Oftentimes, the idea of ageing well is reduced to health and security, and when shifting to the Global South, as in the case of the megacities discourses, essentialized ideas of vulnerability, abandonment and social exclusion are taken for granted (“apocalyptic” view). We want to add to this perspective one of agency, creativity and symbolic capital, to underline older people’s creative potential to shape their environments and habitat (see Kruse 2017). Elderly persons can be “caretakers” (Brosius, in this volume) of neighbourhoods in times of transformation and place-making, or as stakeholders of ritual practices—including rituals that respond to, and accommodate, social change—equipped with a particular knowledge (including memory) of place that in return reveals relevant resources for a sustainable future of diverse generations in urban as much as rural environments. In Nepal, for instance, where a “toothless generation” (i.e., toddlers, children, and elderly) impacts the life in villages due to intense outward migration of male, middle-aged citizens, but also in cities that undergo much transformation despite their deep local histories, such knowledge becomes crucial for thinking about and anticipating the kind of places we envisage to age in (undoubtedly this book does not suggest that these aspirations are universal and consensual).

Another point is connected to the fact that urban and rural conditions in, for instance, South Asia, are also seen as “deficient” and lacking “efficacy”—mainly in terms of “development” and “modernity.” The “developmentalist” and “modernist” bias has been critiqued in other disciplines, such as human geography (see Robinson 2011) or anthropology (see Cohen 1992; Pigg 1992). But neither gerontology nor the interdisciplinary domain of ageing studies have paid much attention to the fact that spatial mobilities and social change must be addressed in the light of a rethinking of their own notions of progress and well-being. While this book certainly does not reject urban transformation and modernization processes and instead privilege a “traditionalist” approach per se, its authors want to underline the fact that in the light of the development narrative, much potential that is swiped away: especially in the rapidly changing cities in South Asia, solid and constructive networks, practices and places could be maintained by allowing them to adapt slowly, and with the support of local participation. Old age could be a promising lens through which the potential of such resilience and sustainability could be considered, also by and for future generations. Moreover, instead of polarizing and thus reifying “Western” versus “South Asian” compartments we would like to highlight the multiscalar relationality and dynamics of traffic between alleged poles, and rather promote a notion of transculturation (Ortiz 1995; see also Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019) as we try to conceive of ageing in South Asia as something that cannot be rendered exclusively “Asian,” confining it to geophysical boundaries, and that calls for a sensibility towards relational transformation and transgressive processes. This, we propose, also pushes us anthropologists, gerontologists,

sociologists or philologists, to reposition our concepts and methods that often lead to such sedentary positions.

ELDERSCAPES AND ENVIRONMENTAL GERONTOLOGY

Two domains of scholarly research seem particularly promising for us: the concept of “elderscapes” and the field of environmental gerontology. Both offer much scope for such needed critical engagement with the intertwined relationship between places that shape subjectivities, and thus also well-being and belonging, and places that are being shaped by certain notions thereof. This also concerns, of course, residential homes and old-age homes. Institutionalizing old age and caregiving was sidelined for a long time, until it became more prominent, partly because of the demographic change and the need for more institutionalized old-age care, but also because of the realization that the “social aesthetics”¹—the sensory feel of everyday and institutional life—of such elderscapes play a vital role for ageing well, for better understanding intergenerational relations during the life-course, new labour segments and infrastructures, and, last but not least, considerate and responsible policy-making (see Brosius, in this volume). By “elderscapes,” we understand a spatio-temporal field in and through which a social agent, or a group of elderly people navigates by means of aspirations, knowledges, sensoriums, and competences related to his, her or their social relations and cultural beliefs and practices. This historical, physical and imagined space is turned into a personal and social, meaningful place through practices and ideas. Moreover, it transforms into an everyday as well as a special realm, shaping and being shaped by people (see Mandoki, this volume). The elderscape is made up of restrictions of access (see spatial justice below). This restriction can be manifold. In terms of geophysical access, it could mean that people of old age lack access to public spaces, including public institutions, such as cafés or parks. They may also lack access to residential institutions, something that could enrich their health but also other qualities of everyday life, such as leisure and friendship. A common view shared about old age is that it is per se deficient and inert, and that neither are most urban environments “age-friendly” nor are institutions like day-care centres or residential senior homes adequate or even empowering: “Whether in a nursing home, care home, retirement home, assisted living, or other form, institutional care for seniors offers a cultural repository for fears and hopes about an aging population,” write Chivers and Kribernegg in their edited volume *Care Home Stories* (2017, 17). The legacy of either poor house or prison, of being

1 Social aesthetics is a concept coined by anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall (2006) that stresses the importance of paying attention to sensorial aspects of social practice and place-making, such as the presence of squares for pedestrians, or the lack of pavements, since they allow for particular forms of engagement and collectivity, as well as for certain qualities of speed and mobility, thus orientation in space.

stigmatized or/and locked away, still persists in Asia and beyond, with many people considering a visit to “such a place” as free of joy, “real care,” and life. Here, care is “naturally lacking” because it is paid for and based on old people’s “dependency” on professional services. Such legacies and moral panics must be taken seriously by considering their socio-cultural, religious and economic context as well as their local emplacement. Only then can they also be challenged, which is what this book aims at doing (see below).

