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## Book Review

Review of Dossa, Parin and Cati Coe, eds. *Transnational Aging and Reconfigurations of Kin Work*. Rutgers University Press. 2017. pp. 231. Price: \$32.95 (Paperback).

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## Book Review

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Rarely does a book make every effort to place both the dimensions of kinship in care work and of transnational intergenerational relationships at the heart of its analysis. In this edited volume, Dossa and Coe have succeeded in this endeavor, and have been able to release the academic potential of the notion of “kin work” to explain the significant contributions of older people in transnational contexts. This book not only focuses on academic issues related to transnational aging and care work, but also highlights the political importance of older women (the main protagonists of this book) as workers, both on the labor market (as producers, e.g., paid work) and in the informal domestic sphere (as reproducers, e.g., unpaid work). The accounts of their lives that take into consideration both their paid care work and their unpaid kin work (as mothers and grandmothers), make visible the leading role that they play in family *regeneration*. The different ethnographically inspired articles in this volume take us to different socioeconomic ecologies of vulnerable populations in transnational contexts, where the impact of neoliberal policies of migration, structural gender violence, the absence of a welfare system, and precarious systems of care work collide. These articles provide a voice to the older women who proactively deal with these adverse scenarios, while, in turn, often from a distance, work to connect, support, and maintain kinship relations, as well as balance the relations between family, community, and the state.

In the introduction, the editors immediately present us to Noor, an older woman from Iran, who, through her handmade embroideries and their circulation among her family members between nation-states performs impeccable work in transmitting family memories and emotions. Through this material practice, she thus connects different generations in the same parental belonging system. Dossa and Coe borrow Stack and Burton’s (1993) definition of “kin work” as “the labor and tasks that a family needs to accomplish to survive from generation to generation” (9). This concept will accompany the reader throughout this book. Noor and her embroidery are emblematic of kin work: she literally weaves networks of exchange for emotions and family belonging to grow and persist across geographic spaces.

The book is further divided into three sections. The first section is reserved for three articles that explore the idea of “kin-scription”: a type of kin work based on cultural scripts that guide family roles based on gender and age. The chapters of this section reveal the peculiarities of a group of older women who, as grandmothers, try to maintain this role and the caregiving related to it, as an inalienable commitment, even if this goes against their well-being. Neda Deneva (Chapter 1) analyzes the case of an older

Bulgarian woman that makes the transition from paid labor to being a migrant worker, while simultaneously caring for her grandchildren. This transition is what the author describes as the step from welfare to “kinfare.” Here, a situation leads to a series of insecurities in the irruption from independent status (as self-employed) to dependent status (as financially dependent on their children). Yanqiu Rachael Zhou (Chapter 2) examines how care, aging, migration, and social policies interfere with kin work, with grandparents who travel from China to Canada to fulfill their care commitments (filial piety) to their new generations. This ethnographic case shows how strong interdependence between generations persists, and how, simultaneously, tensions arise from being a grandmother in a country to which one does not belong. Kristin Elizabeth Yarris (Chapter 3) shows us another face of the conflicts and dilemmas that kin work entails. She discusses the case of two elder women (both grandmothers and mothers) that are caught in the migration processes between Guatemala and the United States. These women strive to maintain family cohesion across three generations of women, while enduring the consequences and ambiguities of migration – which is seen as an abandonment of the family – or by staying and sacrificing themselves for the sake of caring for their families.

The second section of this book thematically focusses on the reconfigurations of kinship, that are taken up in the title of the volume. These ethnographic cases highlight the transformations in the modalities of care exchanges between generations. Erin L. Rafetty (Chapter 4) explores the “kinnig” (Sacchi and Viazzo 2018) that a group of older Chinese women perform in their care work as foster mothers, reconfiguring their modes of solitude, their self-esteem, and their relationships with the community and the state. Mushira Mohsin Khan and Karen Kobayashi (Chapter 5) discuss reconfigurations in the intergenerational care contract based on a system of religious values, Dharma and Karma, between a generation of young women and their Indian mothers who migrate to Canada. Loretta Baldassar (Chapter 6) emphasizes the emotional and moral support that is transmitted between the different generations of Italian migrants in Australia during the 20th century, where the technological modes of communication and *co-presence* become essential for the reinforcement of transnational family values.

Finally, the last section focuses on ethnographies about migration and aging trajectories, as ways to explore the kin work performed by migrant women. Cati Coe (Chapter 7) examines how two older Ghanaian women in the United States recreate a retirement ideal to carry out in their homelands and the dilemmas they face upon arrival, where they must rebuild and reinvent care and family ties in situ. Delores V. Mullings (Chapter 8) explores how a group of older Caribbean women reconfigure their retirement through their kin work in the family and community. Here, remittances, caring for grandchildren and bonding with the church take on a particular role. In the last chapter, Parin Dossa (Chapter 9) analyzes how kin work is activated among Ismaili migrants in Canada, constructing epitomizing narratives about daily life, visual memory, and evocations of home, food, and music.

*Transnational Aging and Reconfigurations of Kin Work* reminds us of the importance of kinship studies in anthropology, making visible the notion of “kin work,” that hitherto remained underexplored in transnational and aging studies. The thickness of the book’s content also surely lies in its ethnographic quality that makes salient the socio-political contexts that impact migration and intergenerational relations in their everyday enactment and negotiation. In sum, this is an essential and accessible book for academics in the social, human, and public policy sciences, as well as for any researcher or student who seeks to deepen their insights into the everyday processes of aging and care in transnational contexts.

## References

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