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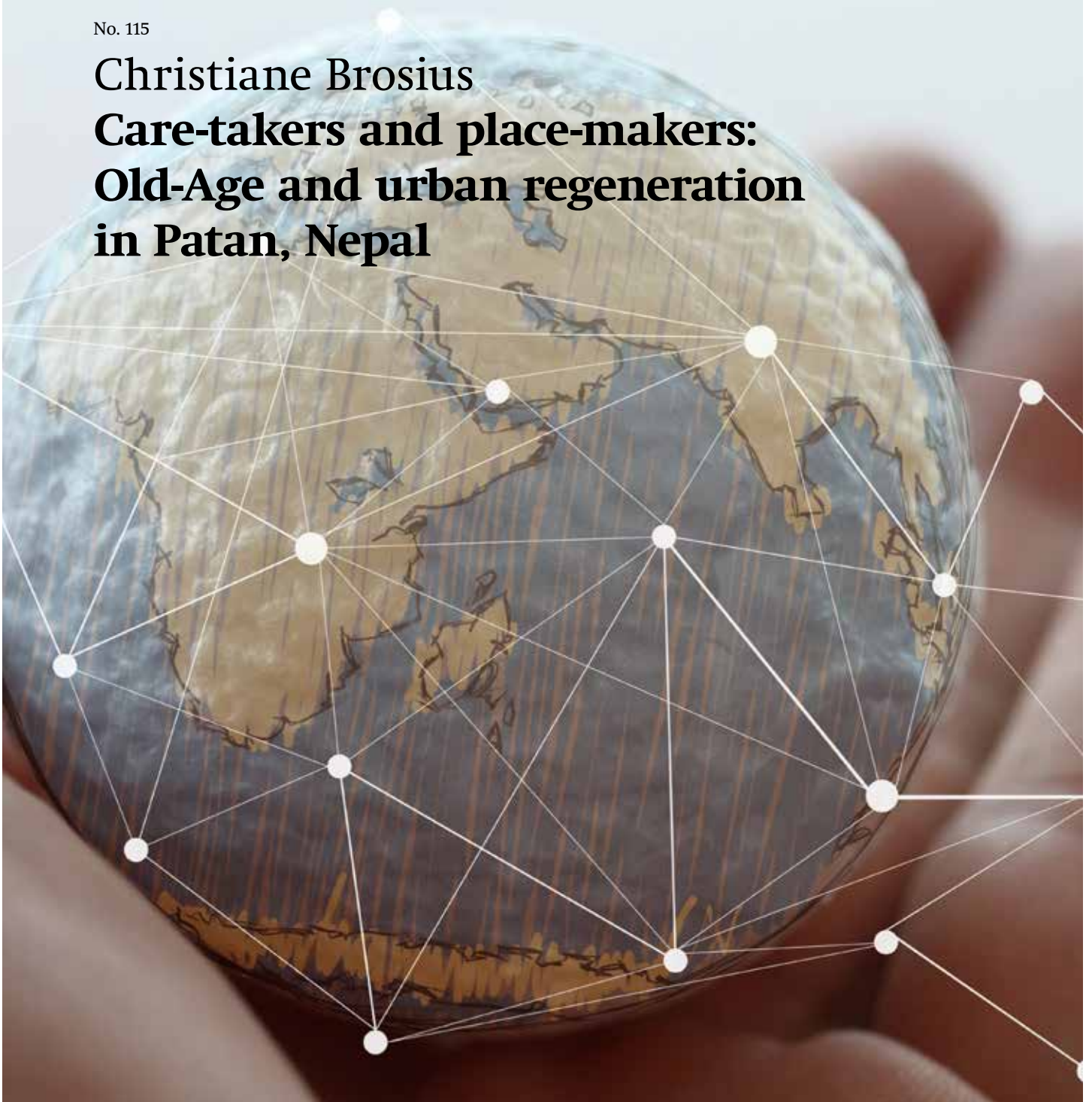
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Christiane Brosius
**Care-takers and place-makers:
Old-Age and urban regeneration
in Patan, Nepal**

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Christiane Brosius[1]
Care-takers and place-makers: old age and urban regeneration in Patan, Nepal

Abstract: This article considers ageing in cities of the Global South, with a particular focus on urban transformation and place-making in the old city center of Patan, Kathmandu Valley. Building upon discussions evolving around concepts such as 'active ageing', 'environmental gerontology' and 'age-friendly cities', terms largely coined in northern America and western Europe, the article addresses their productivity – and challenges – when applied in the case of Nepal. It considers a larger field of ageing in the realm of transcultural place-making, since the contextualization includes global circulations of ideas and practices related to cultural heritage, transnational migration and urban transformation through economic liberalization. The ethnographic material collected between 2014–17 among Newar senior residents is discussed with respect to questions of ownership, participation and responsibility. It highlights the entangled relationship of socio-religious relations and built environment, as well as intangible heritage, seeking to stress the importance of ephemeral and interstitial spaces that do not necessarily resonate with 'global' concepts of public and private, wellbeing and development.

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The building with Sajha Bhandar market used to be one storied.

You could see all the four directions from it. It had a pond at the center.

From our roof terrace, we could see the clock of Ghantaghar (clock house).

We could hear the sound of it by the hour.

We could see Swayambhu (Buddhist site in Kathmandu Valley, located on a hill)

and the mountains with snow on them.

[…]

People thronged like they do now only during jatras (processions).

At other times, there were only a few people around.

There never used to be crowds like this.

This quote is from a conversation of a granddaughter with her maternal grandmother in Kathmandu, Nepal, in 2017. It concerns the role played by memory in the context of the capital's rapid urban transformation, the experience of enjoying a wide view from the roof of the maternal house across the city as far as the Himalayas. It also relates to much less populated streets. In one of her installation works from the series *I Still See that Same Old House of Ours in My Dreams* (2017), artist Sheelasha Rajbhandari refers to histories of the belated grandmother's maternal home, her childhood and adolescence before marriage in Kathmandu.[2] The installation was exhibited at the first Kathmandu Triennale (which was also based on the theme of the city), and Rajbhandari contemplates her own position as a young woman in contemporary Kathmandu. It is a position intimately tied up with her aspiration to excavate, preserve and inscribe those memories in her own work, life, and city. This narrative also connects with her personal experience of witnessing her globalizing home city change at rapid speed, and with it, the transformation, if not vanishing, of older familiar places, rituals, and everyday practices, mainly of the ethnic group of Newars (which also forms the backbone of her family) – who see themselves as indigenous inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley.[3] It is almost as if Rajbhandari generates a space for inertia and anachronistic temporality to work against (yet not stop) the turbulent growth of one of the fastest expanding metropolitan areas in Asia. *I Still See that Same Old House* is an homage to the grandmother as someone who has passed on much more than to the heritage of Newar culture, which is something Rajbhandari is also critical of, especially when it comes to womanhood and marriage. One could say that the memories of the grandmother, particularly her belonging to

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2   For a Nepali woman, marriage generally means that she leaves the parental home for good and moves to her husband and her in-laws. In some instances, the old blood ties are replaced entirely.

3   See David Gellner, "From Cultural Hierarchies to a Hierarchy of Multiculturalisms: The Case of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal," in *Ethnic Revival and Religious Turmoil: Identities and Representations in the Himalayas*, eds. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Pascal Dollfus (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 73–131.

the house and the city of Kathmandu has also shaped the urban habitus of her granddaughter: Sheelasha looks at her city through the eyes and stories of her grandmother, understands it almost as a palimpsest, and further turns it into artworks that reflect social, cultural and urban change in contemporary Nepal.

I Still See that Same Old House of Ours in My Dreams contains three typical Newar trays (*sanduk*) (ills. 1–2). They are filled with miniature household utensils, resembling children's toys (*bhādā-kuti*). The original trays used to be in the old house, but when it was pulled down years ago they disappeared. Rajbhandari had them remade by traditional craftsmen, and documents how she returns them to her ailing grandmother in a reciprocal act of appreciation, allowing her to revisit the demolished home and her childhood.

Illustration 1

Illustration 2

Overview

For this article, the introductory narrative above plays a role for various reasons. It allows the incorporation of personal memories of ageing and belonging in the rapidly and widely changing Kathmandu Valley, which ranks amongst the fastest growing urban areas in South Asia. It also responds to a paucity of research on ageing and spatiality in the Global South, particularly on Nepal[4] by considering concepts of urban regeneration and active ageing, both coined in Europe and the USA. These concepts are both interesting and challenging in that they are being used as a lens to study urban ageing as a form of transculturation. To consider the ways in which younger members of society 'read' urban and societal transformation by attending to elderly peoples' oral histories and everyday practices seems one way to approach the demographic shifts from a qualitative and interdisciplinary angle. The study recognizes debates from the field of Environmental Gerontology and Age-friendly Cities. Doing so, it hopes to critically engage concepts on "global" or "successful ageing"[5] by repositioning their epistemological foundations in order to acknowledge local particularity and simultaneously transcultural relationalities of ageing and urban concepts.

Moreover, the article deals with the question how elderly people are shaping their habitations and are shaped by it. I argue that people of advanced age play a foundational role in a city by taking care of it in many ways. Thus, we must speak not only of age-friendly cities but also of 'city-friendly ageing': old age can be a fundamental resource for urban regeneration and community building. However, in the case of this research, it becomes evident that this potential, which is generally overseen, can vanish if it is not recognized in time and in space and possibly recalibrated in order to fit younger generations' aspirations and the way they conduct their lives.

The main focus is the old historical part of the city of Patan, inhabited by circa 12,0000 people, mainly of the ethnic community of the Newars who have dwelled in the Kathmandu Valley region since the 13–14th century AD; they consider themselves the indigenous population of the area.[6] The locality is particularly made up of over one hundred courtyards with monasteries (bahāl/bahi), but also narrow alleys, larger and smaller shrines, temples and monasteries, brick and cement houses. However, in the past decade, urban change has been fast forwarded due to the strong influx of Nepalis from outside Kathmandu Valley (including returning transnational

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4   See Sara Parker et al., "Theorizing Aging in Nepal: Beyond the Biomedical Model," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 39, no. 2 (2014): 231–54.

5   Sarah Lamb, ed., *Successful Aging as a Contemporary Obsession: Global Perspectives* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017).

6   Niels Gutschow and Hermann Kreutzmann, *Mapping the Kathmandu Valley* (Kathmandu: Himal Books, 2013); Rajesh Bahadur Thapa, Yuji Murayama and Shailja Ale, "Kathmandu," Cities 25 (2008): 45–57.

Nepalis), economic liberalization and changing notions of well-being in the city, especially among younger members of the aspirational middle classes.[7] Finally, the dramatic effects of the 2015 earthquake not only claimed hundreds of lives in the Valley but also partly or fully demolished many residential buildings, many of which have still not been rebuilt. The aftermath of the earthquake contributed to an ongoing discussion about the 'safe' city, which also concerns old age.

The article touches upon three larger thematic fields: first, it explores the notion of the family and home, and relations to urban transformation; second, it discusses the use of open space, in particular, public places and everyday as well as particular ritual practice, and thirdly, it considers the changing roles of institutions and organizations related to the life course in an urban habitat. The data sourced for this article stem from semi-structured interviews with members of the older population of Newars, mainly conducted between 2014 – 2015.[8]

Environmental gerontology and *elderscapes*

This article is informed by several fields of discussion that emerged from research on ageing, mainly old age, but also from urban studies and policies. The following subfields stimulate this research: Environmental gerontology calls for an expansion and deepening of person-environment research with respect to ageing, describing it as an old but empirically still under-researched concept of gerontology.[9] Especially the aspect of place-making as an ongoing process of shaping one's spatial environment (as much as being shaped by it) still requires more attention. With its interest in ageing in place (that is, being able to stay at home), place attachment and human-environment relations environmental gerontology has, in a conceptual sense, emerged particularly strongly since the new millennium. The care given to the qualities and politics of the "spatiality of aging"[10] is mirrored in a recent volume on environmental

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7   Mark Liechty, *Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class Culture in a New Consumer Society* (Princeton N.J., Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003); Christiane Brosius, *India's Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity* (Delhi: Routledge, 2014 [2010]).