To study elderscapes requires considering the different histories of newly emerging institutions such as senior citizen clubs or day-care centres in South Asia. Mandoki, for instance, underlines the short history of residential eldercare institutions in Kathmandu in the light of Nepal’s modern history that differed from the pre-colonial and colonial trajectories of the subcontinent, since earlier missionary infrastructures such as church-led old age homes in Sri Lanka or South India or a larger Europeanized bourgeoisie had not emerged. While Michaels discusses the old-age ashram near Pashupatinath as a state-funded institution based on a Hindu philosophical notion of selfless service (*sevā*), Mandoki also considers the contemporary emergence of privately run senior citizen clubs as well as day-care centres for older persons set up by Nepalis, some of them returned diasporics. All authors in this section highlight the weak and often short-sighted role of the state in considering responsibility towards the demographic challenge of growing ageing populations which results from the South Asian viewpoint that families are accountable for eldercare. Moreover, it needs to be related to different positions of the state, the market, and family, as force-fields in a field of discourse. Lastly, institutions as “hubs” of a larger elderscape must be seen in relation to similar or competing sites that enable or restrict certain forms and notions of being old.

Environmental gerontology is a productive field of research and critical engagement with the ways in which we can better understand and respond to challenges of ageing in particular spatial contexts and transformations. With an increase of depth and attention paid to this realm of inquiry since the 2000s, environmental gerontology calls for an expansion and deepening of research on person-space relations with respect to old age (see Smith 2009; Wahl 2005; Phillipson 2004). Especially the aspect of place-making as an ongoing process of shaping one’s spatial environment (as much as being shaped by it) still requires more attention according to scholars across the disciplinary boundaries of health science, social gerontology, socio-cultural anthropology, or geography. The care given to the qualities and politics of residential privacy and public space, to intergenerational reciprocity and care of the self is reflected in this context. It aims at complementing the predominantly policy-oriented discussion on old-age institutions or “safe cities” by taking seriously the production of meaningful places, the experience of exclusion and the often co-productive strategies of gaining access to an everyday life outside one’s residential home and to societal participation (see Phillipson 2010; Wahl 2005).

From a macro-perspective, both urbanization and population ageing can be considered as the major societal changes in the twenty-first century on a global level (Phillipson 2010; Smith 2009). This section of the book also responds to a paucity of research on ageing and spatiality in the Global South, particularly in South Asia, by considering concepts of elderscapes, urban regeneration and spatial mobility. These concepts are both interesting and challenging in that they are being used as a lens to study urban ageing as a form of transculturation. To consider the ways in which younger members of society “read” urban and societal transformation by attending to elderly peoples’ oral histories and everyday practices seems one way to approach the demographic shifts from a qualitative and interdisciplinary angle (Melville and Hattan-Yeo 2015). The study recognizes debates from the field of environmental gerontology and age-friendly cities. In doing so, it hopes to critically engage concepts on “global” or “successful ageing” (Lamb 2017) by repositioning their epistemological foundations in order to acknowledge local particularity and simultaneously transcultural relationalities of ageing and urban concepts.

This book section deals with the question of how elderly people are shaping their habitations and are shaped by them, whereby people of advanced age play a foundational role in a city by taking care of it in many ways. Thus, Brosius (in this volume) proposes that we must speak not only of age-friendly cities, but also of “city-friendly ageing”: old age can be a fundamental resource for urban regeneration and community building. However, in the case of this research, it becomes evident that this potential, which is generally overseen, can vanish if it is not recognized in time and in space and possibly recalibrated in order to fit younger generations’ aspirations and the way they conduct their lives.

This means that we need to revisit the city and its spaces from an age-sensitive angle. How has the older population been perceiving these fundamental changes and new dynamics in their urban environment over their life-course? How do they engage with the city and urban space, and what contributory role do they assume? In what way can a focus on “ageing in place” (Risseuw 2012) help us to explore social relations and urban inequality with respect to gender, class, or ethnicity? Given the rapid growth of urban centres in South Asia, this book section represents an important contribution not only to cultural and spatial gerontology, but also to urban studies of the area.

