

Introduction: Masculinities Ageing Between Cultures

Bringing Relationality, Kinship and Care into Dialogue

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This book aims to bring together perspectives from Masculinity Studies and cultural Age Studies in order to explore multiple ways in which men age between different cultures, examining also how concepts of gender and masculinities are affected by cultural exchange.

Addressing a broad geographical framework in response to global mobility and migration, the essays in this volume examine exilic and transcultural experiences of ageing men from Northern and Eastern Europe, British and North American diasporic relationships including the Indian diaspora in the US, Chinese father images in the US-American context and Black British queer kinship, drawing its examples for conceptualizing relationality, care and kinship ‘in-between’ cultures also from Brazilian society and African European contexts.

Our first premise is that mobility is one of the crucial, perhaps even the prototypical experience of our time. As a “post-disciplinary” phenomenon in contemporary societies worldwide, the ‘mobilities turn’ or ‘mobilities paradigm’ encompasses “various kinds and temporalities of physical movement,” which extend both to the vertical movement of upward or downward “social mobility” and the horizontal kind of geographical movement involved in migration (Urry 2007, 6, 8; emphasis in original), which may extend over people’s lifetime. John Urry’s analyses of the forms and social functions of mobilities have introduced new

ways of thinking about societies beyond clearly defined spatial boundaries, foregrounding “networks, mobility and horizontal fluidities” (Urry 2000, 3) as of central importance in conceptualizing social interactions and relationships.

In the context of COVID-19, which affected work on this edited collection by shifting personal encounters primarily to the virtual format, mobilities have been revalued. If the mobilities turn in the 1990s responded to “a theoretical devaluing of mobility” in the humanities and social sciences with the implication that ‘cultures’ were frequently seen as “the properties of groups of people with clear territories who shared common identities”, so that the “mobility (real and imagined) of the homeless, the migrant, the refugee” were equally devalued (Cresswell 2020, 52, 53), in a post COVID-19 world ‘viral mobilities’ have been associated with the pathological. As Tim Cresswell points out, this constitutes a regressive return to disease metaphors which have historically been “at the heart of violent reactions to mobility and displacement” (2020, 54). While acknowledging that the mobility of people and infrastructures has crucially enabled the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cresswell argues that it is the metaphorical link between disease and mobility that leads to a devaluing of mobility as “wasted time” or “dysfunction”: “COVID-19 and its mobilities are not an aberration but, instead, evidence of the way ‘normality’ has been spatially rendered” (55).

Mobilities in a post COVID-19 world have implications for thinking about cultures in general, and they affect our spatial metaphor of ‘masculinities ageing between cultures’ in particular. In addition to postcolonial critiques of the spatial and Homi Bhabha’s sense of “In-betweenness” as a cultural condition (1994, 2), there is also the liminal aspect of temporality in ‘ageing’. Also, an ‘in-between’ is, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘a person who intervenes’, while the adjective ‘in-between’ is associated with both the temporal interval and with spatial intervention; and these different forms of ‘intervention’ figure in the essays of this volume. Cultural ‘in-betweenness’ brings up the further association with travel, theorized by James Clifford as “Culture as travel,”, who redefined cultures “as sites of dwelling *and* travel” and as encounters be-

tween people on the move and in fixity (1992, 103, 105; emphasis in original). While travel in this broad sense is associated with negative (“as transience, superficiality, tourism, exile, and rootlessness”) as well as positive meanings (“as exploration, research, escape, transforming encounter”; Clifford 1992, 105), this is also true for mobilities. In the halting of mobilities in the various political responses to the COVID-19 virus, one of the negative meanings of travel – its environmental aspects – were frequently observed, while the push which the enforced fixity of lockdowns gave to digital exchanges were also experienced as positive. However, the negative aspects of the prevalence of digital over embodied encounters were experienced most forcefully by the very young and the very old, while poorly paid workers renamed as ‘key workers’ and refugees falling ill in camps around the Mediterranean were predominantly exposed to “mobility inequities” (Cresswell 2020, 55).