8   92 People were interviewed in Patan between January 2015 – December 2015, 11 people being under 60 at the time of interviews, the others ranging between 60 and 100 years. The majority of informants is Newari, male and has lived in Patan for several generations, and still lives at home, often in a joint family setting. Interviews were assisted or conducted and translated by Rajendra Shakya (in Newari, lasting 30 to 90 minutes). Many interviews were conducted in public resthouses, or in the interlocutors' homes, offices or shops in Old Patan. First names have been abbreviated.

9   Hans-Werner Wahl, "Ageing research along the urban-rural distinction: old questions and new potential," *European Journal of Ageing 2* (2005): 136; See also Chris Phillipson, "Urbanisation and Ageing. Towards a New Environmental Gerontology," *Ageing and Society* 24, no. 6 (2004): 963 – 972; see also Allison Smith, *Ageing in Urban Neighbourhoods. Place Attachment and Social Exclusion* (Bristol: Policy, 2009).

10   Graham Rowles and Miriam Bernard, "The Meaning and Significance of Place in Old Age," in *Environmental gerontology. Making meaningful places in Old Age*, eds. Graham Rowles and Miriam Bernard (New York: Springer, 2013), 3 – 24.

gerontology which calls for "increasing sophistication in understanding older adults' experience of their environment", arguing that this theme has still been sidelined, but that it is crucial in terms of understanding elderly people's experience of belonging and homeing, to relations and qualities of private and public place, mobilities and everyday life.[11] This, I argue, also allows for insights into place-making practices and urban regeneration as well as reflections on sustainable planning and inclusive cities policies. These factors permit us to read the city and urban change through the eyes and experiences of elderly people, as in the case of Sheelasha Rajbhandari's work on her grandmother's memories. They foster an approach that acknowledges and is sensitive to the meaning of place to older adults. But it also pays attention to the ways in which age and ageing practices impact place-making and transformation. To avoid a static and dichotomous relationship between people and places, the concept of *elderscapes* seems best suited[12] to consider a multi-scalar, relational set of experiences, histories, and practices that shape ageing in place as well as place through ageing, that pattern mobilities and social potentiality. Rather than emphasizing demographic shifts, social security, physical mobility or health care for the theme of ageing in cities, the article studies *elderscapes* in such a context.

Age-friendly cities

The second central subfield is that of the 'age-friendly city'. The term goes back to 2005 when the World Health Organization (WHO) started an 'age-friendly city' initiative for both developing and developed countries. This initiative studied the experiences of older people living in urban communities and produced a guide for cities identifying the key characteristics of an age-friendly environment in terms of service provision (for instance, health services, transportation), the built environment (for instance, housing, outdoor spaces and buildings), and social aspects (for instance, civic and social participation).[13] In 2010, the WHO launched the *Global Network of Age-friendly Cities* in an attempt to encourage implementation of policy recommendations from the 2007 project. The resulting report responds to the global impact of demographic change,

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11   Ibid., XI; Chris Phillipson, "Ageing and Urban Society. Growing Old in the 'Century of the City'," in *Sage Handbook of Social Gerontology*, eds. Dale Dannefer and Chris Phillipson (London: Sage, 2010), 597–608; Wahl, "Ageing research along the urban-rural distinction."

12   Roberta Mandoki, "Suburban *elderscapes* and 'modern' modes of ageing: towards a framework of contemporary urban ageing in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal," in *Caring for old Age. Perspectives from South Asia*, eds. Christiane Brosius and Roberta Mandoki (Heidelberg: HeiUP, 2019 (forthcoming)).

13   WHO, *Global age-friendly cities. A guide* (Geneva: WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data, 2007), accessed on April 1, 2018, http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf.

with a range of housing and community needs emerging among those over fifty.[14] However, it predominantly focuses on (accessible and affordable) health, participation, security and on "aging in place" as something made up of quantifiable forms of built, natural and social urban development;[15] these being mainly transportation, housing, social and civic participation, communication and information, community support and health services, outdoor spaces and buildings. Based on the assumption that "(p)opulation ageing and urbanization are two global trends that together comprise major forces shaping the 21st century",[16] data were sourced from older residents in over 35 cities across the world. The report also considered itself a guide to a city's self-assessment in terms of community advocacy, seeing "older people […] (as, CB) a resource for their families, communities and economies in supportive and enabling living environments. WHO regards active ageing as a life-long process shaped by several factors that, alone and acting together, favour health, participation and security in older adult life."[17]

Interestingly, the term is gaining currency at the same time that studies and policies on the subject of plans for 'creative', 'smart', but also 'inclusive' and 'safe' cities move centre-stage of debates on global cities. All these terms underline – from very different backgrounds – the need to secure humane and yet efficient, investment-savvy planning policies, to avoid the continued creation of urban zones of tension and violence, and to work against invasive poverty and exclusion (at least on the surface). The concept of age-friendly cities understands older people as a resource for thriving cities and proposes that if the balance between ageing and environment is struck, the wellbeing and active ageing of other generations may also be nurtured. This is also based on the more recent realization that an unpredictable and unforeseen number of people will live in cities and age in cities, something that poses major challenges to societies, governments, insurances, and health systems, to mention but a few examples. The report claims to enable "the city" to respond to this challenge. The question, however, is who *is* "the city", and whether specific players can be defined, such as local civic bodies or NGOs. Once defined, are such agents at all

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14   Since the late twentieth century, developing countries are ageing faster than developed countries, see Louise Plouffe and Alexandre Kalache, "Towards Global Age-Friendly Cities: Determining Urban Features that Promote Active Aging," *Journal of Urban Health* 87, no. 5 (2010): 733. In Nepal, the demographic shift has been taking shape more clearly since the early millennium. In the 2010s, over 2.3 million senior citizens above sixty were counted in Nepal, about 9 per cent of the population. The report "Study on Demographic Changes in Nepal: Trends and Policy Implications" predicts that by 2028, Nepal will be an 'ageing society' with 7 per cent of the population above 65. That figure will double by 2054, making Nepal an 'aged' society. The speed of ageing will be much faster than in countries like France (115 years), UK (47 years) or Germany (40 years), see Sonja Awale, "A much older tomorrow". Nepali Times, 31 March – 6 April, 2017, no. 852.
15   Plouffe and Kalache, "Towards Global Age-Friendly Cities", 734.
16   WHO, *Global age-friendly cities*, 1.
17   Ibid.

able to impact urban policies?[18] Rightly, the age friendly city debate sheds light on the neglect of urban development both in the Global North and South on the fabric of micro-groups like neighborhoods, but also stresses a "relative 'invisibility' of older people in discussions around, for example, the development of global cities, urban lifestyles, and economic influences affecting neighbourhoods and communities."[19]

'Age-friendly' also relates to the relevance of recognizing life-course processes, that is, intergenerational relations and forms of place-making under conditions of dramatic urban change. Here, for instance, the different attributions of value and relevance given to urban transformation by members of the younger or older generation often vary and produce tensions. The same counts for the important and yet difficult-to-measure quality of experiencing urban transformation. These points will be attended to in the course of this chapter. Special consideration will be put on Kathmandu Valley's rapid housing transformation and land plotting practice that leads to a massive urban sprawl and to a transformation of farmland into construction land, from farmers to property-owners.[20] Moreover, it considers changing patterns of mobility and everyday life due to transformations in labour and leisure, but also migration and religious practices. These changing patterns must be understood as impacting neighborhoods and the ways in which older people in particular navigate through their local quarters and identify themselves with them.

Illustration 3

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18   Ibid., 11.
19   Tine Buffel and Chris Phillipson, "Can global cities be 'age-friendly cities'? Urban development and ageing populations," *Cities* 55 (2016): 96, referencing Mark Gottdiener, Ray Hutchison and Michael T. Ryan, *The New Urban Sociology* (Boulder: Westview Press, 52015).
20   Andrew Nelson, "Land and Ethnicity in a Time of Urbanization. The Case of Plot #7 in Western Kathmandu Valley," *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 20, no. 2, (December 2015): 249 – 277; See ill. 3.

Old age often gets compartmentalized – with the effect of sidelining agency – in a similar way as 'poor' and 'deprived' marginalized slum-dwellers, for instance, are fixed as categories. Moreover, old age is often victimized. Both elderscapes and age-friendly cities help to challenge this view, placing emphasis on resourcefulness as deeply appreciated unless it romanticizes and thus overshadows scenes of exploitation and exclusion. The term of the 'senior citizen', only introduced to Nepal in 2006, changed perceptions of old age by pulling it out of family confines and private realms to a more proactive perception of participation in civil society and national values. However, the use of the term citizen, though legitimate in terms of national citizenship and certain rights to monthly allowances[21] or health care, overshadows that this form of identification is yet not broadly translated into practice. In the case of my fieldwork, the strongest focus was on the direct social environment, family, kin and neighbourhood.

That cities would consider ageing populations as important resources for their functioning and growth has possibly begun in the Global North, with concepts such as the 'inclusive city', or the 'age-friendly' city. In countries like Nepal, however, such policies might take quite some time to arrive and become a major issue for public policy. However, for this paper, the concept allows us to address themes and issues that could not otherwise have been brought centre-stage, and furthermore: they also help to reposition 'age-friendly' in a less developmentalist and 'western' context. This article proposes that people of high age are a crucial source and resource of urban care and caretaking, and that their attitude of voluntary service (*seva*) could be used as a tool for urban regeneration even though it will also quickly be replaced by a younger generation of Nepalis with a different sense of public responsibility and participation. This, in turn, would enable a more differentiated and less 'top down' approach to the ways in which 'elderscapes' are spelt out and help address issues such as public and private space, tradition, development and modernity. This way, our still 'westernized' stance and vocabulary can be recalibrated and expanded. That a country like Nepal shows signs of shifting from Hindu kingdom to federal democracy, and from 'old' to 'new' economy (meaning a massive transformation from agricultural to service-based and skilled labor) and that this would impact both urban transformation and intergenerational relations as well as the concept of old age, seems logical. However, to hold on to a linear transformation would be misleading. This is one of the aspects this article is particularly interested in. The concept of the age-friendly city responds to different aspirations, assets and experiences of ageing generations and groups across the life-course, even though it particularly highlights the ways in which older people may experience marginalisation within urban environments. With

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21   The monthly old age allowance is 500 Nepalese Rupees (4 Euros).

respect to *elderscapes*, this seems pertinent because it allows us to consider different mobilities and practices of place-production and place-use.[22] Here, Handler stresses that: "Cities are, for the most part, spaces that are imagined and structured with a younger, working age demographic in mind. Older people are not, typically, incorporated into the mainstream of thinking and planning around urban environments".[23] The quality of speed, temporality and attention that shifts to the younger populations, who also seem to hold more 'urban currency' in their hand, that is, the potential to translate different forms of capital into a prospering city, becomes more and more evident in Kathmandu too. This creates a multi-layered and multi-temporal urban fabric that resonates with variations and interstitial patterns of aging communities. Modernism and developmentalism, two key narratives of global cities in the South and the North[24] speed up urban transformation. Yet, particularly with the help of environmental gerontology and the age-friendly city model, one can focus on less 'noisy' aspects, one can zoom into more constructive and creative 'in-between' places and conversations. Here, the UN Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, formulated in 2002, seems ample:

> "Population aging and urbanization are the culmination of successful human development during the last century. Older people are a resource for their families and communities, and for the economies in the cities where they live. However, to tap the potential that older people represent for continued human development, cities must ensure their inclusion and full access to urban spaces, structures and services."[25]

'Ageing in place' is a concept often used in the context of environmental gerontology, underlining the relevance of being able to age at home. It stresses the intimate relationship of belonging and well-being in a local context that corresponds to a person's appropriate habitat. Combined with 'elderscape', this enables us to focus on multi-scalar relations rather than compartmentalizing magnetism that often leads to reduced objectives that become the lens of analysis, such as associating old-age with declining joint family system and loneliness.[26] In her research on ageing in North India, Sarah Lamb has pointed out that the focus on family and the narrative of value decline is misleading, blending out forces of the market, the state and media.