RELATING INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND INTERGENERATIONALITY

Another aspect in this book section is of relevance: that of institutionalization as a form of place-making. Much research on ageing institutions evolves from the discourse on the “dilution” of the private institution of the family (see Menezes; Michaels, both in this volume; see also Lamb 2007; Rajan, Risseuw, and Perera 2011). While the fact that old age took place in joint families is more part of a myth from a narrative of modernity as well as national identity, since in South Asia there are several alternative forms

of ageing and intergenerational life-course does not necessarily need to be located in the family, our authors show how newly emerging institutions and places of “shelter” such as ashrams or day-care centres are predominantly seen in relation to the “fragile” family that cannot cater for the elderly any longer, with the fading and failing of gerontocracy seen as a deficit and sign of decline. Several authors in this volume argue otherwise, and present ageing beyond the locus and “sanctum sanctorum” as happening across a terrain of other places and institutions. As much as urban transformation speaks of the ways in which neighbourhoods and caste-based or religious and ethnic communities might pattern the city, institutions like old-age homes or intergenerational spaces too, must be studied and nurtured in terms of senses of belonging, homing, and togetherness. Too little attention has been paid to the ways in which “ageing in place” is not “neutral” and unrestricted but rather constantly contested and negotiated, and thus also renewable and shapeable. An old-age home may provide a previously isolated or stigmatized person with potential to make new relations and connections, both to other people and places (see Menezes, in this volume). As we consider the importance of intergenerational spaces, we are challenged to take a closer look at the often-asymmetrical relationships of domains such as public and private places and spatial arrangements, at the ways in which space is shaped and made by factors such as age. Institutionalization (e.g., day-care centres, old-age clubs and homes) is but one form of such place-making (see Brosius, Mandoki, both in this volume).

Studies by scholars such as Vanderbeck and Worth (2014) stress the need for gerontology, for instance, to challenge the idea of space and place as sedentary and unidimensional. The oscillating boundaries of nation-states, cities, neighbourhoods or families can thus be grasped in a more granulated way, without ignoring the presence of diverse boundary-drawing strategies, of course. Paying attention to the ways in which different temporalities, too, speak through and in places, is productive to grasp the role of memory, the importance of religious and ritualized time, or the temporality of leisure and consumption. In this volume, we also propose that the different histories of urban growth across South Asia must be considered, thus Mandoki’s focus (in this volume) on forms of ageing in residential housing that was planned for middle-class civil servants in Kathmandu, shows how this varies dramatically from closely-tied communities and forms of ageing in traditional quarters of Patan, for instance, in the often caste-based monastic courtyards. Both could have senior citizen clubs, but the themes that connect or create tensions vary also because of the different speed and quality of urban transformation in the distinct sites. Likewise, Mayer, in this volume, shows how ageing in a middle-class neighbourhood of Delhi’s affluent south shows other challenges than the fabric of a senior living project in a new residential enclave in a newly planned part of the city. Different notions of middle-classness (Brosius 2014; Baviskar and Ray 2013) impact on the experiences of “ageing in place” by the elderly citizens in each respective locality. It must also be underlined that the middle-classness Mandoki

and Mayer address differs across the national boundaries, between the two metropolitan centres and their diverse trajectories of undergoing economic liberalization and urban development. All this must be considered if one wants to study ageing in spaces and places, thus turning a comparative angle (e.g., Delhi and Kathmandu) into an interesting methodological and conceptual approach. With a remarkably growing middle class in India, the situation of institutionalization and thus elderscapes in general differs substantially from the situation in Nepal, where the economic growth is evident but not as rapid, although both cities show similar urban growth. The middle class is but one factor to be considered in the larger field of studying elderscapes in urban South Asia; equally important are histories of migration into the two “arrival cities” in Nepal and India.

Spatial and intergenerational justice can be understood as an ideal of the ways in which age-friendly cities and intergenerational spatialization can be spelt out. Referring to Henri Lefebvre (1974) and David Harvey (2008), spatial justice is connected to the “right to the city,” that right to participate, be represented in, and have access to, urban places but also institutions across social strata. Elderscapes do not equal seamless mobility and non-existence of borders. The concept enables us to also attend to questions of power, boundaries of exclusion and segregation (e.g. the gated community as “panopticon” or “prison”; see also Mayer in this volume) as well as new forms of solidarity and reciprocity (e.g., friendship and relations transgressing caste and religious differences).