Travel and mobilities *as* culture and *in-between* cultures have not only a multitude of positive and negative meanings, but are also marked by the intersections of gender, sexualities, class, race and age. In this collection, we focus primarily on intersections of masculinities and age, because it is our second premise that the cultural constructions of masculinities as they change across the life course have received too little critical attention. This is related to the even more punitive cultural constructions of female old age, which have therefore been analyzed primarily in feminist age studies.¹ Constructions of male ageing, then, constitute a blind spot in humanities research, which this volume begins to address in the context of mobilities. In bringing together gendered aspects of movement and non-movement, forced or deliberate, with representations of ageing masculinities, the essays in this volume begin to map a variety of cultural narratives of male ageing.

The two opening essays sketch out a theoretical framework for these narratives by conceptualizing respectively the links between spatial

1 For work in Age Studies that reflects on the gendered “double standard of aging” (Sontag 1972), see, for instance, Maierhofer 2003, 2019, Maierhofer and Haring 2023, Haller 2005, Hartung 2017, Vedder 2018, and Woodward 1999.

movement and male ageing as migrancy and by reflecting on the directions male ageing may take. With few exceptions, among them Rüdiger Kunow's work², cultural Age Studies have focused primarily on Western cultures and literature, an over-emphasis that is in the process of being redressed³. From a materialist perspective, Rüdiger Kunow brings his expertise in postcolonial theory and Age studies to bear on the connection between population ageing, migration and masculinities. If capital-driven mobility has more frequently been associated with the young, old age and older people have been constructed as the 'leftover' of global migration, he argues. Regarding this as a misconception in view of millions of labour migrants growing old "between cultures" in the United States, Kunow maintains that old age does matter in migration in multiple ways, promoting in his essay a "multi-generational understanding of migration". To illustrate the implications of a necessary change in our understanding of mobility and later life, Kunow turns to Indian literature in English in the United States for its awareness of cultural 'in-between-ness'. He focuses on the Sanskrit term "sevā", which designates a complex of services due to older men as part of a non-Western way of regulating relations between generations as well as male ageing inside the Indian family. Reading Jhumpa Lahiri's short story "Unaccustomed Earth" (2008) as an exemplary text that addresses key issues of Indian diasporic culture, Kunow shows how the story about the middle-aged Ruma and her retired father revolves around unspoken issues of filial obligation, intimacy as distance, intergenerational relations and generational difference, in which "sevā" is not an option. Contextualizing Lahiri's story within older Indian men's migration to the United States, Kunow concludes that capitalist globalization uncou-

2 See Kunow 2010 and 2016.

3 See the special issue on "Postcolonial Perspectives in Aging Studies" of *Journal of Aging Studies* 2016 (co-edited Silke van Dyk and Thomas Küpper), Sweta Rajan-Rankin 2018, Sweta Brosius and Roberta Mandoki 2020, and work by Ira Raja and Emily Timms, forthcoming in *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Ageing in Literature and Film* 2023.

ples cultural traditions and relationships to an extent that “age itself, as an idea and ideal” becomes migratory.

From the perspective of medical anthropology, Annette Leibing tackles issues of belonging, citizenship and the complex identity issues of masculinity constructions by thinking through the directions taken within Masculinity Studies. Leibing’s pioneering comparative work on dementia in Brazil and Canada illustrates that a fruitful dialogue can be initiated between anthropological research on ageing, on the one hand, and literary and cultural perspectives, on the other.⁴ In her essay in this volume, Leibing introduces the analytical concept of “reversion” to define social, political and cultural responses to value systems achieved over time that are in the process of being lost. With reference to such deeper changes within societies as “regression, backwardness and devolution”, “reversion” reveals the surprising (structural) absence of older men from cultural narratives of masculinities, which contrasts with the strong presence of older male actors in current world politics. Drawing on the narrative of political masculinities in Brazil after the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president, Leibing illustrates the impact of gendered politics with reference to images and metaphors used by Bolsonaro and his followers to reinforce heteronormative and homophobic values. Reminiscent of older models for being male, the new scenarios redirect images of illegal leadership and violence – for instance, in Bolsonaro’s posing with firearms – into ‘positive’ signs of masculine power. Furthermore, in the context of Bolsonaro’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic illness and the receiving of medical care is linked to frailty and a loss of masculinity.