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22   Mimi Sheller, "The new mobilities paradigm for a live sociology," *The Current Sociology Review* 62, no. 6 (2014): 1–23.
23   Handler, Sophie, *An alternative age-friendly handbook* (Manchester: The University of Manchester Library, 2014): 12, quoted in Buffel and Phillipson, "Can global cities be 'age-friendly cities'?": 97.
24   For a critique of the concepts with respect to urban planning and theorising, see Jennifer Robinson, "Cities in a World of Cities. The Comparative Gesture," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 1 (2011): 1–23.
25   Plouffe and Kalache, "Towards Global Age-Friendly Cities", 734.
26   See Sarah Lamb, "In/dependence, Intergenerational Uncertainty, and the Ambivalent State: Perceptions of Old Age Security in India," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2013): 65–78.

There is an interesting correlation in the focus on urban ageing since it brings together challenges of growth with challenges of providing and defining wellbeing: "to be sustainable, cities must provide the structures and services to support their residents' wellbeing and productivity. Older people in particular require supportive and enabling living environments to compensate for physical and social changes associated with ageing".[27] Yet, this does not seem to suffice, as Buffel and Phillipson underline: "implementing an 'age-friendly' approach requires the close engagement of older people and those approaching old age in urban regeneration. Studies in the UK (…) found that older people were often 'invisible' in regeneration policies."[28] But critics of age-friendly cities also argue that,

> "(a)t the same time, age-friendly efforts should focus not only on changes for current cohorts of older residents, but also work towards long-term neighbourhood change that can benefit successive cohorts of older residents. There is therefore an urgent need to reconnect urban regeneration policies with strategies that support resident-led planning for 'lifetime neighbourhoods' or 'ageing friendly communities'. Such models promote the empowerment of residents of any age to bring about neighbourhood changes which enable people to meet their basic needs, maintain significant relationships, and participate in the community in meaningful ways as they grow older."[29]

As important as this might be for a city context in the Global North, it does not satisfy the Nepalese context. Here, we have different concepts of neighborhood, of family, of the 'glue' that ties groups together, which is still very much caste, profession, but also ritual, though again, not to be understood as compartmentalized 'entities'.

This article proposes that age-friendly cities can also facilitate more attention paid to the creative potential of ritual practices and ritual places as rendering a different quality of time and space meaningful for citizens in a locality. Seeing rituals as intangible heritage allows us to perceive of old age as a resource for alternative dimensions of wellbeing and place-making and asks us to see elderly people as a resource for urban regeneration, resilience and sustainability. Often, studies on ageing zoom in on ageing as a homogenous category and confine it to a rather monolithic form of being in place. However, spatial or urban studies, for instance, contribute to this discussion by introducing qualifiers such as porosity or the interstitial nature of places (for instance,

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27   WHO, *Global age-friendly cities,* 1.
28   Buffel and Phillipson, "Can global cities be 'age-friendly cities'?": 98, referencing Moyra Riseborough and Alan Sribji-lanin, *Overlooked and Excluded? Older People and Regeneration: A Review of Policy and Practice* (London: Age Concern England, 2000) and Charles Simpson, "Older People and Engagement in Neighbourhood Renewal. A Qualitative Study of Stoke-on-Trent" (unpublished PhD diss., Keele University, 2010).
29   Ibid., 98.

home as open to neighbourhood, oscillating boundaries between private and public domains), interconnectivity of sets of places that matter and can thus be considered as a topography of age-ing,[30] and an ephemerality of place usage according to everyday patterns of mobility.

Patan and Newar culture

The Kathmandu Valley is made up of three capitals of Hindu kingdoms: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan (also known as Lalitpur, or Yala; but the term Patan will be used here for this is what is often referred to by locals when mentioning the historical part; Lalitpur exceeds the boundaries of the old city and, today, has the administrative status of a submetropolitan city). Some histori-cal sources trace Patan's origin to the sixth century AD, others claim it is much older. Over centu-ries, the valley was – and still is – strongly influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism, with a unique mixture of Hindu and Buddhist elements particular to Newar culture. But there is also a unique urban history in the valley, with fascinating links to bordering China and India, and beyond, as well as an equally unique presence of 'rurban' structures in that there is a strong presence of farmers in the cities, which impacts the relation to land, but also manifests in rituals and social relations. Nepal was part of a feudal Hindu theocracy and remained substantially detached from Islam or European colonisation. It has been both secluded and immensely porous along its bor-ders to Tibet, China, and India, through lively trade-routes, craftsmanship, architecture and art. The main local ethnic group, the Newars, have impacted the fundamental structures of the three cities in different ways. With the opening of Nepal's borders in 1951 for tourism, the first road in 1956, the arrival of television in 1985 and the inauguration of Tribhuvan airport in 1955, tourism, foreign aid and diverse infrastructures successively entered and were built up in the country. These changes altered keen interest in preserving and vitalizing the 'old' rituals and places, partly seeing them as 'their' heritage, or as a means to promote tourism, or as something new altogether.[31] In a country where a civil war, unstable governments, dependence on international aid for the lack of a strong infrastructure in terms of health, traffic, or electricity and water sup-ply, as well as education has created a "shaky trust in government institutions and representative democracy"[32], internal and transnational migration using the Kathmandu valley as transit space has led to diverse pressures on urban fabric, and also on predominantly Newar neighbourhoods

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30   Including different temporalities and mobilities involved; See Sheller, "The new mobilities paradigm for a live sociology."
31   See Mark Liechty, *Far Out. Countercultural Seekers and the Tourist Encounter in Nepal* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017); Gérard Toffin, *From Monarchy to Republic: Essays on Changing Nepal* (Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2013).
32   Andrew Nelson, "'No Horn Please': Self-Governance and Sociality in a Kathmandu Housing Colony," in *Urban Naviga-tions. Politics, Space and the City in South Asia*, eds. Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria and Colin McFarlane (London: Routledge, 2011), 215.

in the old part of Patan.[33] In such a context, to demand from a city to be 'age-friendly' is possibly asking too much. But the discussion seems to be a very productive lens to use in order to look at urbanization and ageing as well as a need to reposition such 'universalized' discussions triggered by, for instance, the WHO (where neither class nor caste nor cultural particularity are considered).

Kathmandu is one of the fastest growing metro regions in Asia: the National Population and Housing Census of 2011 shows a growth from circa 150,000 inhabitants in 1954 to 2.5 million people in 2011.[34] While the pressures on life in the Kathmandu Valley increase and modern residential and commercial buildings and townships emerge, offering life and work to a host of people from across the country, there are pockets of urban life that have been able to retain intangible and tangible heritage (for instance, Bhaktapur, Bungamati, Khokana). Patan, the former independent Newar kingdom (going as far back as 14th century), and now part of the urban sprawl, is certainly the most dynamic and fascinating 'island'.[35] There has been rapid suburbanization and peri-urbanisation since the 1970s but this has been increasing in speed and number even more since the end of the civil war in the first decade of the new millennium. In all this multiscalar transformation, Old Patan's fabric remained comparatively stable until the early 2000s, but has since then been undergoing substantial demographic change, out-migration, particularly of younger people and, finally, challenges faced through the 2015 earthquakes.

1. Being at Home and in the City: Relocations

Sheelasha Rajbhandari's earlier focus on her grandmother's memories of her maternal house and its transformation over more than 60 years until today gives insight into the ways in which a home oscillates familial and larger kin- and society-related structures and transformations. Moreover, the role of ownership in Nepal, particularly in Kathmandu Valley as the central source of investment, stability and wealth also in the absence of other 'secure' property, must not be

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33   About 50 per cent of Nepal's households have at least one family member with transnational labor experience. Central Bureau of Statistics, *National Population and Housing Census 2011: Household Tables* (Kathmandu: Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, 2014), 315; see Roberta Mandoki, "Suburban elderscapes and 'modern' modes of ageing: towards a framework of contemporary urban ageing in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal," in *Caring for old Age. Perspectives from South Asia*, eds. Christiane Brosius and Roberta Mandoki (Heidelberg: HeiUP, 2019 (forthcoming), fn 28). See also Sushma Dhital, Hom Nath Chalise and Dipesh Rupakethi, "Migration, Ageing and Spousal Separation. A Review of Current Population Trend in Nepal," *Jacobs Journal of Gerontology* 1, no. 1 (2015): 1–7.

34   Bhagawat Rimal, "Dynamics of land cover change in Kathmandu, Nepal". *Geospatial World – Geospatial Communication Network*, February 20, 2012, accessed on April 1, 2018, https://www.geospatialworld.net/article/dynamics-of-land-cover-change-in-kathmandu-nepal/.

35   Andrew Nelson, "Land and Ethnicity in a Time of Urbanization. The Case of Plot #7 in Western Kathmandu Valley," *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 20, no. 2, (December 2015): 249–277.

underestimated. Next to this, possibly, is the access to education and work, for which Nepalis pay immensely high amounts of money, often causing life-long debt. The house, also if traded off against access to education, is one of the few 'secure' forms of capital, with steadily rising value, besides being symbolically relevant for family constitution and intergenerational life.

In this section, I address intergenerational, migratory, financial and topographic transformations and concerns related to old age and home. Age-friendly cities do not only concern old-age but see an intergenerational relationship contributing to the quality of life in cities, the quality of age-ing as important harbor and catalyst of dynamic and solidaric communities. The WHO-report on age-friendly cities also speaks of the importance of "community and family connections" (even though no difference is made as to which of the 35 cities across the world are being cited).[36]

Homeownership in Kathmandu valley is crucial and even referred to as "fetishized".[37] It constitutes the household, regulates social relations beyond the place itself, and can – if we do not consider new neighborhoods such as condominiums – be seen as intimately related spatially and over long durée through kin relations, occupational patterns, festivals and rituals. A household is usually headed by the grandparents, and this also considers Old Patan, where the majority of Newars reside that have been interviewed for this article, and where joint family setups are still in the majority.[38] Traditional occupations like farming, pottery, craftsmanship, religious occupations (priests) are still followed by means of generational inheritance, though increasingly, young people seek other occupations that follow a career and lifestyle model rather than the heritage of their parents and ancestors. Living in a city like Patan and Kathmandu has become relatively expensive, rents and property prices have increased, especially since the end of the Civil War in 2007, and particularly after the 2015 earthquake. Moreover, many young people seek education and work abroad and thus almost every household has at least one family member that works abroad, sending home remittances to further finance the family, particularly children's education. Investing in new houses or improving the living conditions in old houses is a major means of showing success achieved abroad and caring for the future of the family. This may lead to abandoned old family homes because a new house was built, forcing elderly people to move with their children, or to stay behind.[39] Much

36   See WHO, *Global age-friendly cities*, 34.
37   Chaitanya Mishra, *Households, Prosperity and Poverty* (Kathmandu: Chaitanya Mishra Foundation for Social Sciences, 2017); see also Andrew Nelson, "Prestigious Houses or Provisional Homes? The ghar as a Symbol of Kathmandu Valley Peri-Urbanism," *Himalaya* 37, no. 1 (2015): 57–71.
38   On India, see the discussion on the alleged decline of the joint family with respect to ageing, in Lamb, "In/depen-dence, Intergenerational Uncertainty, and the Ambivalent State."
39   Laura Kunreuther, "Between love and property. Voice, sentiment, and subjectivity in the reform of daughter's inheri-tance in Nepal," *American Ethnologist* 36, no. 3 (2009): 545–562.

mobility and also place-making emerges from the grounds of the *elderscape* of the home, which must, moreover, also be seen as deeply structured by external sources and relations.[40]

In Old Patan, many elderly people still live in a joint family;[41] households that are (and have been) in flux due to changing economic status, labor conditions and social change. The 'classical' setup is for elderly people to live with their son/s and their daughter-in-law and grandchildren. The kitchen is usually shared unless there are certain dietary rules, or a division of vegetarians and non-vegetarians, for instance. Even though as per law, all children, including daughters, should inherit the same, the son looking after the parents often gets a larger share, while a married daughter who has 'already' received a dowry, would most likely receive a smaller or no share[42] – one may argue that this also impacts parents' ageing patterns and the urban fabric since they would hardly age with their daughter. Residential setups also speak of other social relations and boundaries, often along the lines of inheritance, sometimes along the lines of gender. Says Rajendra Shakya: "In the Newar family, I guess it's all the same with all the Nepali families as well, […] a mother and a father has to be taken care of by a son and his wife, the daughter in law. But if you have to go to live with your daughter and her son-in-law, the parents might feel awkward. Even if the son-in-law wants to have his mother-in-law, they are reluctant to stay at the daughter's place".[43] In closed traditional settings, parents of the daughter's husband would rarely be willing to share property and other resources with their daughter-in-law, for she is also seen as 'their family' from the moment of being given away by marriage. All income generated by the daughter generally goes to her new family from the moment of marriage. Continues Rajendra:

> "If an elderly couple has only daughters then their property goes to the daughters. In this case, too, if there is one particular daughter who is fully looking after the parents, she gets all the property. This is one scenario where usually the elderly couple go through a lot of problems. When the daughters are married off, it is difficult for them to come and take care of their parents regularly. And the parents do not move into the daughters' house. No parent would want to do that. It is the social perception that discourages the elderly people to move into their son-in-law's house even if the son-in-law and the daughter are very willing to have them in. So the elderly people would rather stay at their own house and maybe have someone like a maid to look after them, while the daughters come visit them frequently."[44]

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40   Mishra, *Households, Prosperity and Poverty*.
41   According to the Central Bureau of Statistics around 120,000 people live in Old Patan – the majority thereof belonging to the Newar community. Central Bureau of Statistics, *Population Ward Level, Lalitpur Metropolitan City*, 2017, accessed on May 26, 2018, http://cbs.gov.np/image/data/2017/Population_Ward_Level_753_Local_Unit.pdf.
42   See also Kunreuther, "Between love and property," 548.
43   Rajendra Shakya, Email conversation with the author, March 2018.
44   Shakya, Email conversation.

