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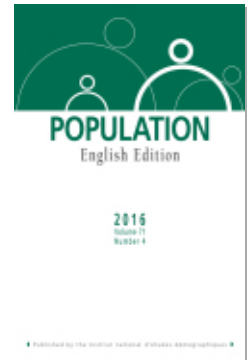
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*Vieillir dans les pays du Sud. Les solidarités familiales  
à l'épreuve du vieillissement* ed. by Nowik Laurent,  
Lecestre-Rollier Béatrice (review)

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(Review)

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NOWIK Laurent, LECESTRE-ROLLIER Béatrice (eds.), 2015, *Vieillir dans les pays du Sud. Les solidarités familiales à l'épreuve du vieillissement* [Ageing in Southern countries: can family solidarity meet the needs of older adults?], Paris, Karthala, 304 p.

Studies in French of old age and ageing in Southern countries are few and far between. Why should we be interested in this issue in that part of the world when the countries in question are accurately described as “young”? This collective work answers just that question in connection with an unprecedented situation at the scale of humanity as a whole: demographic ageing and its corollary, the rapidly changing age structure of Southern countries. Moreover, Michel Loriaux, one of the first demographers to draw attention to the ineluctable “grey revolution”<sup>(1)</sup>, wrote the preface.

The preface is followed by twelve chapters and a DVD (accompanied by a text in the form of a dialogue between an old Moroccan shepherdess, the documentary director and an ethnologist); seventeen researchers from various disciplines and geographic situations contributed, five working in the “South”, twelve in the “North”, not to mention the filmmaker and a consultant in gerontology engineering. Most of the authors had participated in an international conference on the subject in Meknes, Morocco, in 2011<sup>(2)</sup>, the first conference exclusively focused on ageing in Southern countries. The book further develops ideas put forward at that conference on the more narrowly focused topic of family solidarities and ageing. The issue discussed is not so much demographic ageing as the social dimension of individual ageing. And as fertility in these countries remains at relatively high levels, the authors speak of “gerontogrowth”, i.e., an increase in absolute numbers of old persons due to increased longevity.

The book discusses ten countries: Uganda, Madagascar, Tanzania, Senegal, Morocco, India, Mayotte [a French *département* and region], Argentina, Armenia and Georgia. None have a universal social security system; the task of caring for the older generations falls to the younger, who have numerous difficulties to cope with, particularly labour market integration, a situation that forces them to take difficult, painful decisions in the case of old parents with health problems. This is perhaps the common denominator of all these otherwise very different countries. However that may be, all these societies are simultaneously undergoing several transitions: demographic, epidemiologic, nutritional and political.

We cannot discuss ageing without having defined the term. At what age does a person become “old”? In countries with universal retirement coverage,

(1) Cf. Loriaux M., Remy D., Vilquin E., eds., 1990, *Populations âgées et révolution grise: Les hommes et les sociétés face à leurs vieillissements*, Proceedings of the Chaire Quetelet '86 conference, Louvain la Neuve, Editions CIACO, 1,118 p.

(2) Cf. *Actes du Colloque international de Meknes*, 17-19 March 2011, “Vieillessement de la population dans les pays du Sud. Famille, conditions de vie, solidarités publiques et privées, ... États des lieux et perspectives”, Les Numériques du Ceped [Centre Population et Développement], Université Paris Descartes]. Free in full on the Ceped website, <http://www.cephed.org/cdrom/meknes>

the old age threshold is defined by retirement from occupational activity (usually at the age of 60) and entitlement to a pension. What is the situation in Southern countries, where only a minority have a pension and most people aged 60 and over continue working? Can the same indicator be used under these circumstances? In their introductory chapter, editors Laurent Nowik and Béatrice Lecestre-Rollier critique the indicators generally used to assess demographic ageing and old age in these countries. Sadio Ba Gning's contribution (Chapter 5) argues for distinguishing between biological and social age: "to age is to be the age of the social reality covered by that process". Cecile Lefèvre and Loucineh Guevorkian recommend close examination of respondent statements on age and its meaning, conditions for registering date of birth, and the existence and quantity of civil registries in Southern countries (p. 276). And most authors note that entry into old age is marked by new health problems that force individuals to disengage from social, family and productive activities.<sup>(3)</sup>

While standard indicators may not effectively apprehend old age in non-Western socio-cultural contexts, there is also the crucial issue of measuring the social realities of ageing at the regional or national level. Valérie Golaz et al. (Chapter 2) note that national data on Uganda (from the Demographic and Health Surveys, for example, household surveys, or target surveys on financial transfers) do not give access to old persons' vulnerability "because [they] are based on representative samples that do not contain enough persons aged 60 and over for detailed statistical analysis. Above all, we are far from local representativeness, a major strong point of population censuses". The methods applied by the various contributors therefore combine quantitative and qualitative data (population counts, population observatory reports, surveys; interviews and ethnographic observation), small questionnaire surveys and secondary data analyses (literature reviews, legislative texts, association reports, etc.).

Are the various types of family solidarity operative in these countries enough to cope with increases in the number of so-called old people? Or have they already reached the limit of what they can do? How is solidarity practiced? What, precisely, are the sources of vulnerability? These are so many cross-sectional questions, here partially answered by way of case studies. From changes in family structure (adoption of the nuclear family model, youth emigration, having fewer children), rapid urbanization, the HIV-AIDS epidemic, higher educational attainment levels (particularly for women), individualization of trajectories, land saturation, to changes in marriage, etc., the complex problems that family solidarity is called upon to handle puts it under intense strain. The authors conclude, however, that it will hold up rather than fall apart given the many strategies individuals develop: varied cohabitation, assistance segmentation, individualized or elective solidarity, the outsourcing

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(3) All identify age 60 as the old age threshold, with the exception of one (Chapter 4), who does not specify any age.

of family assistance in migration contexts, complementary public and private solidarity, etc. Those solidarities, meanwhile, are gendered, polymorphous (financial, emotional, etc.), multidimensional (from ascendants to descendants and vice-versa) and adapted to donor context.

All the authors use an intergenerational approach to old age; some relate individual trajectories to the events those respondents experienced and the economic, social and political contexts they have lived in. They are also attentive to differences in the realities of ageing by whether one lives in a rural or urban context and to differences in ageing by sex.

Written for specialists and non-specialists alike, the book is a precious contribution to the study of old age and ageing in Southern countries, an as yet emerging research topic and an issue that is sure to loom increasingly large on policy agendas in the decades to come. I would have just two small criticisms. First, there is some confusion of age and generation categories, as attested by the undifferentiated use of terms “older persons” and “elders”. It seems to me the two should be distinguished and yet analysed together to account more clearly for inter and intra-generation relationships. Second, there are several errors or omissions in bibliography references (omission of publication dates, author first names, pagination); we have been accustomed to more careful editing from Karthala Publishing.

Tom BRIAUD