All contributions in this section draw their data from up-to-date ethnographic research. Mayer’s chapter broaches the issue of ageing in Greater Delhi, India, where she assesses how older people engage with their city between safety discourses, real estate dynamics, and attachment to place. This is illustrated by two contrasting case studies, an urban neighbourhood and a gated community. Mandoki’s contribution investigates emerging spaces for older persons in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, currently one of Asia’s most rapidly urbanizing areas. Along the lines of the concept of elderscapes, Mandoki explores how new urban institutions for older people are negotiated and reshaped in the local context.

Caring mobilities

In this volume, we want to shed light on the importance of considering caring for old age as a distributed and highly mobile form of giving and receiving care across social and regional scales. This includes physical mobility, for instance, though transnational care and work chains, but also social distribution of care as a symbolic and social capital and corporeal resource (see Gregory 2011). This also prompts us to consider care as a good that can be restricted, transformed and also traded, that is both intangible and tangible, institutionalized and performed. The lives of older people are increasingly impacted by and entangled in transnational contexts and

mobilities, be it on a social, religious, cultural, economic, or political level. Global educational and labour markets allow as well as demand an increasing flexibility and mobility of individuals and groups who seek to make a living across the globe. Face-to-face relations and smaller-knit networks are now also managed with an altered temporality—couples, families, parents, and their children, might meet less on a regular but more on an irregular basis, following globalized rhythms and patterns of life. Old age in particular has come into the focus of ethnographic or policy-based research only recently. It matters on various levels: 1) there is a transnational elderscape that is made up of people ageing “away from home”, in the diaspora, because they migrated at a much younger age and stayed, or went on, but did not return to their original home; 2) retirement migration in the light of distributed families: concerning those aged persons, a couple or an individual, who are either providers or receivers of care (“flying grandparents”), and 3) the transnational care market: there is a growing need for professional and affordable care work that caters to old age because the conditions in the country of residence are not sufficient enough (Horn and Schweppe 2016; Baldassar and Merla 2014; Brijnath 2009). Thus, mobilities related to old age can concern both active agency and participation as well as rather passive forms of being made to move, and an expanding infrastructure of care as affective labour (Hochschild 1983).

Moreover, mobilities may also include notions of immobility, of inertia, and “being stuck” (Gutkunst et al. 2016). It also refers to the challenges of coping with different lifestyles in the Global South or the Global North. For this book, we have also been inspired by the so-called “new mobilities paradigm” coined by scholars such as Mimi Sheller (2014), Tim Cresswell (2010) and John Urry (2007) in order to search for appropriate concepts and methods to study the complex navigations of people, ideas, institutions or things across geophysical, historical and media-related spaces and boundaries (including the politics of restriction of access to places, justice, education, and the like). Such a multiscalar and multiperspectival approach, we argue, takes seriously the importance of relational dynamics of both movement and stillness, here and there, including the ethical and political dimension of uneven mobilities. This proves to be fruitful for ongoing research on the dynamics of ageing in the contemporary world since the human condition is one of many qualities of mobilities, and today’s conditions of globalized work chains and transcultural knowledge production demand a view that transgresses reification and fixing of identities in essentialized units of theory and practice. Moreover, such an advance helps push some of the current research which reduces mobility to transport and policies of physical movement (e.g. wheelchair-friendly residential homes) to the politics of mobilities. It also calls for a systematic and interdisciplinary fine tuning of mobile methods (such as walk-alongs, mobile visualization, see Sheller 2014, 14).

Even though the aspect of mobilities in ageing must not be reduced to (transnational) migration, diaspora plays a substantial role in generating

new discussions about the factor of “ageing in place” and how to retain place-specificity without reification. Ageing in the diaspora is still an under-researched theme (see Lamb 2009) and poses challenges on the level of researching ageing because many studies are often restricted to national and culturally monolithic boundaries or “containers,” and researching transnational mobilities reveals methodological as well as conceptual issues, too. How, for instance, do family structures change with migration? What about transforming gender roles and notions of a “suitable” life when away from home? How does the altered notion of home trigger new ideas of belonging—also for elderly people who retired and follow their children, for instance, or who commute between their children’s new lifeworld in the USA and their ancestral home in India? Long-distance relationships and care systems have been discussed in the context of family caregiving as a social act that has the quality of a good or a gift. This way, care can be circulated, defines inequality and asymmetrical power relations or is restricted altogether (see Baldassar and Merla 2014), e.g., by means of rejection and denial.² How can one communicate and practice care across geophysical distances, beyond face-to-face intimacy? Ahlin, in this volume, spells this out with respect to the potential that being away can imply continuing to care and look after the aged family members nevertheless—or, even more. It can also help in generating new forms of agency and empowerment (e.g., independence and safety). Baldassar and Merla propose that care circulates between social agents, be they individual or groups, in networks, and is shaped in that context and over time. They underline the role of “mobility and (physical) absence as common features of family life” (2014, 6). But one could also argue that immobility, as well as the presence of other social segments (such as friends, domestic workers) matter just as much.