Hence there is only little freedom of choice for ageing parents: they will preferably live with a son (exceptions being that they are childless or have no son). T. M. Awale (aged 77) and B Awale (aged 78) are two friends from Old Patan, both potters and still working in their occupation. They elaborate on the challenges of sharing often limited space on an everyday basis, and the possible tensions that can emerge, as T. M. Awale spells out: "In a family, one has to understand this – one should not say 'my daughters-in-law are angry' or 'my grandchildren are irritating'. Sometimes I also have to be humble. Only then they will respect me."[45] He has passed on all his property to the children and feels that this puts him in a precarious situation. Awale stresses that other ageing parents decide not to pass on the inheritance in order to remain strong and be treated respectfully: "you should also give them their share of inheritance. But then, once one does that, they stop giving the respect", says T. M. Awale to B. Awale, and laughs. The former is grateful that his daughters-in-law still treats him with respect, that she follows the unspoken rule of filial piety, that is, the acknowledgement of younger family members' respect for the aged: "We are all happy together. I have distributed everything to my sons. I also have to be a bit humble. And then my daughters-in-law come and tell me '*Bhāgi yāe ti*'[46]."

Filial piety is not always the highest value in decision-making processes, especially when the perspective of the ageing parents is concerned, who may feel sidelined. Moving out because a son has decided to leave the parental house (and sell or rent it) is sometimes the fate of aged parents, as in this case. After refusing to do so for many years, my neighbor at Patan Darbar Square, a lady in her early eighties, was finally moved out of her husband's family house because her son had built a modern house in a new neighbourhood outside Old Patan. Even though she was lonely during daytime, she had felt happy previously, cooking for the children in the morning so that they could take their lunch to work, then spending many afternoons in the sun on her roof ter-race, dozing, chatting with neighbors across rooftops, and performing rituals. The rituals and the proximity of key shrines to her (in eyesight since she could not walk anymore) were the reasons given for the rejection of moving house. Many children – now adults – would seek to move out of what is often perceived as too narrow, dark housing, with low ceilings, no access for parking, no symbols of 'modern living'. Moreover, privacy and seclusion take up new meaning. The density of the many courtyards and close housing, where families know each other because of close daily interaction but also membership to the same caste and ethnic group is now considered 'too close' by many young adults. Their decision to buy land outside, in the periphery of the old town, and to live among members of the 'same class' is often also an attempt to free themselves from such

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45   Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with T. M. Awale and B. Awale, January 2015.
46   Asking the elders for blessing by bowing down in front of them, as a sign of filial and highly gendered piety.

social control. This is then imposed on the parents who, instead, often do not experience the density in and with other houses as claustrophobic. Their 'urban' habitus is much more connected to the proximity of work, religious practice and social exchange.

Close to Patan Darbar Square lives S. M. Joshi, 96 years old and a well-known scholar of Newar history and culture. He also inhabits an 'old' house, probably around 100 years old, set in a typically Newari garden with brick walls, a pomelo tree, vegetables, and other fruit trees (ills. 4–5). He decided to stay back when his children moved out after marriage:

Illustration 4

Illustration 5

"We, who are staying here, are like the fish in water. We don't think much about the change of our environment; we are not that concerned about it too. What we say is this is all because of the changes brought by the time […] the modernization. For instance, here in my own house, I have this land and house. I brought in the daughter-in-law. Then my son had children. I could give them one room. Then the children grew up. Now the question was: where to let them sleep? Not just here, even there in the West, too, it is a great problem. Whenever the children grow older, they try to go somewhere; they leave the house. Or, they think of rebuilding the house in a new way if they have the money and land. Hence, they will not rebuild the house in a traditional structure, as they need modern toilet and kitchen. This leads to the changes."[47]

Joshi refers to the fact that traditional houses might have an outside toilet. But bathrooms are a recent introduction, and because there is no running water, and they still fetch the water from the well, 'bucket baths' have to be taken on the roof terrace or in the courtyard and garden, with little privacy. This is now increasingly perceived as backward by the younger generation and new houses come with indoor bathrooms and toilets (if running water is provided). People also left their houses in old Patan after the 2015 earthquake, even if they were still standing. The old houses were either pulled down and replaced by concrete houses, out of fear that they might eventually collapse, and also out of a desire for a modern lifestyle in better equipped houses, often 1–2 floors higher than previously. Or they left them to dilapidate. There are no concrete numbers, but hundreds of houses, sometimes whole blocks of houses, were demolished after the earthquake.[48]

Yet, many elderly persons also refused to leave, despite the risk and the perceived low housing qualities. I tell Mr Joshi about my neighbor, a Newari lady in her eighties, whom I used to chat with when we both spent time on the sunny roof terrace. Over many months, she told me that her son had built a modern house in a new neighbourhood on a plot of land outside the old city. His wife and daughter had already moved there and even he spent the nights there, sometimes coming 'home' to spend time with his mother who could hardly walk and refused to leave for many years: she wanted to be able to perform rituals close to the temples opposite and in the surrounding area. For her, being able to look at the temples alone was a blessing. I asked Mr Joshi to comment on the refusal to move to a new neighbourhood, where, at the most, newly built shrines could be found:

47   Christiane Brosius and Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with S. M. Joshi, March 2015.

48   Following the dramatic impact of the 2015 earthquake, almost 900,000 housing structures were damaged including 33,000 alone in Lalitpur/Patan, according to the National Reconstruction Authority. NRA, "Nepal: geographical coverage of Damage area in 31 EQ affected districts by concentration of damage grades to housing structures," published in *Central Bureau of Statistics Report* of June 11, 2017, accessed on May 31, 2018, http://nra.gov.np/uploads/map/XUCpgq2AnP170731092024.pdf. The urban fabric was therefore dramatically affected and many inhabitants had to leave their homes with no prevision of return.

"It's saṃskār (cultural heritage) that she is talking about. Take my wife, for instance. My son has a new house. My elder son built a new house. And he asked his mother, my wife, to come and live there. It's a modern house. "Why do you sit here in such an old house?", he would say. But the main thing is that it is the cultural heritage. And: she loves to be here with the relatives. They come here and just talk. So she does not want to move. […] But my son still asks: "Why are you sitting here? We have so many facilities in the new house – toilet, bathroom, and all sorts of things. You live here in such a poor place". But still, we are here. As you have already said, there are so many deities here. We worship, that is one main attraction. That is a heritage, it is a spiritual legacy that attracts us. So, we don't want to go here and there. We are satisfied with our own style."[49]

There is a particular temporality and mobility connected to the much-appreciated proximity to deities and ritual practice. It is a form of place-making based on the mobility of elderly (but also younger) people around dawn, mainly between 5am and 7–8am. Often equipped with plates filled with ritual objects, such as flowers and vessels with water to sprinkle on the deities, women go for these morning walks, on their own, or in groups. Men, too, or married couples take the morning walks, to greet the deities and get blessed, listen to devotional singing (*bhajan*) but also to do a little exercise and buy vegetables. The places visited can be in the shared courtyard (*bahāl*), but mostly a longer walk connects shrines and temples along a fixed route. This activity, spanning several hours, is a unique, crucial form of urban care-taking of the city and its social and ritual energy. This way, the close relationship between caretakers and places creates a habitat of an age-friendly city and city-friendly ageing. Ageing and place-making enforce each other as resources for wellbeing and communication. This expresses a special form of shared public ownership. Thus, the ritual morning walks contribute to and reposition the conventional form of age-friendly cities defined by Buffel and Phillipson who argue that, one

"factor influencing the development of age-friendly cities concerns the control and ownership of public space. The policy of developing age-friendly cities makes a number of assumptions about access to, and ownership of, public space: namely, that it can be controlled and influenced on behalf of the changing needs and expectations of people in later life. But space in cities is not itself freely available. Increasingly, ownership and control are vested in particular groups for whom the issues raised by the age-friendly agenda may have limited appeal."[50]

Placing their research in secularized contexts, the authors might have overseen the resource of religious ritual as an intangible and yet also 'solid' form of ownership, control and ecology of visibility. However, considering such intangible heritage conveys the need for cities, at least in

49   Brosius, Conversation with S. M. Joshi.
50   Buffel and Phillipson, "Can global cities be 'age-friendly cities'?": 97.

the Global South, to consider stakeholding as a central motor for the age-friendly city in another way, and to see this as a "voice in decision-making processes relating to urban developments and regeneration.".[51]

The urban relationship between people and their environment is shaped by urban transformation.*52* The span, scale and scope of daily activities and routines differs substantially, as can be seen in the ritual walks of elderly people and the reluctance to move out of their homes. This personal context is impacted by the urban transformation since the 1960s, the move from monarchy to democracy, from an agricultural, craftsman-based and trading society to a service-oriented consumer society has impacted family relations, labor patterns, the need for other educational skills and demand for land.[53] From one generation to the next, whole occupation patterns, social relations and cultural practices have been transformed, come to an end, been replaced, or at least dramatically diminished[54], something that has much affected elderly people's belonging and association with places.

The impact of in-migration (due to poverty and civil war or the search for work and education) from outside the Kathmandu valley has been mentioned, pushing up property prices but also improving infrastructural conditions (e.g., access to water, electricity) of certain neighborhoods in parts of the city. But out-migration, too, has left marks on the ways in which the elderly citizens of Patan experience their ageing in the city. Family structures have changed due to migration mobility and the intense investment in childrens' education. A. Shrestha, Chief of the Social Welfare Division of Lalitpur Sub-metropolitan City Office, recalls how the situation for many elderly people has changed over the years:

> "A lot has changed from the past for the elderly people of the core area. In this 21th century, the children mostly go abroad. The children have stopped taking responsibility of the family. We all know that. Not just going abroad but also sending the children to hostels has increased. There is a vast difference in the nature of children brought up in the family and those sent to hostels. The children sent to hostels do not have any love (for the family members). This has created a lot of problems for the senior citizens."[55]

He continues:

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51   Ibid., 98.
52   See Wahl, "Ageing research along the urban-rural distinction."
53   Mishra, *Households, Prosperity and Poverty*.
54   See Liechty, *Suitably Modern*; Toffin, *From Monarchy to Republic*.
55   Christiane Brosius, Conversation with A. Shrestha, February 2015.