Conceptualizing links between mobility, age and masculinity as multi-generational migrancy and as reversion, the two opening essays introduce many of the terms that reverberate with other contributions in this volume. In order to knit the observations in the case studies that follow closer together, we invited contributors to engage in cultural comparison by drawing on the concepts of relationality, kinship and care. In this way, insights from the broad geographical and intercultural

4 See Leibing 2006 and 2015.

framework, from which the essays draw, may be put into dialogue. The “need” of ideas, concept and theories “to be ever on the move” is one further dimension of mobility (Urry 2007, 16), while the idea that theories travel in time and space is a metaphor introduced by Edward Said, who links conceptual travel to a “a distance traversed” and “conditions of acceptance [...] or resistances” (1983, 127). As a flexible tool of trans-cultural research, Mieke Bal defines narrative as a travelling concept and concepts as “sites of debate, awareness of difference, and tentative exchange” (2002, 13), which she regards as the “basis for an intellectual adventure” (2009, 18). In this sense, we offer the concepts of relationality, kinship and care as mobile sites of dialogic exchange between cultures.

Beginning with the broadest, but also most encompassing term ‘relationality’, the essays in this section address mobility, age and masculinity from the perspectives of Russian literary writers in exile reflecting on their homeland and from the angle of Ang Lee’s filmic (re-)construction of the Chinese-American father-son relationship. Dagmar Gramshammer-Hohl shows in her essay how discourses of home and belonging by male Russian literary writers in exile during the twentieth century are shaped by (re-)configurations of both age and gender. Relationality is at stake in this essay as it investigates how concepts of gender and masculinities itself are affected by movement and migration. While exile is associated with age, even an accelerated ageing process imagined as “turn[ing] grey overnight”, the exile’s longing for home is also gendered. As Gramshammer-Hohl illustrates in her analyses, the relationship between the exiled writer and his homeland is conceived in familial and gendered terms, in the trope of “homesickness” or the longing of a prodigal son for his (aged) mother.

Yumin Zhang investigates in her essay on the Taiwanese filmmaker Ang Lee’s “Father Trilogy” how the changes in the depicted relationships between ageing fathers and their sons or daughters portray generational and cultural conflict, while they challenge hegemonic views and stereotypes in American society concerning perceptions of Chinese masculinities. Lee’s films do this, Zhang argues, by representing a variety of positions taken by these only apparently traditional older men, thus suggesting that ageing men’s experiences are “anything but monolithic”. With

the story of the retired Master Chu in *Pushing Hands* (1991), who moves to the US to join his son, Lee uses conflicts in filial obligations to dismantle the stereotypes of emasculated Chinese men in American culture; in *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), the Confucian father Mr. Gao is shown as a complex figure who embraces his son's homosexuality as well as alternative family arrangement to the surprise of his own family; while the protagonist of *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), the retired Chef Chu, a widower who has raised his three daughters alone, represents 'caring masculinity'.

As both these essays illustrate in their different cultural contexts, representations of masculinities ageing between cultures rely on different forms of relationality, which involve also forms of kinship – as Dagmar Gramshammer-Hohl shows in her essay by highlighting the connection between images of home and belonging with kinship relations – and those of care – as Yumin Shang indicates with reference to the various forms of caring, but also un-caring, masculinities in Ang Lee's films.

The next section addresses the interrelations of 'kinship' with ageing masculinities and migration in three case studies on Swedish literature, Black British literature and Bosnian film. The concept of kinship itself has travelled from anthropology to gender, queer and diaspora studies. In response to universalist claims in structuralist anthropology which associated kinship with nature and biology, the concept itself was challenged, following David Schneider's *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984), who rejected kinship studies as forcibly imposing "European categories on other cultures, thereby distorting them" (Adair 2019, 13). In response to Schneider's critique, a more complex understanding of the relationship between the biological, social and cultural in kinship has evolved, which traces its links to other cultural phenomena, identity categories and biopolitical developments (Franklin and McKinnon 2002, Carsten 2004, Sahlins 2013).

From the perspective of queer studies, Kath Weston foregrounded the aspect of choice in homosexual relationships which recast close friends as kin. As she argues, the aspect of choice is determined by social aspects such as "material circumstances, culture, history, habit and imagination", intending with her approach to undercut "the danger-

ously utopian fantasies of harmony” in concepts of family which ignore that families are “sites of conflict as well as support, violence as well as love” (1991, xv, xviii). In her examination of the link between sexualities and kinship, Judith Butler considers the implications of the concept for our understanding of cultures as exchanges between provisional rather than “self-standing entities or unities”, suggesting that we think of kinship as “a kind of *doing*, [...] as an enacted practice,” which makes it possible to “consider how modes of patterned and performative doing bring kinship categories into operation and become the means by which they undergo transformation and displacement” (2002, 34; emphasis in original).