Moreover, a theme that needs further research and emphasis are the social norms attached to care and its regulation and circulation as a good—Lamb, for instance, has shown how important intimacy is when it comes to allowing for someone to take care of one’s own, or another person’s ageing body, this brings along taboos and moral restrictions—for instance the unspoken imaginary of filial piety and gerontocracy as being the “best possible care,” while low labour care work could instead humiliate and degrade a person in need, or a family incapable of caring for the elderly family members. Moreover, in most places caregiving is still gendered, be it with respect to the “duty” of the daughter, and very often the

2 Baldassar and Merla define care circulation “as the reciprocal, multidirectional and asymmetrical exchange of care that fluctuates over the life-course within transnational family networks subject to the political, economic, cultural and social contexts of both sending and receiving societies” (2014, 24). Thereby, they also pay attention to the mobility turn (Urry and Sheller 2010) that aims at studying multilaterality, speed, and temporality in contexts such as transnational migration. Much attention therein is paid to circulation and connectivities between Global South and Global North mobilities.

daughter-in-law, to give care, or the female worker or nurse in the global care chain. Such culturally coded norms become twisted in the context of transnational migration (Reynolds and Zontini 2014). This opens up room for research on the circulation of kinship ties and taboos, on notions of intimacy as linked to caste, class, race, ethnicity or religious belief as well as gender. Baldassar and Merla (2014, 9–11) also stress the importance of acknowledging that taking care of old age must not be reduced to two entities (e.g., persons) but that it is distributed across the social field and across scales or circulation (e.g., legal issues such as citizenship or illegal migration and informal work, but also mediascapes, ethnoscapes; see Appadurai 1997). They highlight the need to study the multiperspectival and mobile aspects (“lens of circulation”) of care by also considering positionings of children, in-laws, etc.

What has so far been under-researched is the meaning and knowledge attached to certain concepts of age (e.g., active ageing). Moreover, the “emotion work” (Hochschild 1983) is often sidelined, that is, the substantial investment of affect and intimacy into a caring relationship, with all its risks, disappointments, rejections and other moral twists. The idea of investment is also crucial because it points towards that which is considered “worthwhile” being interested in, quite like the idea of productivity in the active ageing discourse is strongly tied up with notions of effectivity and value: one is considered productive if one contributes to societal well-being rather than restricting or “burdening” it. Such a strong metaphor gestures towards the seeming linearity of mobility, such as productivity in the interest of national development (see Denninger et al. 2014). The dangers of such monodirectional assumptions are evident. Gamburg (in this volume) addresses another challenge of mono-directionality. She underlines that caregiving in the context of the global care chain has often only been studied mono-linearly—very little research is done into those agents who are trained to give care and their familial and local contexts, or how their work impacts local networks of care, too.

Beyond migration (and yet, not detached from it completely, since migration is a ubiquitous condition of contemporary life), mobilities play a central role in the shaping of relations and experiences of old-age. Care is a key concept for the analysis of socio-economic and religio-cultural changes in late capitalism because demographic and labour-related shifts demand dramatic adaptations. This becomes particularly obvious in Asian contexts, where economic liberalization has yielded challenges with respect to the role of religious and caste solidarities and practices and the relationship of the state and the market (Lamb 2005) in defining values and morality, welfare and participation. State, market and family negotiate notions of, and responsibilities—or rules for commitment—for care-practice, in different ways. The concept and organization, or institutionalization, of caregiving and care-training, becomes crucial where urbanization, (transnational) migration, and highly fluid working conditions trigger changes in families, residential and neighbourhood milieus, and larger social networks.

Transnational eldercare systems appear to be insensitive to local specificities, to bodily, gendered or religious notions of intimacy and status, privacy and mobility. Not only old-age homes, but also day-care centres, senior citizen associations, changing familial or kinship-based life conducts, or notions of filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity must be considered. Moreover, the concept of co-presence as corporeal and/or virtual helps to explore reciprocity, trust, autonomy, and distance.

Global work mobility and educational options can be considered as the major driving forces for international migration and the increasing existence of transnational families. What consequences do these dynamics have for older people and care arrangements? Transnational family members are located in specific places and times and negotiate their relationships within the territorialized contexts of nation-states, class and citizenship (see Baldassar and Merla 2014). Although local challenges in social work have to be acknowledged in dealing with the increasingly diverse norms and practices of old age (Torres and Lawrence 2012), the concept of care itself too needs to be reconceptualized and broadened beyond physical proximity and the stigmatization of transnational relations (Horn and Schweppe 2016; Baldassar and Merla 2014).

