

Navigating Care, Wellbeing, and Place in Later Life:
Feminist Pursuits in Aging
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Abstract

Growing into old age – to be able to live a long life – has long been a marker of wellbeing. And yet, the process of aging is complex and inherently variable. This thesis challenges dominant assumptions and power relations in later life, opening a dialogue between the fields of aging studies, critical gerontology, feminist political ecology, and decolonial feminisms. I explore the intersection of care for/with older adults and care for/with nature. Using a metaphor of bridge building, I explore the possibilities for other-than-dominant ways of caring, focusing on how wellbeing in later life and environmental wellbeing are mutually constitutive.

In Chapter 1, I explore the limitations of normative frameworks about aging and argue for the importance of examining age as a biopolitical process, agism as a dynamic of power, and aging as a socionatural process. Chapter 2 reflects on how feminist research ethics helped me navigate ethical considerations for aging research during the COVID-19 pandemic, examining some of the unconscious assumptions in my research design and unpacking understandings of risk in research. Chapter 3, written with Nanako Nakamura, argues for the inclusion of aging within feminist political ecology research and draws on examples from Japan and Uruguay to explore the embodied experiences and agency of older people. We emphasise the importance of examining the intersection of aging and environment through an ethics of care in thinking about aging and socionatural relations.

Chapter 4, written with Zuleika Sheik, explores how Zapatista praxis teaches us connection across differences and settler colonial places. Finally, Chapter 5 invites the reader to consider a more complex understanding of wellbeing and relational care through intergenerational and more-than-human care in an older woman's garden. The chapter emphasises the importance of connecting across generations and with the land as a way to restore relations and prefigure a more care-full present.

I use the generative potential of tensions that arise from drawing on a range of perspectives and methodologies to argue the importance of relationality, mutual care, and more-than-human connections in the study of aging.