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Pooley and Qureshi’s volume consists of ten ethnographic studies—the authors of which come from a myriad of disciplinary backgrounds including anthropology, sociology, and history—intended to illustrate a qualitative analysis of generativity (which includes the struggle of defining “generation” as well as studying its conceptual interplay with parenthood) and what they call “intergenerational transmission,” a core process in the making of a parent. This process is an integral component in a “reproductive culture,” and Pooley and Qureshi focus on what constitute such cultures by exploring how ways of being, thinking, knowing, and remembering are transmitted from one generation to the next.

However, taking into account agency of the youth themselves—that their memories can be remembered selectively, intentionally or otherwise—one finds that transmission is altered and that “people transpose, rather than replicate their pasts,” leaving room for revision (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 9). As such, Pooley and Qureshi imagine reproduction as something more than a simple passing of the torch but as “a site where replication and innovation are inextricably intertwined” (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 9). In other words, intergenerational transmission is not simply passing culture on, but an act of re-creation that is dependent on the recipient’s (being an active agent in this process) memory and subjective interpretation. This sort of innovation has become more noticeable in contemporary times and in areas where expert authorities in parenting now provide a viable alternative to historically-based understandings of parenthood, such as in Michala Breengaard’s chapter concerning intergenerational practices and relations in contemporary urban China.

The book itself contains twelve major sections: ten chapters and a comprehensive introduction and conclusion in which Pooley and Qureshi provide their own analyses. In their commentaries, Pooley and
Qureshi offer four processes through which they argue intergenerational transmission occurs: implicit normative expectations, moral judgement, habituation, and memory. The editors briefly describe in their introduction how each of the subsequent studies demonstrate various processes of intergenerational transmission which is noteworthy as the presence of these processes are not readily apparent otherwise.

Chapters are grouped into eight categories according to which of the four processes of transmission is being exhibited and whether or not the process is considered the “primary process” or a “secondary process.” The process of differentiating between the two isn’t always self-evident and sometimes appears to be a largely subjective evaluation; their presence is perhaps more important than their priority. Pooley and Qureshi stress that these processes should not be understood as operating in isolation but engaging one another in a dialectic (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 22). Pooley and Qureshi state that implicit normative expectations are the primary process of transmission at work in Pralat’s, Doyle’s, and Breengaard’s studies; moral judgement is the primary process present in Hertog’s and Pooley’s studies. Habituation is the primary process present in Qureshi’s and Rahman’s studies; and memory is the primary process in Davis’s, Chowbey and Salway’s, and Heron’s studies (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 22).

Pooley and Qureshi highlight the differences between their four processes of intergenerational transmission in their introduction, often including relevant examples from the later ethnographies. Implicit normative expectations are defined as seemingly vague questions of “what should be done,” and can be used to take into consideration the opinions of one’s parents (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 22). For example, in Robert Pralat’s chapter on gay parenthood, parents and children rarely explicitly discussed their reproductive expectations, but children took into great consideration what they believed their parents’ opinions were. Moral judgments are more explicitly stated and function similarly but “parents communicate moral judgments in ways that are less worked-out than the concept of morality implies” (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 25). Habituation draws upon Bourdieu’s *habitus*, or more specifically, a critiqued version of it by Ingold that rejects the internalizing processes as a method of acquiring skills and know-how; Pooley and Qureshi view this critique to be less deterministic than the manner in which habitus has been used concerning the “inescapability of a person’s early constitution” (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 27). Instead, Ingold,
as quoted by the editors, theorizes that such knowledge is “generated within contexts of experience in the course of people’s involvement with others in the practical business of life” and regrown in specific environments rather than simply recreated (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 27). As for memory, Pooley and Qureshi approach this process in much the same way they approach generativity. Memory is not a “straightforward retrieval of a past experience but a dialogue between a person’s past, present, and future self” (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 29). Similarly, generativity, as used by Pooley and Qureshi, is conceived of as a both vertical and horizontal phenomena (both as a family lineage and as a socially constructed origin with which others come to identify), but also as a self-referential narrative of change shaped by a discourse between earlier ways of being, knowing, and thinking and new information dispersed by expert authorities (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 12-17).

Despite being made up of predominately ethnographic accounts, the volume lends itself well to social theory in the domain of parenthood, especially with Pooley and Qureshi’s commentary on parenting studies in the introduction. The authors’ interest in intergenerational relationships means that the chapters all focus on older parents raising adult children. However, the chapters are diverse in subject matter and span the globe, ranging from illegitimate pregnancies in contemporary Japan in Hertog’s chapter to Rahman’s exploration of the Warakena’s style of perinatal care in Northwestern Amazonia. Pooley and Qureshi’s focus on adult children—who are simultaneously young parents—is a refreshing break from ethnographic studies focusing on rearing youth. With prospective grandparents and their adult children, questions of generativity and continuing the family line become more explicit in the minds of those involved. In her own chapter, Pooley highlights the increasing relevance of intergenerational narratives and grandparenthood, pointing to the increased life expectancy over the years and how grandparents play a more central role in family relations. This is undoubtedly true for her informants: English parents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whether the same trend in life expectancies can be observed in families elsewhere is doubtful; such inductive fallacies are understandably dangerous when talking about sweeping generalities such as “modern parenting.”

Any student of kinship studies will find this volume a departure from more matricentric or child-centered studies that gloss over the socially constructed meanings we assign
to terms such as “parenthood” and even “personhood,” meanings that are transmitted from one generation to the next and now from external authorities legitimized by the state as well. Pooley and Qureshi’s emphasis on using reproductive cultures as the lens with which to examine family relations and the social construction of parenthood proves to be an excellent method in answering what they believe is the “neglected question of how parenthood is passed on” (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 277; their emphasis). In their own words, Pooley and Qureshi do not aim to “be destructive” by rejecting simple linear narratives (i.e. rejecting “global theories of demographic transition, of the decline of extended family..., or of ever more child-centered affective cultures across the last century”) but offer a framework in which generativity and the transmission of reproductive cultures can account for the intergenerational transposition of ways of being, knowing, remembering and, as shown in this volume, culturally inflected understandings of parenthood (Pooley and Qureshi 2016, 277).