In light of such a broader understanding of care, there is a lack of research on the actual negotiations of “doing family” and care practices of transnational families. The chapters in this section cover aspects such as multiple transnational kin constellations (ageing in diaspora vs. kin abroad) and the fluidity and temporality of migration, but also the global labour market and the feminization of work migration. The migratory mobility of South Asians is visible in their large diasporic communities in the US and Britain, but also increasingly in the Middle East. Gamburd’s chapter in this volume examines gender-related state regulations of migration and their practical impact on intergenerational caregiving in Sri Lanka. Gamburd contrasts the state’s rhetoric of normative family values that are based on a nuclear family model with ethnographic data about intergenerational care arrangements of working-class families. Responding to normative local discourses about abandoned elderly people in India, Brijnath’s contribution scrutinizes care practices of transnational Indian families with older kin in India. By looking at transnational flows of capital and changing interpretations of kinship, Brijnath challenges the idea of care as being bound to physical proximity, but also explores ambivalent feelings and experienced limitations of transnational care practices. In her chapter, Ahlin supports the view that transnational migration must not be fixed in a discourse of elder abandonment in the light of globalization’s burdening impositions, suggesting that it can also be understood a form of eldercare practice.³ Media technologies and communication play an important role in

3 Likewise, one must not deny the burden of many caregivers who work abroad to leave behind their parents who are perceived as suffering more under these conditions. This relation underlines an asymmetrical relationship of care as

this context. Moreover, gerontologist Kruse stresses the fact that we must consider an extended care system that includes more than the biological family. Beyond the critical focus on the normative power of ageing discourses, family and filial piety, this approach facilitates a fresh look at other social relations and formations, such as caste and class, religion, gender, friendship, neighbourhoods—or clubs, for instance. His concept of generativity—the co-production of individual and societal competences when it comes to care for and of old age (2017, 133–36)—can be implemented and complemented by means of paying attention to place and cultural context.⁴

New information and communication technologies (ICTs) challenge our notions of proximity and intimacy as much as those of responsibility and duty—thus these issues play a substantial role in research on transnational care mobilities, such as in Ahlin's chapter in this volume. Media may be said to be a trustworthy means of circulating care, be it via Skype, WhatsApp, or polymedia, to mention just a few. Media technologies have become an important research field in transnational studies, and the ways in which elderly persons take to (or resist) the new media speaks of their agency in participating in different forms of caregiving, but also knowledge production and social networking beyond the family. In her chapter in this volume, Ahlin proposes that instead of considering elderly parents as being left behind and “abandoned” by their transnationally migrant children, “migration led to a particular understanding and practice of care, which included communication technologies.” She extends the field of “care circulation” to “care as a relational practice between people and technologies”—one could even argue, to a field of co-production of care. Her ethnographic focus of Malayalees in Kerala and abroad underlines the methodological challenges and richness of anthropology to ageing studies. Most interestingly, Ahlin even proposes understanding migration as less as a careless practice than as a “new kind of care practice” that allows for the emergence of new forms of proximity and emotional involvement, in fact, the emergence of a rhythmic pattern of care that is structured by ICTs.

Brijnath (in this volume) moreover underlines the need to consider different and even “new modalities of care” in light of migration and ageing populations among Indian middle-class families, and she mentions but a few examples where such modalities surface: in citizenship, and notions of kinship, love, and compassion. She also highlights the ambivalence of care and migration as being both loss and gain. Here, too, we find the rather one-dimensional metaphor of the “old ones being left behind,” as victims of a burdening modernity. While this might in some cases be true, and we know of the many villages mainly inhabited by the ‘toothless generation,’

alleged carelessness that can be “paid back” through remittances or emotional and other “tokens” of love and faithfulness.

- 4 We consider as relevant for such an approach studies of intergenerationality and life-course, as well as environmental gerontology (see Vanderbeck and Worth 2015, Bruckermann 2017, Hromadžić and Palmberger 2018, Wahl 2005, Rowles and Bernard 2013, Kriebner and Maierhofer 2013).

e.g. in Nepal, according to Brijnath we must also understand the potential of empowerment and creativity that opens up when family fabrics change or post-familial relations shape (Beck-Gernsheim 1998). Indeed, new forms of agency can emerge, extended family can move in and become more central, but, moreover, friends can also become parts of the extended family. There might be new and liminal space for navigation that emerges with transnational migration of family members.

