

REVIEW

Contemporary Narratives of Ageing, Illness, Care

Katsura Sako and Sarah Falcus (eds), Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 2022, 216 pp., hbk £120.00, ISBN 13: 9780367528393

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(First published online 2 October 2023)

Edited by Katsura Sako and Sarah Falcus, this book is a collection of essays focusing on narratives of ageing, care-giving and illness portrayed through diverse media. The aim is to move away from political and economic discourses of crisis and burden towards using care as the lens for thinking about all aspects of life. The overall theoretical framework of ‘social interdependence’, which incorporates a feminist perspective to the cultural narratives, raises crucial questions about what it is to be human and co-exist in an interdependent society. This context defines care as a practical support and an obligation (or responsibility) with a moral meaning within a specific cultural and social setting. The use of music, literature, films and art from Europe, Latin American, Asia and Oceania allows comparison regarding the challenges of care among differing narratives and cultures.

The book is composed of ten chapters, which can be grouped into three main sections, the first addressing care as portrayed through photography and performance; the second section comprising four chapters using film and music to explore memory and dementia; and the final three chapters exploring examples from literature, specifically a short story, a novel and children’s picture books. The first chapter, ‘Ageing and Care in the Visual Field’, explores how Martine Franck’s photographs can promote an ethics of care of concern with the ageing population as active members of society. Chapter Two, ‘Improvisation and Vulnerability’, considers circuits of care among the audience, performer and dramaturg as a way to perform care. Chapter Three, ‘The Bucket List and More’, explores care practices of spectators interacting with the performers and how the ‘narra-theatrical’ lens lets older people be active contributors of care.

The second section begins with Chapter Four, ‘Come Healing of the Spirit, Come Healing of the Mind’, which discusses the notion of dementia using two films to prove that this may be a different approach incorporating a dialogical exchange and a participant observer. In addition to the methodological contribution, this chapter also highlights that care for older people is not only holistic and compassionate but also time relational, creative and evolving according to the stages of the person’s life. Chapter Five, ‘Dementia in Familial Documentary Film’, draws upon two documentaries to raise the relevance of the representation

of people living with dementia as a crucial ethical dimension that affects the people, the viewer and their projected image. Comparing these two documentaries, the author shows that the 'harm to subjects that the filmic interaction can cause can be mitigated by the role assigned to the person living with dementia in front of the camera and the concept of care presented' (p. 99), which is the main ethical point raised. Chapter Six, 'Re-orientating Hesitantly', declares that living relationally with dementia and considering everyone around the person involved is a decolonial approach in itself. For this affirmation, the author draws on the analysis of a film that explores the relevance of hesitation in those relationships and the creation of multiple temporal positions around the person with dementia. Chapter Seven, 'Dementia in Familial Documentary Film', shows that older people can connect with music on another level, promoting and facilitating conversations about what it means to ageing and Alzheimer's disease.

Chapter Eight, 'A Glut of Slippers', pays close attention to a short story to make visible the development of diverse ways older people are intimate, showing time as crucial because it makes the audience consider beginnings and endings in a short timeframe. This chapter puts forth the idea that the 'ethics of care takes caring relationships as a morally fundamental form of interaction and value ... Care, in this vein, should be gender-blind' (p. 72). Chapter Nine, 'Old Friends', discusses problematic friendships, not only from their positive consequences but also the tensions and complicated connections that can carry on care relationships. The final chapter, 'Care, Generations and Reciprocity in Children's Picture Books in Japan', addresses the cultural discourse of ageing, illness and care from the point of view of different generations in picture books for children.

As it is identified in the book, representation matters. That statement comes to life in this book through photographs, plays, films, musicals and art pieces. This book defines care from a feminist ethics point of view, considering two aspects: 'the giving and taking of practical support for daily living – clearly crucial in the lives of many older people – and an understanding of care as "caring about" something that involves obligation and responsibility, as an individual and as a society' (p. 3). Accordingly, this book reminds us to look at care as immersed in a culture that can be studied through identifiable narratives. The authors have established that care is embedded in a society with a diversity of interconnected inequalities with the narratives that represent care-giving practices. In other words, 'We lived in times of care. A time in which scientific and technological advancement contrasts with critical inequalities, exclusions, poverty and incomprehensible marginalization' (Camps, 2021: 14). All the narratives analysed in this book are excellent examples of the representations of those times of care. However, it does not clarify how those critical inequalities can influence the audience who experienced those media analysed throughout the book, specifically: Who is the audience of those representations? How are those representations accessed? Did everyone have access to the films mentioned in the book or only the upper class? The existence of barriers like languages, education and socio-economic level influence access to the media analysed. Although those barriers are not mentioned in this book, it may be possible to explore them in future research.

The strength of the book is that it presents reads with a panorama of how care is a lens to view every aspect of life, traceable throughout a diverse media. In addition,

the book shows that humanities can help to analyse those media and identify care as narratives and cultural practices in all of them. If the reader would like to learn about contemporary narratives and have new ideas for approaching the representations of the ageing population, this book may prove incredibly helpful.

Reference

Camps V (2021) *Tiempo de cuidados: Otra forma de estar en el mundo*. Barcelona: Arpa & Alfil Editores.

doi:10.1017/S0144686X23000338