> "The main problem is there is no one at home. The children are all abroad. Daughters are given away in marriage. Usually, people have only one child and many of them try to go abroad. So just the parents are left back there. They cannot work at that stage and the children are not together. And this has forced them to go and live in the old-age home (*brddhashram*). This is not part of our culture, where everyone lives in the family."[56]

Shrestha sees this as 'westernisation', while he also alludes to the fact that 'western' people look towards joint family systems as an ideal. Clearly, he oversimplifies the cultural divide, yet his comment underlines the effect of transnational migration on local structures. Awale criticizes that people give up their home and habitat too easily for the sake of education in the city, or abroad: "Just being educated is not enough. It's not good if you cannot explain about the place you were born and live in."[57]

While outmigration of younger family members has affected residential structures, urban densification, too, plays a role. The growing dynamics of people leaving and coming have changed the city, and the way of life in certain neighborhoods. People from the locality profited from the price hike; old houses were pulled down and replaced, and additional houses were built. We return to S.M. Joshi, aged 96 years, who alerts us to the following:

> "This is the quarter of the *Jyāpus*, inhabited by farmers. […] The prices of land skyrocketed. There is an influx of people from outside. For instance, the people working in the Middle East came back with a lot of money; they took over the whole area around Nakhipot. The people with the money bought all the land there. This is the case of the area outside (the old Newar settlement). They built modern houses over there. Here, too, people sold their land. […] This brought in a lot of money. […] You can just take a look at here in my neighborhood. I'm living in an old house. All the houses here have become new (this is before the earthquake). Once I could clearly hear the animals from the zoo cry from here. Now the city has been densely populated, nothing can be heard now."[58]

Another interlocutor recalls that earlier, many elderly people also wanted to live in the old part of the city because there were many herbs and healers for them to access by the river, a scenery perceived as naturally and ritually 'pure' and good to be close to. This had changed and now nobody even remembers this former haven. Yet another informant, B.R. Shrestha, a member of the Senior Citizens Society, recalls that, "there have been so many changes in our lifetime. In our time, the chariot procession of *Bungadyaḥ* was visible from everywhere. The houses have

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56   Ibid.
57   Brosius, Conversation with A. Shrestha, January 2015.
58   Brosius, Conversation with S. M. Joshi.

grown taller now." This reference to the changes in the urban landscape also refers to the fact that intense land plotting is taking place by which farmland is converted into residential land, with brick or cement houses of 4–5 floors' height (while a traditional home would not be higher than 2–3 floors).

The usage of particular socio-religious sites, constituting the 'code' of the city, has been altered altogether, as many elderly informants underlined. This has affected the flow of movements and activities of certain social and also age groups. Many typical landmarks, sites of social and ritual activity, have vanished, stopped being used or been privatized. Examples are the *hiti* (small water tanks, also for drinking), open platforms for performances, ponds and semi-public resthouses. One informant recalls that Patan was a city without shops: previously people sold basic goods on the streets. Today, almost each newly built house in the old town plans a shop on the ground floor, while the street vendors largely have to leave the pavements except for early in the morning to make place for pedestrians, motorbikes and cars. In terms of family homes, the practice of splitting the house into verticular 'slices', each 'slice' belonging to one son after the inheritance has been handed over to them and split, is not new. But what is new is that the urban landscape now shows examples of the leftover of an old brick house, maybe still inhabited by the aged parents, while one son has torn 'his' part down and built a concrete house double the height next to it (ill. 6). These building forms reflect social forms of interfamilial property division and property disputes.[59]

Illustration 6

59   See Robert Vanderbeck and Nancy Worth, *Intergenerational Spac*e (Abingdon: Routledge 2015); Leng Leng Thang and Matthew Kaplan, "Intergenerational Pathways for Building Relational Spaces and Places," in *Environmental gerontology. Making meaningful places in Old Age*, eds. Graham Rowles and Miriam Bernard, (New York: Springer, 2013), 225–252.

2. Place-making and old age in public: mobility and inertia

How does the physical environment impact the subjectivities and everyday lives of ageing people? How is the public aspect of a city occupied by different ageing generations? What role do ritual practices and places play in this context? One of the most unique and yet sidelined sites in contemporary urban Nepal are the resthouses (hereafter also phalcā, the Nepalese term is *pati*). There is no other space that is as public, dynamic and available for multiple uses, and for a variety of social groups, as this arcaded platform. As the nodal points of Newar culture, *phalcās* have a meandering history, often undergoing architectural and social changes. Many also have a daily rhythm that invites use by different local groups. It is a ritual site, a site for gatherings and leisure, used as shelter, shop space or storage (ills. 7–8). But it is also a site that, in some cases, has been closed down by means of a fence, and silently vanished through conversion into a residential place. After the earthquake, it has been seemingly rediscovered as a supportive institution,

Illustration 7

Illustration 8

a much-needed island of momentary relief and solidarity. *Phalcās* are places that are semi-public and religiously or ritually used. The resthouse is also a social space for everyday gatherings, mainly of elderly people and children. With a few exceptions, the 'middle' generation does not seem to pay attention to the relevance of the *phalcā*, and many people are not familiar with them, especially if they are from outside the valley, even outside the historic centres of Bhaktapur, Kirtipur, or smaller towns like Khokana and Sunaguthi. Even the communities located around the phalcā may not cherish this institution any longer and allow it to be encroached, privatised or dismantled. This way, this age-friendly social and ritual gathering site, where leisure and ritual merge, gradually disappears. As K Maharjan, in his seventies, and having spent much of his life playing devotional music (*bhajan*) recalls:

> "In the past there were many, also many *hiti* (stone water spout) *and ja:rhum* (drinking water tank with one or more outlets from which people can drink water). They were installed by our ancestors. These days, people have become mean. The chiefs of the government authorities also transferred the (*guthi*[60]) lands to their own name and built houses. There were so many ponds but they are no longer in existence. All of those people (in government authorities) including the ministers are no good. Ministers and kings are all no good. After these leaders came, everything has gone haywire. It's difficult to make a living. There is no money for the elderly. After all, we need money to eat. We have to survive."[61]

The research conducted for this study perceives *phalcās* as nodal points and constituents of urban neighborhoods. They follow a particular temporal ecology of place-use and this way offer members of different ageing groups, even jointly, space to gather, exchange and nurture relationships. In response to the WHO report on age-friendly cities that underlines the importance of rest places[62] to relax, recharge, and socialize, the *phalcās* are a central element of urban regeneration and sustainability for an age-friendly city of the Global South. They may be used as temporary shelters overnight by homeless people. They are quasi-public places; often they are sponsored by a private person and/or a local community. They are looked after by local stakeholders, often the eldest of the community. From the perspective of social and cultural regeneration in post-earthquake Nepal, the *phalcās* prove to be as significant as, or maybe even more, important than ever. Not just as vernacular sites of intangible and tangible heritage, but also as supportive institutions, especially for less visible and more vulnerable groups like the elderly, women, children or

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60   The word derives from the Sanskrit gosthi, meaning an 'association' or an 'assembly', see Gérard Toffin, *From Kin to Caste. The Role of Guthis in Newar Society and Culture* (Kathmandu: Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture, Social Science Baha, 2005). It refers to initiatives that take care of the establishment and restoration of temples and Buddhist shrines and monasteries. Some are compulsory, some optional (ibid: 3), and they can be found across castes.

61   Brosius, Conversation with S. M. Joshi.

62   WHO, *Global age-friendly cities*, 13.

homeless people – for whom they are a much-needed island of momentary relief and solidarity. While some *phalcās* still lie in ruins and have little chance of being reconstructed because of some communities' lack of financial resources or because they were not actively used, other *phalcās* have been rebuilt, again, mostly through community initiatives which could mobilise state subsidies, or with the help of private organizations and donors. The practices related to *phalcās*, mainly devotional music, also reveal intergenerational contestations, spatial transformation and challenges of ageing in the city, thus underlining the relation to environmental gerontology and age-friendly cities discussions.

Intangible heritage: storytelling, music-making and exchanging in public

Exploring elderly persons' ritual activities opens access to more than questions of belief and tradition. It speaks of the transformation of social relations, work and spatial transformation, and gestures towards the porosity of the private and public spheres. One could differentiate between qualities of cultural heritage that impact more and less on the self-perception of Newar communities in the Kathmandu Valley where old age plays a distinct role as stakeholder and important resource of cultural production. There is what I call 'five star' heritage, made up of pagodas and temples that have been declared prominent cultural heritage by the UNESCO. But these rankings, though they might bring in much financial capital or tourist attention and also lead towards an appreciation of traditional architecture and care for those sites, do not necessarily overlap with the prioritisation and usage of locals. Many important active shrines and temples lie outside the trails of the world cultural heritage map, remain invisible to many outsiders. Elderly persons are vital caretakers of them and connect them through their 'alternative' trails. The landscapes and practices that make those buildings visible have their own temporality and are strongly linked to the morning walks mentioned above. Whether or not this can be defined as temporary public space is debatable, because it is also a personal religious fact of everyday life. Among the sites that play a larger role in the early mornings patterns of movement is the unique architectural structure of the *phalcā*. And connected to it are the *bhajans*, the devotional music played according to a sacred temporality. Many conversations with older age members with a Newar background circulate around the *bhajan* as a sensorium of the changes mentioned, and the role of old age in nurturing this form of cultural heritage.

The outdoor living-room

The arcaded resthouses called *phalcā* are part of an religio-architectural ensemble made up of actively used shrines, sometimes temples, or a Buddhist monastery, such as in the case of the Jyābahābahī, which was badly damaged by the 2015 earthquake. The earthquake interrupted

many social and ritual activities that used to take place in these sites. The restriction of access to these sites brings to the fore their relevance, which is usually a presence taken for granted. H. K. Maharjan, aged 74, a wood carver by profession and playing the flute in the bhajan group of the locality remembers the days of his childhood:

> "Children used to play on the *phalcā*. We stayed there when it rained. People used to sit on the *phalcā* and the elderly people used to tell us stories. We sat there and listened. They talked about history and legends. So, the *phalcā* also served as a place for gaining knowledge. Once it got dark we stayed on the *phalcā*. A straw mat would be laid on the floor. Some of us used to sit on the lap of our father and chat. The sittings like that mostly involved gossips and also consultations regarding serious matters. […] And when people came back from their early morning visits to various shrines, they gathered there."[63]

M. D. Maharjan (aged 78) stresses that it was also a place for people to spend time if they were out of work. And his friend, K. B. Maharjan (aged 70) highlights the intergenerational element of this meeting-point:

> "In the past, the houses were small and not good. People returned from work and the *phalcā* was like a living room. Everyone used to come and sit here. But these days, the houses are getting better. So people stay home. The TV is there now, there is not much interest in the *bhajan*: there are so many things to watch on the TV!"[64]

The *bhajan* practice too is undergoing changes, and this affects the use of the *phalcā*. Shyam Gopal Maharjan, aged 46, mourns the fact that *bhajans* are not popular among youngsters anymore:

> "The youth do not show interest in learning. […] we organized a *bhajan* training, calling every household here to participate. We all studied and also handed over the certificates. But those who had learnt also forgot performing *bhajan* as they did not give continuity to what they had learnt. […] *Bhajan* also used to be a means of entertainment in the past. There was nothing else to do after returning from the fields. So, people would sit on the *phalcā*, chat with each other and perform *bhajan*. But these days, everyone's life is full of struggle. Financial issues surface no matter whatever one wants to do. This has forced people to focus on earning money. I think that is the reason. I mean, we haven't been able to bring changes in *bhajan* as per the changes in time."[65]

This quote underlines the realization that the practice of *bhajans* must be reformed to fit the aspirations but also practical demands of the younger generation who, for instance, cannot

63   Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with the author, September 2016.
64   Christiane Brosius and Rajendra Shakya, Interview with K.B. Maharjan, January 2015.
65   Shakya, Conversation.

sacrifice their work schedule to the demands of ritual time, and find it unnecessary to do so. The above quotes also stresses the fact that these sites are important arenas for social gathering and communication, vital for regeneration, but in a liminal state of vanishing.