Narratives of care

The closing book section focuses on diverse narratives of care from various angles: following Liechty's (2003, 21–27) approach to employing the concepts of narrativity and performativity to analyse particular cultural processes, such as negotiating meanings of care, allows us to articulate fine nuances of vernacular narratives and imaginaries of care and bring them into conversation with apparently globalizing ageing paradigms without ignoring transcultural translations. The chapters of this section look at various manifestations of care on different scales: Ethno-Indologist Michaels tests a dominant contemporary, but not-so-recent discourse, the “decline of the joint family,” in Nepal and India to its textual roots, juxtaposing the results with ethnographic material, whereas literary scholar Raja introduces us to literary reflections from India on imaginaries and articulations of care in view of ending life-courses. Sociologist Chatterji and anthropologist Lamb examine narratives of care on a larger scale: Chatterji scrutinizes shifts in national care paradigms in the Netherlands from a long-term perspective, while Lamb dissects transcultural impacts of a US-American dominant ageing paradigm on a global scale. The chapters explore these vernacular narratives of care and their transcultural entanglements over three (sub-)continents from South Asia over Europe to North America.

A brief look into the academic and political history of the two dominant ageing paradigms allows us to better understand their discursive power. As already mentioned above, the globally circulating ageing concepts of “successful ageing” and “active ageing” formulated in US-American and European gerontology represent an influential transcultural phenomenon which impacts public and personal imaginaries of old age. Both ideas emerged in similar contexts of socio-gerontological work in the 1950s and 1960s (Katz and Calasanti 2015, 26; Boudiny 2013, 1077). In their original intention, they can be very broadly understood as correlated labels for a positive approach to ageing focusing on a healthy lifestyle, personal well-being and social inclusion (Lamb, Robbins-Ruskowski, and Corwin 2017, 1).⁵ The purpose of these concepts was to offer an alternative to the

5 The major theoretical difference between the two concepts is that the idea of active ageing initially was exclusively rooted in American ageing studies' activity theory of the early 1950s which focused on older individuals' adjustment to

former perspective on older age which emphasized its deficits (Foster and Walker 2015, 83). Ironically for the case of “successful ageing,” despite its initial ambition to combine “antiageist advocacy with empirical research” (Katz and Calasanti 2015, 27), the concept’s spread through popular literature and media eventually turned it into a partly ageist movement ignoring the perspective of individual elderly people (Lamb 2017b; 2014).

While conceptually strongly overlapping with the successful ageing paradigm, the active ageing concept has been framed in many European countries as a policy response to demographic change and population ageing from the late 1990s onwards (Lassen and Moreira 2014). Adopted to calm increasing “anxieties about the economic implications of global greying” (Boudiny 2013, 1078), the concept of active ageing fell on fertile ground in Europe and, together with the identification of the “new elderly,” well-settled, educated recent retirees, resulted in a profound “renegotiation of old age”⁶ (Denninger et al. 2014). These dynamics occurred in a time when many countries realized a shift in their demographics, i.e. the growing proportion of older people in the total population of a nation, which was presented in both media and scientific literature as a ‘catastrophic scenario’: despite the above-mentioned renegotiation of old age and an increasingly positive attitude towards the potentials of older age in general, the increasing share of older people was statistically represented as hazardous for national economies and welfare systems (Kunow 2005, 28–29). Woodward described such phenomena as “mobilizing statistical panic,” where probabilities are strategically employed to produce knowledge and receive the needed support in society for policy strategies: “fatally, we feel that a certain statistic, which is in fact based on an aggregate and is only a measure of probability, actually represents our very future” (Woodward 1999, 185).

The active ageing paradigm has mainly been disseminated in policy strategies to influence national ageing policies through intergovernmental organizations (United Nations, World Health Organization, etc.) or supra-national unions (European Union) as a homogenized response to demographic shifts in many countries of the Global North. In that sense, the active ageing paradigm differs from the successful ageing paradigm which is similarly embedded in discourses of public health and medicine, but primarily “emphasizes the power of individual agency and the individual self as a project” (Lamb 2014, 44). What both paradigms have in common is their strong emphasis on autonomy and independence in older age rooted in North American and European understandings of personhood. Despite their understanding of ageing as a universal matter, it is crucial for any

changed circumstances of their life (Lynott and Lynott 1996, 750–1; Bowling 2005, 3ff.; Boudiny 2013, 1077f.; Katz and Calasanti 2015, 27). Havighurst’s (1961) article on successful ageing attempted to offer a concept that could be applied in both individual-centred activity theory (which Havighurst supported) and Cumming and Henry’s then upcoming disengagement theory (1961).

6 German original: “Neuverhandlung des Alters”.

discourse analysis in this context to highlight that these paradigms emerge from “particular cultural values, aspirations, assumptions, and visions of personhood” (Lamb 2014, 42) and shape an “internationalist” discourse on ageing (Cohen 1992) that profoundly influences imaginaries of older age on a global scale.