Emphasizing the performative and relational aspects of kinship, these considerations foreground the spatial and temporal movement of the concept, which makes it possible to move beyond the binaries of nature and culture, the normal and the pathological in terms of gender and sexualities. Similarly, recent work on diasporic kinship draws specifically on “structural queerness” in arguing for both a spatial displacement “of the national” and a temporal redirection “in a desire to be and relate otherwise” (Adair 2019, 10). Gigi Adair describes the “double bind of kinship discourse” in her study of diasporic kinship as “an awareness of the privileges accorded to normative kinship forms”, on the one hand, and as “a diasporic longing to find alternative ways of being in the world”, on the other (2019, 10). Arguing that contemporary forms of migration, and mobility more generally, are part of kinship, Janet Carson shows that both models of kinship – the more static one that “emphasizes *being* over doing, origins over attainment, the past over the future”, and the more dynamic one which “stresses the importance of processual and performative ways of *becoming* kin” (2020, 321; emphasis in original) – have important implications for a politics of mobility and the multidimensionality of kinship as “imaginative, material and relational” (332).

Taking up the imaginative link between kinship, male ageing and migration, Katharina Fürholzer analyses in her essay the Swedish-born writer Aris Fioretis’ book about his father, a Greek physician who migrated to Sweden, *Halva solen* (2012; “Half the sun”). The dementia and

death of the father motivates the son's intercultural narration, looking back at the father's youth, his immigration to Sweden during the Greek Civil War in the 1940s, and at his professional and personal life in the new country. Linking key moments in the father's past to his illness, the narrative oscillates between intimacy and distance, revealing the double bind of kinship, as Fürholzer points out, in the "paradoxical dichotomy of the foreign in the familiar and the familiar in the foreign".

In her essay on the British writer Bernardine Evaristo's novel *Mr Loverman* (2013), Kristina Weber considers implications of queer kinship for older black men of the Windrush generation, who migrated to Britain from the Caribbean between 1948 and 1971. Set in 2010, the novel focuses on the protagonist Barrington "Barry" Walker and his long-term secret partner, Morris, both in their seventies. As Weber argues, the rigid standards of "hegemonic masculinity" (R. W. Connell 1995) lead to the two closeted queer men's "internalised homophobia, shame and self-hate", while their relationships to their (biological) families are conflicted. In response to the loneliness the two men face in their old age, the novel portrays their eventual coming out as gay and their adopting a queer kin network, thus contributing to a "redefinition of what kinship means for elderly queer diasporic men".

Renate Hansen-Kokoruš turns to narratives of male identity in two films by the Bosnian director Ines Tanović, *Our Everyday Life* (*Naša svakodnevna priča*, 2015) und *The Son* (*Sin*, 2019), which focus on family relationships and generational conflicts in post-war Bosnia. In contradistinction to the "toxic masculinity" of the stereotypical martial war hero in other post-war films, Hansen-Kokoruš argues, the two films by Tanović foreground generational aspects, showing how male gender roles evolve in familial connections and intergenerational interactions across different stages of the life course. Just like kinship itself (Carsten 2020, 326), these familial roles in their effect on masculinities across the ages may be conflicted and exclusionary, but can also be supportive and beneficial. Leaving the future of the younger generations of men open in the films' ending, as Hansen-Kokoruš suggests, Tanović's films nevertheless invite a conciliatory perspective.

Turning to the concept of 'care', the last section brings this concept, which has historically been associated more frequently with women and femininity, to bear on ageing masculinities. Stereotypes such as the 'uncaring male' have been deconstructed in a feminist care ethics, which has foregrounded the importance of relationships and responsibilities rather than rights and rules in matters of care (Gilligan [1983] 2003, 19). From the perspective of metaethical political theory, Joan Tronto has analysed two forms of social care as the traditional domain of men: those of the "protection" of society and "productive economic activity", for instance in providing for the family (2013, 91). As she argues, these engagements, which traditionally granted men "a pass from caring" are no longer adequate in response to changing gender and care conceptions in contemporary societies (93). The traditional focus on the public realm within which care has been defined as a feature of hegemonic masculinities, has also been questioned in sociology, in which the concept of 'caring masculinities' has been employed to shift the emphasis instead on familial care, to promote fatherhood as a realm for male care beyond the paradigm of protection and productivity (Scholz and Heilmann 2019, Tholen 2018).