There is a particular spatial pattern behind the practice of *bhajan*. Until recently, the Maharjans, Newar farmers from Lalitpur/Patan were divided among forty quarters (*tvāh*), writes Toffin, and adds that these territorial segments, also *guthis*, had their own music houses (*manka chen*) where apprentices were trained and music could be rehearsed.[66] Increasingly, however, younger men pull out of *guthis* since they feel these associations regulate and demand too much. Even if they are keen to share with and pay respect to the older generation, the often very strict rules imposed are not identified with any longer. The demands for musical competence, too, are very high and elaborate, and request much investment in terms of time and attention. Nutan Sharma, an expert in Newar cultural heritage elaborates that *bhajans*, especially the *dapha bhajans*, are very difficult to learn. It takes years for the music to be 'internalised'. Moreover, members of a *bhajan* group must commit additional time during special ritual periods where *bhajan* must be played, for instance, in the temple of the Rato Matsyendranath for 6 months, every morning between 5 and 6am. And ritual timings cannot easily be shifted according to one's personal or work-related needs and desires; they are linked to auspicious moments set in a ritual calendar. Moreover, while earlier there would have been up to 50 people for the special performance of Nasaṃcā Dāphā Bhajan, now many also abstain from coming, says another bhajan player from Patan, P.L. Maharjan (aged 78), because they do not know how to sing and are embarrassed. Now there are about 5 people left. Previously, he goes on to recall, bhajan groups would also compete with each other, and feel motivated because it had a good reputation. Now the investment in learning mantras and spending extra time are not considered rewarding any more. This is in contrast to a revived interest of Jyapu youth in joining traditional music groups with a less demanding schedule, organized by the *jyapu samaj* (the collective association of the Maharjans of Lalitpur, which is a democratic move stemming from the 1990s to solidify porous structures)[67], and including girls and women too. On this matter, P. L. Maharjan underlines that people are not ready to invest their energy in things that seem 'too complicated', and sees with a certain regret that particular practices vanish because of that, turning rituals into less complex events:

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66   Toffin, *From Kin to Caste*, 17–18.
67   *Jyapu samaj* is a community-based organization, established in 1994 for the collective development of peasant communities in Lalitpur District.

"We used to have a *kajīchẽ*[68] in the past, when everyone used to gather there in the evenings after the dinner to sing the *bhajans* and play the instruments. Now, the *maṅkāḥchẽ*[69] has also disappeared. The gurus who can teach have also passed away. So, it appears as if there has been no attempts (at learning *bhajan*) at all these days."[70]

A key interest, according to another senior citizen from the locality, is to meet for *bhoj* (a feast based on a communal meal). A group conversation with Maharjans from Lũchẽ Nani, Cābahal reflects the decline of ritual diversity:

C. Brosius:
What is it that you cherish the most when you think back of your past? When you think of the past since your childhood till now, what is it that you enjoy the most in your life?

M.D. Maharjan (aged 80):
The *jātrās* are no longer there like in the past. The festivals are only for eating now. When *Matayāḥ*[71], *Gunupūnhi*[72] came in the past, we used to have *khyālaḥ*[73] (taken out on the streets for a whole week. All of that has ceased to exist. The *jātrās* of gods have started to disappear. Otherwise, we had *Mahālakṣmī Jātrā*.

R. Shakya:
Oh! The one in Lagankhel?

M.D.M.:
Yes. Goddess *Bālakumārī* of *Kvāchẽ* used to be taken out for a procession, the deity from Sikabahī used to have her procession too. All of them have ceased to exist.

K.B. Maharjan (aged 71):
Because of the availability of all sorts of things on TV, the interest of the people has decreased. Not even one out of 20 youngsters would want to learn these days. It's difficult; one has to work hard a lot (to learn). They have in a way lost the courage to learn.

M.D.M.:
It was all done for the sense of pleasure in the past. Now we need money.[74]

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68   *Kajī* is the main coordinator of any event or activity. *Kajīchẽ* is his residence, where they teach playing instruments and singing *bhajans*.

69   *Maṅkāḥche* is the community building usually found in almost all the *Jyāpu* localities. They perform all the community activities including teaching musical instruments and organizing feasts at *maṅkāḥchẽ*.

70   Christiane Brosius and Rajendra Shakya, Interview with P.L. Maharjan, November 2015; see also Toffin, *From Kin to Caste*, 30.

71   Literally meaning a procession of light, *Matayāḥ* is a day-long walk through the inner parts of Patan with the participants offering various materials to all the Buddhist shrines and monasteries of the city. There are ten localities in Patan which take turns, one after another, to host the procession.

72   The full moon day of *Śrāvana*, when Newars drink *kvāti*, a liquid mixture of grains and lentils (like beans and mustard).

73   Mostly exhibited during the festivals like *Gunupūnhi*, *Sāpāru*, and *Matayāḥ*, it is an urban street drama, with comic and satirical elements.

74   Christiane Brosius and Rajendra Shakya, Group conversation with Maharjans from Lũchẽ Nani, November 2015.

The reference to money is relevant. It underlines the effects of several reforms during the past decades that led to a centralized organization of *guthis* (local associations, predominantly male, and responsible for rituals, care of temples and monasteries, and able to generate an income through land-holdings and donations) into the body of the *guthi samsthan* (nationalized and centralized association of *guthis*). With the *guthi samsthan*, agency was shifted away from individual groups, and the state refrained from providing money to ensure the survival of ritual and cultural heritage. Today, some of the more complicated rituals cannot be financed anymore and recede or vanish. This also restricts the activities usually held in hands of senior persons, thus decreasing their status and reputation that usually comes along with old age.

The patis represent another logic of mobility and sociability: they are spaces for inertia, they offer moments of slowing down, of loitering, watching life pass by, yet remaining a part of it. Thus, they are ideal for children and old people. The focus on speed allows us to also bring in the coevalness of multiple qualities of mobility, since today, roads are widened to make space for more cars, demanding the removal of *phalcās* and private homes from the surface. The definition of leisure has changed too, requiring other symbols of one's presence and status. The *phalcās*, quite like the *bhajans*, seem to have fallen 'out of time', overtaken by a younger generation that considers them 'too slow', different to what they consider 'classy'. But there are exceptions too, such as the community at Pimbahal, a neighbourhood with a large water tank framed by with three phalcās that had collapsed or been damaged by the 2015 earthquakes. Now, in 2017, the community has reconstructed the phalcās with support from the municipality, and the site has become a place of pride and much attention (ill. 9). In the mornings and evenings, children, youth and old people go for walks, sit, and

Illustration 9

enjoy the public space. Other examples of phalcās reconstructed through local initiative, and with financial support from private donors and the municipality point to a possible new appreciation of 'the old' and a smooth conversion into a space that is also valued by the youth. As the head of the Social Welfare Division of the Lalitpur sub-metropolitan city office, A. Shrestha says:

> "Since about a decade or so, there has been a growing awareness on maintaining and preserving such phalcās. There was a phase in the past when they were misused and destroyed. The local body is carrying out renovations of them these days. Recently, one phalcā near Sundhārā was about to be destroyed. But the municipality provided Nep. Rupees 1,000,000 (circa 8000 Euros) to rebuild it this year. So, gradually the attempts at preserving them has grown. Not much can be done for the ones that have already been converted into private property. But the municipality is moving forward with the concept of preserving the ones that still remain."[75]

This can be read as an attempt to create age-friendly cities. The local municipal body even set up a separate branch for the preservation of culture and heritage (however, the procedures are fairly bureaucratic). Communities must also contribute money, something not always easy for them. Shrestha continues: "The concept behind this is to develop a sense of ownership in people towards the public spaces. Plus, the consumers' committees are temporary. They are set up only for the construction, and do not take responsibility for conservation."[76]

Renovated heritage sites such as *phalcās* also face intergenerational competition in the search for communal space in a densifying city, stresses Shrestha:

> "It is good if we can involve senior citizens in conservation of such heritages. […] of course, they will not be contributing financially, but if we can tell them that these heritages are for you to use, they will also have love for such spaces. The problem here is the youths renovate them and they use it to form clubs. They tend to take control of the space, thinking that they are the ones who made it. That is wrong. If we leave it to the senior citizens, tell them that it's theirs to use, they will sit there and chat. They will be talking about the past."[77]

Shrestha sees a very recreational aspect in thinking of the presence of old age persons in public spaces, since they turn the places, if we think along the lines of age-friendly cities, into thriving places, where old age becomes a resource for the future wellbeing of the citizens:

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75   Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with A. Shrestha, February 2015.
76   Ibid.
77   Ibid.

"And if we can record their talks, it will be great. They will have space to talk. Some people do tend to disregard the talks of the elderly people. But it is from them that we learn about our culture. […] Now, I came to know of this (he refers to a particular ritual, CB) and I told you. You will tell someone else. This is how such information is spread. That's why one should listen to the old people. One should not disregard the views of the old people. We are starting to witness the change in the society. If we are unable to effectively manage the changes, it may turn out to be very bad. Even the *Jyāpu Samāj* is constructing an old age home. As a consequence, old people will be dumped there. Keeping them there just because there are facilities is very bad. I'm not very happy about that."[78]

3. Caring duties: guthis, senior citizen societies and old age homes

Both environmental gerontology and the concept of age-friendly cities require a careful analysis of how the relationship of persons to their habitat is structured by means of built environs (in our case, the home but also the *phalcā*), as well as social groups and associations. The fact that the concept of the senior citizen in Nepal is less than two decades old also explains that senior citizen organizations are a recent phenomenon and mostly contain the secular realm and civil society. They look after their members' access to health care, their monthly allowance, and other rights that consider the wellbeing of aged persons. Old-age homes in Nepal are a recent phenomenon, even though the concept of the 'abode for the aged' (*brddhashram*) is part of the culture of ageing in South Asia[79], yet in that traditional trajectory, it is usually confined to religious charity, service (*seva*) and organizations. In Patan, a unique form of association that is predominantly monopolized by elderly men deserves attention because it is highly urban, responding to social and urban transformations and providing elderly persons with a cause for action in the form of service and duty that simultaneously transforms them into caretakers of the city. This final section will first look at the guthi, then the senior citizen society and the old-age home.

The centrality of the guthi has been highlighted earlier. Guthis are a highly elaborate and diverse network of associations within Newar society and culture that largely look after the conduction of rituals, religious places and practices, thus forming a social 'glue' that holds individuals together through elements of duty, privilege and the flow of different forms of status, capital

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78   Ibid.

79   See Lamb, "In/dependence, Intergenerational Uncertainty, and the Ambivalent State"; Annika Mayer, *Old-Age-Home? Middle-Class Senior Citizens and New Elderscapes in Urban India* (Heidelberg: Hochschulschrift, 2017); Axel Michaels, "The 'Holy Joint Family' in South Asian Ageing Theories," in *Caring for old Age. Perspectives from South Asia*, eds. Christiane Brosius and Roberta Mandoki (Heidelberg: HeiUP, 2019 (forthcoming)).

and communication. Guthis make up a central part of the "symbolic organization of the city"[80], further connecting towns, quarters, and villages through intricate social and religious relations, many of them reciprocal. As Toffin writes: "These associations are of tremendous importance in the traditional society and culture of the Kathmandu Valley. Basically, they regulate several aspects of Newar social and religious life, and even possess economic functions in some limited cases."[81] After the nationalisation of *guthis* in the 1920s[82] under the umbrella of the *guthi samsthan*, according to David Gellner, many private *guthis* declined. This was also due to the fact that members were not able to chip in the money needed for rituals, and the corporation denied them money. However, the monarchy of the Hindu Kingdom still provided support to the corporation, thus also ensuring a thriving ritual life in the city. A more drastic cut came with the civil war and the transformation of the country from monarchy to democracy and civil society in the early 21st century. One could argue that yet another step was the economic liberalization in the new millennium, and changing relationships between the emerging mega-economies of India and China between which Nepal is sandwiched. New labour and education patterns, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, contributed to a decline of younger members within the *guthi* structure. Some *guthis* responded through adaptation, for instance, by giving more agency to the young men, instead of 'naturally' privileging the old members (*thakalis*, *aji*, see below). This, evidently, also shifts the position of elderly persons in their life-course patterns and social status, it impacts their role as keeper of rituals and thus also caretaker of the city, of the neighborhood/quarter.