In this publication, we aim at tracing counter-narratives of such dominant paradigms and their inherent Eurocentrism which are formed through processes of transcultural translation and incorporate vernacular particularities. In their contributions, Chatterji and Lamb scrutinize different articulations of such narratives of how to age well and how approaches to care shift in view of changing socio-political circumstances, whereas Raja and Michaels examine shifting care narratives of families as spaces for care and liminal stages in the life-course. In her chapter on altering care narratives in public health and policy and consequent shifts in institutional care approaches in the Netherlands, Chatterji draws a detailed, comparative picture of her initial ethnographic study of a Dutch care home for disabled older persons in the 1980s and the institution’s approach thirty years later. By including literary narratives in the form of cartoons and short writings of a professional in this institutionalized care context, she explores his critique and self-reflexivity of the institution’s shift from a once pioneering, liberal care approach to care marked by a neoliberal care environment. Chatterji’s observations as an Indian scholar conducting research in European care institutions are a perspective that we unfortunately rarely have the opportunity to read of; from a distant viewpoint she offers valuable insights into the narratives of an “elsewhere” (Robinson 2016) society with distinct understandings of personhood, sociality and care. Such shifts of perspective are of great importance to a refined examination of transcultural processes of translation.

Narratives and imaginaries of being old and ageing are also impacted by media, and such media representations play a decisive role in how young people perceive the ageing process, and how older people look at themselves. In some cases, media may contribute to the stereotyping of ageing, but in others, such as the literature studied by Raja in her chapter, certain media genres may even break and alter stereotypes, and open new spaces of imagining and engaging with ageing. Raja looks at such literary perspectives on the conditions of old age through the lens of gerontology’s narrative turn. She explores imaginaries of life stories as narratives in particular moments of life, such as dementia, illness or approaching death, where older people’s voices become less heard because they are no longer in a position to compose stringent narratives of their life-course and self (Brijnath 2014). The medium of literature suggests a negotiation space for exploring opportunities of how to care for old age through such disrupted or assembled narratives as expressions of selfhood in view of the frailties of ageing.

At the roots of the above-mentioned global “care circulation” are shifting narratives of what is the appropriate place for care. Whereas in Asian

countries in particular the family continues to be regarded as the primary locus of care, mobilities and changed labour markets challenge such moral norms, and a gradual institutionalization of later life is taking place to adjust to large-scale longevity and new public health scenarios in care. Michaels addresses the narrative of the decline of the joint family as epitomizing South Asian moral values: following Lamb (2007), he helps to critically recalibrate the dominant discourse on the joint family as an ideal care system which serves as one of the most significant symbols of South Asian identity and personhood. As elaborated on in the second book section, the discrepancies between powerful normative narratives of filial piety and care and contemporary South Asian life realities where long passed-on performances of care need to be negotiated and adapted (see Ahlin, this volume) may lead to tensions and even impasses between different family generations. Michaels juxtaposes this discourse with textual sources and ethnographic material which reveals the moral roots of this narrative as a subaltern moral positioning against the Euro-American "elsewhere." In this context, a promising alternative view on care which stems from a different sociocultural context is suggested by gerontologist Kruse: he stresses the fact that we must consider an extended care system that exceeds the biological family. Beyond the critical focus on the normative power of narratives of ageing, family and filial piety, this approach facilitates a fresh look at other social relations and formations, such as caste and class, religion, gender, friendship, neighbourhoods or clubs, for instance.

In her chapter, Lamb, who conducted pioneering research on travelling concepts such as "successful ageing" (2017; 2014), reflects on transcultural assemblages of care and personhood. In this paradigm, she sees a powerful neoliberal narrative of self-care which profoundly shaped US-American contemporary understandings of lifestyles, sociality and personhood in later life. Contrasting dominant American ageing imaginaries with notions of old age from her long-term research in West Bengal, she understands successful ageing as a current "obsession" whose "emphasis on personal responsibilities complements neoliberal ideals about individual freedom, self-governance, and minimizing public support" (2017, 7), i.e. as an imperative to avoid dependence, which converts productivity into a merit and thus aims at diminishing the individual's "footprint" on family, friends, and the state. By carefully bringing into conversation such large-scale discourse analysis with the opinions of individuals in India and the United States, Lamb impressively deconstructs narratives of ageing which apparently care for old age, applicable in a global context, but which ultimately represent Eurocentric moral imperatives to "discipline" old age and reduce its "burden" on societies and their economies. Lamb's findings, as well as the previous chapters of this contributions, highlight the importance of the anthropological lens and critical research to uncover and articulate important vernacular and individual counter-narratives to seemingly globalizing narratives of care, ageing and the life-course as central elements of the human condition.

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