Nevertheless, male care – whether extended to others or to the self – is still perceived as unusual in many social contexts, while gender implications in care encounters may be complicated in intercultural contexts, as the essays in this section illustrate. In the opening essay on a group of men who have grown older in correctional institutions in the United States, Andrea Zittlau explores the opposite end of the mobilities paradigm in her focus on male imprisonment, drawing out the implications that forced fixity also has on care. Excerpting texts written in creative writing workshops and in personal communications, her essay presents some of the voices of imprisoned men themselves on how ageing affects their self-images. With reference also to a senior center behind bars that is in the process of being created at the State Correctional Facility of the city of Chester, Zittlau addresses the complex contradictions of masculinity images and ideas of care, self-care and the lack of both that are at stake at the personal and institutional level within the prison, which leaves little room for physical frailty or vulnerability.

In her interview-based study of older German men, Lisa-Nike Bühring illustrates from a different angle how hegemonic masculinity constructions continue to associate care predominantly with women and femininity. Conducting semi-structured interviews with four white, heterosexual and married German men in retirement, whose successful careers mark them as belonging to a hegemonic class of men, Bühring is interested in how they respond to the loss of their professional roles and how this affects their gender identity. While their responses indicate a relatively stable self-image, with which they carry their traditional gender concepts into older age, Bühring suggests a “potential revaluation” as part of the retrospective life review. However, confirming a traditional view of the gender binary in the identity constructions of these older German men, Bühring points out, crucially illustrates also the limits to gender equality in Western cultural settings.

Pepetual Mforbe Chiangong's closing essay brings migration to bear on male ageing and care, focusing specifically on *Notaufnahme – Hospitali*, an intercultural theatre project, written and directed by Christoph M. Gosepath and Robert Schmidt and performed in 2018 at Vierte Welt (Berlin). Exploring the intersections of health care, elderhood, and African masculinity as points of diasporic encounter – a relationship that has received little critical attention, as Chiangong points out –, the play centers on an older Tanzanian artist with mental illness who has moved to Berlin and his struggles with the German medical system. Chiangong illustrates how the older performer as artist embodies different identities – as storyteller, restaurant owner and traditional healer – in order to tell “multiple narratives about diasporic experience, elderhood and masculinity”. At the point in the plot when the artist has a mental breakdown, he encounters a young and unfriendly female medical doctor, a moment in the performance that stages the conflict between gender and age within the framework of Western medical authority. However, as Chiangong argues, the hybridized performance structure in the multiple roles of the artist-performer as well as his silence to the doctor's intrusive questions serve to deconstruct these power relationships within modern medicine by providing a counter-discourse of ageing African masculinities.

As the broad range of intercultural encounters analysed in the essays in this volume proves, the contemporary spaces for masculinities ageing between cultures are multidimensional, encompassing both imaginary and material travel; they can be disruptive and disturbing experiences, but also instructive and expansive journeys in space and time. We consider the heterogeneity of approaches, methods and materials that the essays in this volume display and address as a strength. It is a necessary outcome of the intersectionality that the amalgamation of different academic fields – Masculinity Studies, cultural Age Studies – and theoretical perspectives – such as gender studies, postcolonial studies, migration studies – demands. “Masculinities always have an age”, writes Edward H. Thompson (2019, 1) in the introduction to *Men, Masculinities, and Aging: The Gendered Lives of Older Men*. They also have a transcultural and a diasporic dimension, a postcolonial and a class dimension, a geographical, performative and a social dimension. All of these dimensions need to be thought of as dynamic and interdependent, they are as mobile as so many people in a transcultural world characterized by globalization and mass migration. In this framework, masculinities and age emerge as contingent and changeable concepts, an understanding that the editors share, and the volume reflects, hopefully to offer a wide variety of possible pathways for further investigation.

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