AGEING AND SUBJECTIVITY IN A TIME OF 'MULTIPLE CRISES'

NARRATING CRISES IN LATER LIFE -
A COMPARATIVE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY BETWEEN SINGAPORE AND VIENNA
2025 - 2027

In the early 2020s, exceptional government measures across Europe, Asia, and beyond have been implemented to contain the COVID pandemic and to protect those deemed most at risk. Older adults, in particular, have become the focus of these regulatory interventions. Moreover, recent years have witnessed the emergence or exacerbation of further burdens, threats and uncertainties likely to affect older persons such as high inflation, the energy crisis, global warming, and armed conflicts. This project seeks to understand how crises are experienced and narrated in later life and what role social relations and the wider cultural and political environment play. We address this question by comparing the experiences of older adults (aged 70 and over) in Singapore and Vienna.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Theoretically and methodologically innovative, this project integrates research on ageing and subjectivity by examining individual agency in later life within distinct local political regimes of care and protection. In doing so, this take on social relations not only theoretically integrates relations of proximity and social connectedness but also relations with institutions of care and the state and their intermediaries, and ways of responding to specific biopolitical subjectifications. Ultimately, the study aims to theorize what it means to live one's later life in times of crisis.

METHODOLOGY

This project offers a unique comparative perspective that challenges conventional interpretations of crisis experiences. The project is grounded in a comparative and experience-near level of narrative analysis based on 27 months of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in retirement homes and senior centres in Singapore and Vienna. Long-term participant observation is complemented by in-depth analysis of life stories and social interactions as well as by selected collaborative, creative, and digital methods.

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