

group of retirees by ethnic or racial origins and we can only presume that the overwhelming majority are white. These are relatively comfortable and healthy people who, for the most part, experienced a fairly orderly transition into retirement. Weiss purposely avoided interviewing people who had retired from a succession of unrelated jobs. The experience of retirement portrayed here is partial in another sense: it is time- and cohort-specific. The focus is on one cohort of retirees over a narrow (and unspecified) period of time. Current and future generations of older people, especially from different social strata, may experience retirement in rather different ways from those featured here.

In the concluding chapter, Weiss defines retirement as leaving a career and a community of work. Retirement, he says, ends the associations of work. Yet he and many of his interviewees were still working for pay. They had entered new communities of work, begun new projects, and were economically active. Weiss fails to use this as evidence of the fundamental inadequacy of retirement as a meaningful concept in the 21st century. Retirement as practised in today's economy is a shifting, highly dynamic state, which encompasses a multitude of activities and pursuits, including periods in and out of part-time, temporary and seasonal work. His academic audience would have appreciated an additional section or chapter which attempted to reframe and critique retirement as a theoretical construct.

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doi:10.1017/S0144686X06245720

Philip Kreager and Elisabeth Schröder-Butterfill (eds), *Ageing without Children: European and Asian Perspectives*, Berghahn, Oxford, 2004, 276 pp., hbk \$60.00, ISBN 1 57181 614 3, pbk \$25.00, ISBN 1 84545 041.

This edited volume addresses the centrality of adult children in older adults' support networks. Interestingly, 'ageing without children' not only implies a focus on those who have no living children but also on those who are *de facto* childless, where offspring were born but are unable or unprepared to provide support. As Philip Kreager puts forward in the introductory chapter, surprisingly little is known about older adults without children, though the childless constitute a sizeable minority in many cultures and historical periods. The book is the outcome of a seminar organised by the Fertility and Reproduction Studies Group of the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology and the Institute of Ageing at the University of Oxford, where researchers were invited to reconsider their ethnography from the perspective of older people without children. A strong feature is that the book includes case studies of extended family systems as well as nuclear family systems. The chapters do not only draw on ethnographic research; using registry and survey data, Maria Evandrou and Jane Falkingham provide an overview of demographic trends in Europe and the implications for family support.

A tenet of the book is that the childless are not the only group of older adults vulnerable to being without the support they need. Parents are also at risk of having unmet support needs. Several authors take a stand against equating having children with having access to a support network. Edi Indrizal reports, in a fascinating study of the matrilineal society of the Minangkabau in West Sumatra, that older adults who only have sons consider themselves childless. Among the Minangkabau, inheritance and kinship group membership are organised along female lines; those without daughters and without nieces in the matriline effectively have no old-age security. Gender preference is also focal in Penny Vera-Sanso's chapter on filial support in Tamil Nadu, where old-age care has been predominantly the responsibility of sons. Vera-Sanso thoughtfully analyses the lack of congruence between the norm (enshrined in legislation) that sons provide support and everyday practice. She shows that it is not just those without sons who lack filial support. Often support is not forthcoming, either because sons feel their parents have ample financial resources to fend for themselves, or because sons are providing for their own families and have no resources to spare. Apparently, duties to parents are only secondary. In her chapter on Pakistani older people in Britain, Alison Shaw reports that a return to the village of origin is sometimes the only viable option for older immigrants who cannot be cared for by their children.

Another central theme is that childlessness does not inevitably lead to vulnerability in old age. A number of chapters describe the strategies adopted by childless men and women over the course of their lives to gain access to support networks. The Minangkabau, as is evident in Indrizal's chapter, have a normatively prescribed strategy: moving to the household of a sister. Schröder-Butterfill focuses on three common social institutions in East Java: adoption, patronage and charity as substitutes for filial support. The ways in which these strategies require work and negotiation are insightfully elaborated, revealing that wealthy older adults without offspring are clearly advantaged because they can promise an inheritance and create obligations through payments. Issues of adoption and the build-up of reciprocities are also considered in Ruly Marianti's chapter on childless widows in urban East Java. Using historical data, Violetta Hionidou shows that adoption was an option only for couples and women, not for single men, in late 19th and early 20th century Greece. In her study of rural elderly people in East Anglia and Normandy, Judith Okely points to the role of age peers as providers of assistance. She makes an important observation, that '[p]ublic discourse underestimates the dependence the aged have among themselves rather than on younger generations' (p. 235).

With their detailed and in-depth analyses, the presented case studies form an important complement to survey research on support networks. This edited collection will be of particular value to researchers, practitioners and policy makers interested in families, old age support, and ageing immigrants. It provides, however, little insight into the circumstances of childless older adults in areas other than social support.

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