

Book Review

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Brigitte Aulenbacher, Helma Lutz, Ewa Palenga-Möllenbeck and Karin Schwiter (eds), *Home Care for Sale. The Transnational Brokering of Senior Care in Europe*, Sage: London, 2024, 322 pp. ISBN 978-1-5296-8014-0.

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How many chapters do we need to understand ‘the profound changes in senior home care provision in Europe’ (p. 1) stemming from the expansion of brokering agencies that are in the business of providing care services and workers in people’s homes? Twenty, no less. *Homecare for Sale* draws together empirical, methodological and theoretical analyses of live-in care work in national and transnational settings, organised into four substantive sections, bound by an introduction and an afterword.

Part 1 (‘Care markets, care provision, working conditions, and the role of brokering agencies’) is concerned with care markets and how agencies shape care provision by navigating transnational recruitment practices and national welfare regime contexts, negotiating the tensions between quality and affordability, formality and informality, mediating working conditions regulations, and straddling the paradox of professionalisation and undervaluation of care labour. It comprises analyses of Polish placement agencies in Germany, the business interests of the live-in home care sector in Ireland, the continuity and change of informal live-in care networks developed by post-Soviet migrants in Italy, the emergence of new market actors in care provision in Hungary, and the market adjustments of care employment models in Austria.

Part 2 (‘Transnationality, mobilities, border regimes and global care chains’) pays attention to the transnational character of the home care sector in Europe, distinguished from other world regions by the fact that most migrant care workers are from central and eastern Europe. Here explorations of the uneven political economy of European integration, specifically state disinvestment, labour deskilling, care extraction, bordering and the production of hierarchies within the category of whiteness, demonstrate who benefits from and who pays the costs of these developments, careful not to exclude the political agency of care workers struggling for better living and working conditions. These themes are explored through mobility across regional borders between Slovenia and Western Balkans and between Czechia and Austria or Germany, and across colonial ties between Spain and countries from Latin America and the Caribbean.

In Part 3 ('Worlds apart: the household as a workplace'), the analysis of the household as a place of work takes centre stage, where the contradictory logics of personal and family life associated with the private sphere confront the more impersonal world of employment normally assigned to the public sphere. Bargaining over time for work and leisure, for space and privacy, for physical and emotional wellbeing, and for financial security straddle the home as a simultaneous space of belonging and isolation, shelter and vulnerability, security and precarity. These themes are explored through an analysis of the differences in the treatment and remuneration of active, on-call and leisure time in Belgium, of labour intermediaries engaging in conflict resolution in Italy, and of bargaining power dynamics of agencies, family care managers and migrant carers in the Netherlands. They illuminate how migrant live-in care workers in England are put at financial and social well-being risks by intermediary agencies, and how agencies' marketing campaigns centred on homemaking are experienced by migrant carers in Germany.

Building on the complexities of all the preceding chapters, Part 4 ('Contested labour rights, fair-care initiatives and labour organizing') focuses on contesting the inequalities and injustices that permeate the system of home care provision in Europe. It responds to the important question Helma Lutz and Aranka Benazha pose in their chapter: 'under what conditions can we consider a placement in a private household to be acceptable from the perspective of the care migrant?' (p. 227). Multiple responses to this question include an articulation of decent and just work from the perspective of ethics and its application to actual conditions of migrant care work, an example of implementing fairness in practice and the extent of resources required to counteract the structural injustice inherent in the live-in care model, the limitations of individualised over collective coping strategies, and the cultivation of political subjecthood through claiming rights, self-organising and transferring knowledge to enact solidarity. The appeal is to governments in western Europe to regulate live-in care and normalise just working conditions and to develop alternative forms of long-term care provision. For instance, it directly addresses state agencies to implement labour inspection and training in contexts such as Greece, where Filipina domestic workers experience decollectivisation. Alternatively, the prompt is to foster community organising and mutual aid that renegotiates individualised and invisibilised employment conditions in the public realm, as shown through the actions of Polish care workers in Switzerland.

In the final chapter ('Brokering care migration – a new element in the transnational care worker supply chain'), Ito Peng highlights the contributions of this volume as (a) fostering a dialogue between global care chains and global commodity and supply chains literatures; (b) emphasising the role of state and society in countering neoliberal economic pressures; and (c) benchmarking the global processes of transnational care provision against mature European welfare-states within which live-in care is prominent.

I would add to these accomplishments the impressive scope of the volume's coverage in geographical terms, where local, national and transnational process play out within and across European borders, demonstrating unequal power relations between countries and regions within the European Union, the wider Europe and beyond. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of geopolitical processes between core and (semi)peripheries and, in some cases, post-colonial relations. Relatedly, the global appeal of the book lies in its focus on current developments in the proliferation of transnational brokering

agencies and its contribution to unfolding debates on the commodification and marketisation of care. This temporal focus is well-rooted, however, in several decades of state disinvestment from or restructuring of the care sector and the unevenness of European integration fuelling the transnational organisation of care. Another aspect of the impressive scope of this collection lies in its ability to capture the conflicting interests of brokering agencies, employing and managing households, care recipients, migrant live-in carers, and community and workers' organisations operating at the interface of state regulations and labour, care and migration regimes. This not only draws clear connections between analytical registers spanning from subjectivities to political economies, but helps analysts and activists alike in approaching any claims to win-win solutions currently on the table with caution. In addition, the volume adopts an intersectional sensitivity, by attending to questions of social and geographical location, especially in relation to gender, age, race, ethnicity, migration, health and class, which include both individual and structural factors and power relations.

These bring me to three major scientific contributions of the book from the perspective of gender and women's studies. The first is substantive, in carefully and persuasively delineating the consequences of market-led socio-economic development in Europe reliant on adaptations to rather than transformation of unequal gender relations. The second is methodological, in employing the specific focus on senior home care provision to anchor sweeping interdisciplinarity, multi-scalar (subnational, national, transnational) locality, and situated intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2015) attentive to the concrete and changing social locations of individuals and groups studied. The third is theoretical, in illuminating the paradox of care and care labour as both symbolically and materially devalued, yet subject to expanding business activity and extraction of value. Consequently, the book furnishes us with vital insights – theoretical, ethical and practical – about how to approach the unequal system of live-in care provision in Europe. For this, a sharper and more consistent engagement with the distinct theoretical and political implications of scholarship on care and scholarship on social reproduction would be beneficial. However, this volume facilitates, rather than pre-empts, such an extension by all those who will engage with it. As such, it is a valuable source for students, scholars, practitioners, policy makers and activists within and beyond Europe. As with most edited volumes, readers of this collection might be drawn to particular chapters or sections in line with their interests, and these particular chapters or sections will not disappoint in furnishing original and relevant analysis. My advice, however, would be not to skip any parts of the book. Indeed, the whole represents more than the sum of its parts.

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Reference

- Yuval-Davis N (2015) Situated intersectionality and social inequality. *Raisons politiques* 58(2): 91–100.