But duty and voluntary service still play a role; the duty to care by means of voluntary service is a foundation of a special urban habitus and knowledge owned especially by elderly people. This allows them to connect sites and events, practices and people. The older a person is, the more responsibility and authority s/he holds for performing rituals and taking care of spaces. Albeit, due to the fact that the *guthis*' power decreases due to lack of donations and remittance, the burdens on status-holders also weigh more heavily, thus diminishing the reputation of a formerly honorable position. One challenge, according to M. D. Maharjan (80) is that some sons of those involved in *bhajan* and certain *guthis* stopped caring about the bhajan performance after the death of their parents. Their withdrawal, either because of outmigration or disinterest "is one pathway to the guthi extinction."[83] Another is the role of land, religious topography and collectively versus individually owned property.

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80   Toffin, *From Kin to Caste*, 8, see also 16–17.
81   Ibid., 4.
82   David Gellner, *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest. Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 235.
83   Christiane Brosius, Conversation with M. D. Maharjan, November 2015.

The urban transformations partly go back to a dramatic land reform act in the 1920s and another one in the 1970s.[84] Through ownership of land and houses, *guthis* were able to generate capital (rent, harvesting taxes) that was invested in rituals and renovations of religious buildings, even shrines, *phalcās* or houses. One's membership to a guthi requests regular participation in festivals and also in contributing to financing or paying service to the activities. They hold land in order to extract land revenues to finance rituals and religious buildings:

> "In the last twenty years, with land values rocketing in the Kathmandu Valley, many quarrelsome and/or apathetic guthis have had their land registered by the tenant, or embezzled by one of their number, and rapidly sold. Much *guthi* land has been lost to the building of new roads or other projects, particularly the ring road, with scant compensation. On the other hand, cohesive *guthis* with active leaders have in some cases become very rich because land they owned happened to be in what had become an urban area: by selling it (from one quarter to one third of the selling price goes by law to the tenant) and banking the proceeds the *guthi* has ensured itself a regular income to hold its rituals and feasts."[85]

Toffin differentiates between death *guthis* (residential), *guthis* ensuring worship of a particular deity, lineage deity *guthis* (residential, strong regulation of members), caste council *guthis*[86], economic *guthis* (such as the oil pressers, Manandhars, or the farmers, Maharjans), and finally, youth club *guthis*[87]. Public utility *guthis*, so Gellner, "ensure upkeep of wayside shelters or temples, to keep water fountains (*hiti*) in good repair."[88] After the land reform act of 1964, rituals depended more and more on personal donations, says Nutan Sharma.[89] Newar heritage expert Rajendra Shakya adds that,

> "initially, *guthi* land was not allowed to be sold. Then the government introduced new laws allowing the *guthi* members to sell land by depositing a certain amount of money in the bank as a trust sum, so that the *guthi* could be operated from that money. This soared up the selling of guthi land (in the 1970s). It's difficult to say who is to blame: the new law paved the way to sell guthi lands, but then the people were also willing to sell the guthi lands. This is only about the private guthis. All the guthi lands belonging to the state guthi, for instance, the guthi lands of Matsyendranath or Kumari, were all brought under the jurisdiction of the guthi samsthan (association). The guthi samsthan also followed suit and started selling lands to bear the cost of all the rituals to be performed for the deities. This allowed rampant corruption in guthi samsthan and the heads of guthi samsthan became very rich within the period of their tenure. And a lot of guthi lands were sold."[90]

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84   Gellner, *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest*, 235.
85   Ibid., 234.
86   This form is relatively rare, found among the caste group of Chitrakars or Ranjitkars; see ibid., 237.
87   Ibid., 235.
88   Ibid., 236.
89   Christiane Brosius, Conversation with Nutan Sharma, March 2018.
90   Christiane Brosius, Email conversation with Rajendra Shakya, March 13, 2018.

The vibrancy of ritual practice or the state buildings thus shoulders on a semi-religious form of civil society that claims and commits to responsibility by ownership of land. This directly impacts the tangible and intangible fabric of the city.

Dutiful care-habitat

Belonging to a place and a social environment is strongly shaped by personal commitment and ownership (as well as dissociation and neglect). The willingness to invest in functioning spatial and social or religious relations and practices is often defined through the notion of duty as part of one's habitus and contribution to one's kin's wellbeing. In South Asia, such duties hold together ritual patterns and social groups, and are defined through the religio-spiritual concept of *seva* (voluntary service). Generally, *seva* would mean the service for a deity, and not expect reciprocity. Many duties vary according to social status and thus also age. In the context of this research on habitat and age-friendly cities, they can also be seen as the catalyst of social relations (mostly within a locality largely defined by caste or/and ethnic association) as well as a nourishing quality of care towards particular places. Thereby, care for place must not be confused with caring for a litter-free space, there are many paradoxes with respect to understanding the acceptance of material dirt in streets while much is invested in beautifying temples, statues or even wayside shrines. This observation stresses the need to rethink public space, shared ownership and participation in South Asia along the lines of a more diverse pattern of belonging and place-making.

The importance attributed to serving larger than individual aspirations is expressed in a group discussion with members of a Maharjan locality next to an old Buddhist monastery and a *phalcā* used for *bhajans*, both badly damaged by the earthquake of 2015. While the situation had already been vulnerable before the disaster, the aftermath brought to the fore heightened effects of rupture and distress. The *bhajan* group as a solidaric agent served as moment of resilience after the crisis, and in the light of rapid urban transformation (ill. 10). In November 2015, we learnt that the young generation had no major interest in continuing the practice of their fathers and grandfathers, and the impulse of the older members of the community to hand the traditions down to the younger generation and to inspire them to invest and serve, also in order to stabilize their own community's status. As P.L. Maharjan, aged 78, says:

> "The youngsters are not interested and they don't try to learn. Only the older men are doing it. Take me, for instance, I could not attend yesterday's performance because I have asthma and it's really cold. So, if we keep it (*bhajan*) alive, people from the community will recognize us as *bhajan* performers and good people. If we stop performing it, they

will not say that we are good. They will go on to say, 'It used to be performed so well in the past, but they have stopped doing it now.' With the display of the photos, others will also come to learn *bhajan* to have their photos on the wall too. That may happen."[91]

The photos he refers to were taken in the context of the curated walk for the international PhotoKathmandu festival in November 2015, for which portraits of the bhajan players were taken and mounted onto lightboxes, then fixed onto the walls of the dilapidated 'bhajan phalcā'. The photos, along with recordings from the bhajans previously played, were to remind of the practice-on-hold. That this had become part of an international festival became a source of pride for many neighbors. Status and practice are closely connected. There are several terms for elderly persons, besides the hardly used 'senior citizen'. There is the thakali (old member), then there is āju[92] and aji, for men and women respectively. These terms also relate an older person to his/her environment and define the relation of caretaking and investing, for instance, in helping to renovate a monastery or temple. Gellner describes that a Buddhist monastery can be regarded as a kind of guthi, "duties are determined in rotation through lineages (kawah)"[93], not through individuals but the unit of membership is the household. Old people relate to the quarter, but also to individual sites in terms of looking after the renovations. But some people also look after the handing down of traditions such as particular songs. As J. R. Bajracharya, aged 75 and a goldsmith from Ha:bahal, a major Buddhist monastic order, says:

Illustration 10

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91   Brosius and Shakya, Interview with P.L. Maharjan.
92   Senior/elder of the *bahāl*. Mostly in major *bahāls*, there are ten ājus locally known as Daspāramitā Āju. When one of them passes away, the āju next in line will replace him while a new āju is inducted as the tenth *āju*. The induction of āju is done based on the seniority in terms of age.
93   Gellner, *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest*, 248.

"These days, *caryāgeet*[94] is on the verge of extinction. I am teaching *caryāgeet* to others. I have been involved in various *pujas* of the (*bahāl*) for the past 34–35 years. We don't have people who can sing *caryāgeet*. You can say that I am the only one who can. […] One person who could sing them was Surya Man Bajracharya. But he passed away. If I teach them while I'm still alive they will learn. Otherwise it will be lost forever. There are many pujas that require such songs."[95]

His 'students' are other elderly persons (ājus[96]) from the bahāl. In 2015, B. Awale (aged 78), had already held the responsibility in the guthi of performing the puja of the digudya[97] for a decade. The duties change according to a person's hierarchy of ājus. There is a linear ranking of old persons in a guthi that can be made up of more than twenty 'oldest' male members in a community. T.M. Awale, for instance (aged 77), is 'climbing the status ladder' and is proud to announce that soon he will be nāya: luigu.[98] Ha:bahal has almost three hundred members; of these, there are eleven *thakali ājus*, most of them above seventy years. Goldsmith S.R. Bajracharya (74) takes up the sixth position in the ranking:

"The first *āju* carries out all the *pujas*. The second *āju* helps him as *jaemāṃ* (sponsor of *puja*, in this case the second āju acts as the sponsor for the collective *puja* of the *bahāl*, as the presence of a sponsor is necessary in such *pujas*). The third *āju* looks after the annual income of paddy. As the fourth and the fifth *ājus* are not well these days, I am looking after all the accounts, along with funeral guthi, and other guthis."[99]

Thus, there is a very elaborate pattern of tasks and duties that give the elderly persons a standing and possibilities to participate. It also defines them in the context of their social and built habitat and turns them into care-takers of urban regeneration. But Bajracharya also indicates entrepreneurship:

"These days, the tenants do not pay the paddy anymore. We still have some lands of the *bahāl*. We sold a plot […] to build the building from where the Sunrise Bank is operating now. We didn't have sufficient money so we took some loan from the Sunrise Bank itself to build the building. We still have some amount to pay the bank. And we get rents from the building too."[100]

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94   *Caryāgeet* is a Sanskrit term. Locally, Newars call it *cacāmye*. The term denotes secretive songs sung at special esoteric *puja* at *āgaṃ*, the *puja* room with esoteric deities at any *vihar* or home.
95   Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with J. R. Bajracharya, December 2014.
96   Senior/elder of the *bahāls*. Mostly in major *bahāls*, there are 10 ājus locally known as Daspāramitā Āju. When one of them passes away, the āju next in line will replace him.
97   The lineage deity.
98   The ritual of inducting a senior as the chief of any *guthi*; Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with T. M. Awale, December 2015.
99   Shakya, Conversation with J. R. Bajracharya.
100 Ibid.

This allows for financing rituals and renovations, but also bears risks. A monastery like Ha:bahal conducts around thirty *pujas* at the site per year. Some are jointly organized by all *ājus*: "The senior most *āju* must perform all the *pujas*." Rajendra Shakya explains that there is more than ritual function to the activities of elderly men entitled *āju* in their neighborhood:

> "the getting together is also very important socially for these *ājus*. Along with the status of an *āju* comes respect in the society and, in most cases, the family too. Because the responsibilities of an *āju* usually pulls in his other family members too, who usually carry out ritual responsibilities. Some of them may take it as a burden but they do it; they may not like or want to do it, but they do it. And, more importantly, these extra engagements for the family members may also prevent maltreatment of the *āju*. Even a nuclear family of the *āju* will usually fulfill the responsibilities they inherit along with the induction of the elderly gentleman as an *āju*."[101]

This speaks of a certain form of social control since the obligation for family members for regular participation in rituals happens in a spatially densely woven neighborhood (most families share the same courtyard). This ensures that they pay attention to their status and relations. However, Shakya also stresses that most *ājus* are treated well at home. The moment an elderly person becomes an *āju*, he becomes a public figure, he escapes the confines of the home and gains more opportunities to socialize, also with members of younger generations.

This is an interesting phenomenon that finds no direct recognition in the WHO report for age-friendly cities, though here too, one learns that voluntary services by older people have become a central part of active ageing and age-friendly cities policies, as a means to keep them busy with a purpose. In this context, limited choice and access as to what one would like to engage in is often quoted as a challenge for these policies. Voluntary service is associated with civic participation in cities of the Global North. It is then applied to southern contexts too, but with little variation (and thus usually held in more affluent middle-class realms, and secular contexts). It sidelines the resource of voluntary service as a crucial aspect of religious everyday life, and it keeps people engaged and active, urging them to communicate and reflect the social ecology of their direct neighborhood.

