

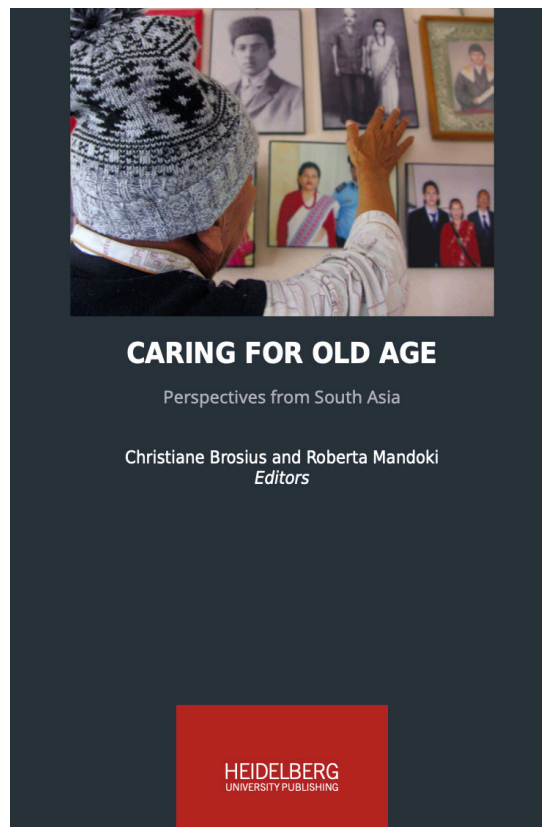
Book Review

Review of *Caring for Old Age: Perspectives from South Asia* edited by Christiane Brosius and Roberta Mandoki

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Ageing. An inevitable development of the 21st century with all imaginable consequences for our societies. The global demographic transition to aged societies is having extensive implications on living arrangements and the way our economies and policies work. We need to (re) negotiate how we want and can live in and with ageing societies, (re)schedule policy action plans, (re)distribute finances, (re) built infrastructure, and (re)think how we “do family” and care about ageing, old age, and older people. Ageing brings about a range of urgent challenges regarding social, financial, and health issues. In the Global South, ageing is gaining increasingly more attention, yet the South Asian demographic transition towards aged societies has been largely omitted in academic research due to its relatively young population share. However, rapid urbanisation and mobilisation in South Asia, combined with demographic shifts, transforms societies and creates new demands for families, societies, and policies.

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- Sarah Speck on *Caring for Old Age*

The edited volume *Caring for Old Age: Perspectives from South Asia* by Christiane Brosius and Roberta Mandoki is a timely collection for scholars and students interested in ageing and care in the South Asian region. By taking a predominantly transcultural approach, eleven authors provide deep ethnographic case studies based on original research with local communities. Reflecting on the multidimensionality of how old age and ageing is experienced, perceived, and shaped, this book offers inspiring and innovative perspectives on transcultural concepts and discourses in the field of care and ageing. The authors

aim to shift the discourse of old people as a burdensome matter of our societies to a more positive direction by highlighting their individual roles and responsibilities within family and society.

Caring for Old Age is structured into three main parts: Caring Places and Spaces, Caring Mobilities, and Narratives of Care. The first part, Caring Places and Spaces, offers glimpses into lived experiences in different spaces elderly people occupy in the urban areas of Delhi, Goa, and Kathmandu, particularly the classic retirement homes and other newly emerging spaces and places for the old, such as senior citizen’s day care centers or care homes. Applying the concept of *elderscapes*, adopted from Stephen Katz’s (2009) research on retirement communities in Florida, the authors show how environments in which culture, history, and older people’s own life (hi)stories are interwoven, play an important role for the well-being of senior citizens themselves. Their agency and diverse forms of participation in

everyday urban life clearly takes centre stage. The chapters are not so much about how urban space is created for senior citizens but how they are an active part of the development of “age-friendly cities.”

Part two, Caring Mobilities, follows female migrants by focusing on the intersection of migration, care, and “doing family,” including practices of care for aging parents. Concepts of family and kinship are transforming and (re)negotiated as people find new ways and strategies to make a living while at the same time (needing to) care for their loved ones, be it financially or emotionally. The three chapters of this section fill a significant gap in migration research, where grandparents and their important role as caretakers for grandchildren or the ancestral home are often overlooked. By interrogating how care

and maintenance of intergenerational relationships happen across borders through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) – even if it is just to comfort the conscience of migrated daughters or sons – the chapters skilfully demonstrate that ICT possibilities not only connect migrants and their parents but also expand to include grandchildren as well. In so doing, these new and digital technologies help to overcome feelings of loneliness and being “left behind” among grandparents.

Part three of this book, *Narratives of Care*, deals with the spatio-temporal and socio-cultural embeddedness of ageing, or how aging is described in different narratives and discourses in a global context. The reader is introduced into discourses about old age and ageing in Europe and North America, e.g. concepts of ageing well that convey the image of senior citizens’ activeness and independency. In contrast, everyday discourses about aging in South Asia are summarized by the phrase, “In old age especially, to be able to sit and be served (...) is a sign of privilege” (p. 329). This section carves out quite clearly that South Asian concepts of successful ageing are reflecting long-standing understandings of family, care, and old age that are deeply rooted in cultural and religion traditions as is shown, for example, in Axel Michaels’ chapter about the holy joint family (pp. 285-304).

In summary, the edited volume *Caring for Old Age* provides an excellent introductory overview of the transcultural entanglements and interconnectedness of different perspectives and experiences of

care and ageing. The authors succeed in overcoming the negative image of ageing societies in which older people present a burden. However, the announced program to approach issues of care and old age from a balanced perspective, including authors from the region, to counter dominant Western discourses, is not adequately achieved as Eurocentric perspectives still overweigh South Asian discourses. In addition, some assumptions are based on relatively sparse qualitative data. Though qualitative data does not claim to be representative, a handful of cases do not seem to be enough to draw overarching conclusions. By failing to contrast statements and experiences of older people with those of younger family members, for example, the book misses an opportunity to expand the holistic picture of ageing in South Asia, including trends induced by the young related to care and life in old age. These minor shortcomings notwithstanding, *Caring for Old Age* is a timely and valuable contribution for scholars and students of South Asian Studies, Social Gerontology, Social Anthropology, and Human Geography.

Sarah Speck is a human geographer currently working in the Institute for Ageing Research at the University of Applied Sciences of Eastern Switzerland. Her research includes ageing and digitalization, newly emerging social institutions for elderly people in the Global South, and daily living with dementia in Switzerland. Sarah Speck holds a PhD in Human Geography from the University of Zurich.