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Tiago Morera
Science, Technology and the Ageing Society, London and New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 240

Roberto Lusardi *University of Bergamo*

In this book, Tiago Moreira makes an interesting operation. He takes the concept of ageing – not exactly part of the most popular STS vocabulary – and then breaks it into its parts and analyses the processes connected using the STS gaze. Recalling a metaphor always effective (and dear to the STS world), he "opens the black box" of ageing and the book witnesses what he found.

First, Moreira says that ageing is not just a demographic, medical, or economic concern. It is a repertoire of practices and an institutional setup that the author calls "ageing society". He makes clear his interpretative proposition: that the ageing society "is first and foremost a collective predicament, a swelling uncertainty concerning how to deploy procedures of scientific research and technological innovation in addressing ageing as an issue" (p. 1).

As STS scholars know very well, every collective predicament, every controversy – regardless of whether it concerns political, environmental, or health issues – implies sociotechnical arrangements, expert knowledge, power relations, and economic interests. The demographic data is not secondary, of course. The United Nations set the threshold of population's sustainability to 7% of people being 65 or older in any given country. In Italy, according to the last ISTAT report on the national population, the percentage of people being 65 or older has overcome that mark by far and is at 22%.

The same phenomenon is affecting all the so-called Western nations, albeit in different percentages. This means that the demand for healthcare services and funding of health insurance is increasing, as are the pressures on systems of formal care and on processes of informal care within families and communities. Finally, the demographic trend affects the political and cultural attitudes of society, which tend to become more

conservative.

Moreira proposes not to analyse only demographic data, but also to examine the ways in which we understand and manage the ageing process in society and how they shape our collective life (Ch. 1). His approach is derived from Foucault in that he offers a genealogical history of the present, focusing on the link between structures, practices and contingencies. He proposes to understand the ageing society as an epistemic assemblage, in which making procedures and institutions, techniques, and technologies shape how we see our society through a demographic prism. The ANT apparatus stands out in the book's toolbox: Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, John Law, Annemarie Mol, among others, discuss with gerontologists, demographers, epidemiologists, cultural geographers and economists (Ch. 2).

The author states that the ageing society is challenging the epistemic infrastructure of the liberal welfare state and the system of expert knowledge on which it relies. To demonstrate these transformations, Moreira invites the reader to rethink the relationship among birth, death, and migration. Races and migrations are indispensable concepts for understanding the constitution of the ageing society despite the fact that they have not until recently taken into account the management of demographic ageing (Ch. 4).

This omission seems to rely on a precise bio-political orientation that contrasts migratory flows on one hand and medical technologies and health services on the other as resources to mitigate some of the economic effects of ageing populations (Ch. 5). Due to this orientation, widespread in the 1980s and 1990s, "the relationship between health and longevity has become central to the problem of population because of the fact that the problem of population decline is the disqualified immigration and the fertility as a solution to the problem of demographic ageing" (p. 71).

The author investigates the same concept of chronological age – by the number of years lived since birth – which we use to measure a person's functional capacity or health. Moreira discusses how the diffusion of this analytical tool is linked to the requirements of precision and classification inherent in the information requisites of modern state bureaucracies and administrations. The author shows how this model is challenged by emerging epistemic and normative uncertainty about chronological age as a variable and marker for social and political rights and duties. At present, no alternative model has been imposed to replace chronological age with its age-specific norms, values, and expectations although its solidity and reliability has been questioned widely.

Chronological age is at the base of the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging (BLSA), a massive U.S. public programme of investigation on ageing that has been funded from 1958 to the present day (Ch. 6). Moreira reconstructs the history of this programme and its epistemic repertoires to demonstrate how epistemic and methodological procedures

shape the ageing society: "Ageing is an individualized process [that] became entangled with a set of methodological procedures and practices encased in the longitudinal approach" (p. 117).

He then introduces a more recent key concept: functional age (Ch. 7). This consists of tools and instruments (e.g. the Work Ability Index) that measure and manage individual functional abilities and indicate the roles or tasks a person may be involved in. For Moreira, this concept represents the relation between work and technology and the ageing society, and it aims to "maximise older people's participation in the economy by identifying unused capacities and opportunities to employ them" (p. 120). Tracing the assemblage around the concept, Moreira unveils the epistemic tensions that it hides.

Another interesting object analysed is the Instrumental Activities of Daily Living Scale, a tool used in the assessment and planning of older people's care (Ch. 8). Moreira suggests that its relevance relies on the expectation of aligning aging-in-place policies with active ageing instruments. Following the genesis of this tool and analysing its contexts of use – that require the process of rational decomposition of daily life activities such as cooking, housekeeping, laundry, etc. – Moreira describes how the reliability of tools like this is constantly challenged by situated practices of customization of ageing-in-place tools to individual needs.

Finally, the author's last efforts lead to an analysis of the most recent epistemic scaffolding named "biomedicalization of ageing". Using Alzheimer's disease as a case study, Moreira emphasizes how this new platform is based on the frail alliance among biogerontology, mainstream medicine, and anti-aging movements (Ch. 9).

To conclude, this is a very interesting book, which proposes an unprecedented reading of contemporary society and the theme of the ageing population. It is not easy to read because the argumentation is complex; very articulate. It integrates theories, analytical tools, and empirical materials from different scientific fields and epistemic domains. Nevertheless, given the relevance of the topic and the innovative approach, it is certainly worth it.

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