Honoring old age and ritualizing death
There are different ways of paying respect to old age in Newar rituals, and preceeding death, there is a unique intergenerational ageing ritual among the Newars that marks the completion

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101 Christiane Brosius, Conversation with Rajendra Shakya, September 2015.

of a specific lifespan and a liminal, even risky moment transgressing to sanctification of the honored person. With the so-called *jya jamko* (or *janku*), an elderly person aged seventy-seven becomes a deity, and undergoes a set of rituals of appeasement.[102] The ritual must be initiated and conducted by the children and the most spectacular event is when a procession takes the celebrated persons on a palanquin or in a chariot, like a deity, through the old part of Patan, visiting important shrines and marking the city through the special ritual event.

But there are also attempts to introduce new rituals of honoring old age in Patan, through a more recent organization of the Senior Citizen society of Nepal. While ritual and old age are seen as activating resources, D.J. Sharma recalls that:

> "What we did was not a new thing. We only reformed the old tradition. We have the provision of jhimha thakāli[103]. […] But that is only limited to some bahāl or any guthi. What we did was we gathered senior citizens from all over Lalitpur. First we only took Newars, then we also included Brahmin/Chhetris. Then people from the village area also came. We did not categorize in terms of caste-based hierarchy."[104]

Less wealthy people, too, are sought to be included. G. M. Shrestha, another member of the senior citizen society states that the activities are decentralized so that even people who are not mobile can access meeting points. He sees that:

> "There has been a change in the way people view senior citizens these days. They take senior citizens as knowledgeable people. The recognition one gets is directly related to his contributions to society. So our rule is to be positive and make others positive too. This is just a part of a process. We used to have a lot of people sitting at public places (*phalcā*) and chatting. That has declined a lot. Gradually their economic level has gone up."[105]

This means that people with more wealth, for whom membership to class matters, might not find it appropriate any longer to spend time sitting in a *phalcā*.

Rituals of death are still of key importance, and one of the most important *guthis*, the *si-guthi*, is concerned with a guthi member's burial, ensures that the corpse is picked up by members of the

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102   Alexander von Rospatt, "Negotiating the Passage beyond a Full Span of Life. Old Age Rituals among the Newars," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2014): 104–129; see also Niels Gutschow and Axel Michaels, *Handling Death: The Dynamics of Death Rituals and Ancestor Rituals among the Newars of Bhaktapur, Nepal* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005).
103   The ten elders of any bahāl.
104   Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with D. J. Sharma, 2014.
105   Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with G. M. Shrestha, December 2014.

guthi and accompanied to the burning grounds. Normally, it is the oldest son who has to lighten the funeral pyre, but K.R. Joshi (aged 81) also says that, "If I get sick, we have hospitals; if I die, we have the cremation ground and *guthi* as well. So what do I need them (the sons who live abroad) for? We have to be able to bring changes to everything according to the time. If we don't introduce changes, it will never continue."[106] His friend Ram disagrees: "I don't think we need funeral *guthis* these days. Recently, I had my turn of organizing the *guthi*. It's not necessary anymore. Firstly, everyone is usually hospitalized these days. You can simply bring them from the hospital to the cremation ground." Kali adds:

> "The biggest defect in it is that they have not introduced any changes in the proceedings of the *guthi*. We are still going to the residence of the deceased, make *bier* there and take out the funeral procession. It's not feasible anymore. People have moved to new locations and it is not possible for the *guthi* to carry out the funeral process in the traditional manner."[107]

The adaptation now is that families are requested to bring the dead with a vehicle straight from the hospital. By now, hearses have been introduced too, making the presence of the company of community members who carry and accompany the body redundant. This comment also reflects the urban transformation, where densely woven networks are shifted by introduction of new institutions (hospitals, old-age homes) and preferences of younger generations, even the aged persons themselves. The shift of institutions, social relations and ritual practice is also mirrored in S. M. Joshi's reflection about modern old-age homes, of which there is barely a handful in Kathmandu valley:

> "I am talking about Newar society. They have such a rich culture that there is no need for *vṛddhāśrama* (old-age home). The sons and daughters spend so much money just to celebrate the *janku* of their parents. You know it, it's for the reputation. They put that chariot on their shoulders. In Kathmandu, they pull the chariot. But here in Patan, they put the chariot on the shoulder in such a way. They have a great respect. So there is no need for this *bṛddhāśrama*."[108]

Against this view, R.P. Joshi, the program organizer of the Lalitpur (Patan) Senior Citizen society, supports the promotion of old-age homes in the neighbourhood, even if families are still predominantly looking after the elderly people. The association of farmers (*jyapu samaj*) built an old-age home for members of their community in 2013. In 2017, they received financial support from the Indian government to make plans for a four storey senior citizen home, hosting 110 senior

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106 Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with K. R. Joshi, December 2014.

107 Ibid.

108 Christiane Brosius and Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with S. M. Joshi, March 2015.

citizens who have been abandoned or cannot be looked after by their families. The home is open to people regardless of their caste, sex, and economic status. The homepage of the jyapu samaj old-age home (*bridhashram bhavan*) announces: "With rapid urbanization and development, life of the senior citizens has been quite difficult and pitiful these days in Nepal."[109] As H.G. Dangol, member of the senior citizen society and over 60, says when asked whether he would live in an old-age home:

> "that's something to be thought about in the future. If the sons and daughters-in-law don't look after you, then the problem arises. I don't have such problems at the moment. There are many who don't look after the parents. For them, it is necessary. Another thing is, the view of the person who goes to live there – does he want to go there?"[110]

The need for old-age homes grows with increasing numbers of couples working, many of them abroad, thus being physically absent.[111] But in conversations it also became obvious that even if need be and people would opt for such an institution, many did not even know the term 'old-age home', or that, and if so, where it exists. As K.B. Maharjan (aged 70) says:

> "there are old-age homes, but not around here. All such reforms and managements are good. But the problem is: only the people with connections have access to them. I don't have any. Who shall I approach? Even if there are people in need of it here, where do we go to get information? Those who have connections make necessary arrangements for that, those who don't are left behind."[112]

This could be an issue taken up by stakeholders interested in the WHO age-friendly city report that defines communication and information as a right in an age-friendly city (WHO 2007: 60-2). There are civil organizations that look after the rights and interests of senior citizens. The existence of a wide range of associations – such as guthis, but also senior citizen societies or Rotary Clubs – shape an atmosphere of participation, and they must not even be played out against each other. One organization that particularly cares for a wider involvement of elderly persons maintaining the city's intangible heritage, is the Lalitpur Centre for Culture Conservation and Promotion (*Lalitpur Saṃskriti Samvardhan Kendra*) that was formed under the initiative of the Senior Citizen Society, Lalitpur[113]. As R.P. Joshi, the program organizer of the Lalitpur Senior Citizen society, explains:

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109   See http://oldagehome.jyapusamaj.org.np/background/, accessed on May 26, 2018.
110   Christiane Brosius, Conversation with H. G. Dangol, January 2015.
111   This article cannot look into situations outside the Kathmandu Valley where whole villages struggle with the fact that mostly younger and even elderly men work outside the country, leaving behind parents, wives, and children.
112   Christiane Brosius and Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with K.B. Maharjan, March 2015.
113   http://www.lalitpurculture.org/, accessed on April 1, 2018.

> "Our cultures are gradually dying. All of them – the dances and others as well. So, how do we stop it? I mean, stop the gradual death of cultures and, if possible, revive them. Hence, we formed the organization and we recently organized a program as well. This is a big issue, not an easy one to deal with. But still, we have to do it. We have just started and there are a lot to be done. It's been only 4–5 months since we launched it. I'm very busy due to my involvement in plenty of things. I'm also in the Rotary Club and the Heart Foundation."[114]

For him, the new and the old can easily cling together. He supports the existence of public places like *phalcā*, *bahāls* and *nani* and says that it is important because,

> "they sit and talk about all their feelings and it allows them to let it out. We need to have such platform for all the senior citizens. We need to make such groups; there should be a place for bhajans as well. That will make them unaware of old age. Though when they go home, it'll be back to the same. But still, it is very important. We have to preserve it. We have also started *bhajan* here."[115]

Bhajan gatherings are organized in the society's office, with men and women coming together for 2–3 hours on Saturdays: "We have to do such things. Not just that, it can be playing or studying as well. If such things continue, people will not realize the passing of time. These are the things that we should think about for all. Just giving them food is not enough. Food is for physical strength but we should also think about mental health as well."[116]

Against opinions that see old people as a burden to younger generations and even the state, I want to highlight voices raised across social strata that insist on perceiving elderly persons as an enriching and vibrant social and cultural resource for a city. A. Shrestha, Chief of the Social Welfare Division of Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan City Office tells research assistant Rajendra Shakya:

> "The senior citizens are a kind of challenge for the local (government and municipality) body. There are many target groups and the municipality has other responsibilities too. It is the responsibility of the government as well to honor the senior citizens. I feel that the government has failed to extract the knowledge for – and from – the senior citizens. Both the local and central government have failed to do that. Only they know our culture. We need attention and money from them – this will be crucial in the preservation of our culture. For that we need to introduce programs to motivate the elderly. We will also get old! If we don't leave behind the knowledge we have, it will be of no news. Only then the future generation will benefit. We have to record their knowledge in written form. So I

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114   Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with R.P. Joshi, December 2014.
115   Ibid.
116   Ibid.

suggest that the foreigners who do research on the senior citizens, they should also find out what the elderly people know, instead of just talking about their current situation."[117]

This implicit critique of studies that do not turn towards experiences and oral histories of ageing generations might be wind in the sails of reports such as the WHO report on age-friendly cities. They are certainly relevant for the agenda of *elderscapes* and environmental gerontology that try to push beyond policy-oriented, and deficit and problem-solving approaches. Such studies, to end with the same artist and her work on her grandmother's memories of the city, would allow for historical depth, for multitemporal and multispatial sensibility, as in the montage of Sheelasha that was still in the making as the article was finished: it shows the montage of a historical photograph of her grandmother's neighbourhood, including a *phalcā*, now encroached by shops, even paving the ground in front, with labels and consumer goods (ill. 11).

To conclude: Environmental gerontology as well as the concept of elderscapes allow a multiscalar and multitemporal approach to study and analysis of the experiences of elderly people in an urban habitat that is changing dramatically. Concepts such as the age-friendly city can enrich the discussion, even though these must also be critically examined as tools for urban planning and development, particularly in the Global South. In that sense, the concept can well be enriched through an ethnographic perspective that highlights in what important ways an understanding of urban transformation and of elderscapes reflect and respond to each other. One way of doing so is by exploring the 'urban code' of a neighbourhood (such as Old Patan) and see how familial, occupational, ritual and ownership aspects matter not only for urban regeneration but also for

Illustration 11

117   Rajendra Shakya, Conversation with A. Shrestha, February 2015.

conditions and notions of ageing. Here, changing patterns of migration, education, globalized lifestyle or political and civic life also need to be considered. This highly inter-relational and multi-scalar fabric of life in cities, and of ageing in cities, has often been sidelined in studies of urban ageing. Moreover, it receives a new dynamic if conducted in and from the so-called Global South, where demographic change and urban transformation take place and impact ageing more rapidly than, for instance, in the Global North. Old-age as urban caretaking – be it related to social or/and religious practice or cultural heritage, too, gains new meaning when alternative temporalities and forms of place-making must be recognized that complement, or even create tensions with, 'secular', developmentalist chronologies and notions of 'public' space. This article has tried to shed light on this habitat of practice, event and agency with a particular focus on the cosmopolitan and 'traditional' context of the old – yet modernizing – Newari city of Patan. It has thereby also uncovered the need for a morphology of dimensions such as 'age-friendly cities' with respect to 'regeneration' and 'modernity', temporality and mobility and belonging, highlighting the productive dimensions of 'peripheral' metropolitan environments such as Kathmandu Valley.

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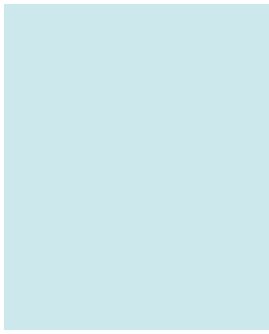Gutschow, Niels and Hermann Kreutzmann. *Mapping the Kathmandu Valley*. Kathmandu: Himal Books, 2013.

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