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Book Review

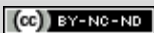
Review of Repetti, Marion, and Toni Calasanti.
Retirement Migration and Precarity in Later Life.
2023. Bristol: Policy Press. pp. 151. Price: \$140
(Hardcover)

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Retirement Migration and Precarity in Later Life is a welcome addition to understanding aging in a global context. As the authors and sociologists Marion Repetti and Toni Calasanti point out, in 2019, 11.8% of all international migrants were estimated to be 65 years or older, yet most policies to support seniors overlook their geographic mobility. This book is based on interviews with 79 older adults from Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States who permanently retired to either Costa Rica, Mexico, or Spain. As such, the book contributes to a growing stream of research on retirement migration, otherwise known as lifestyle migration, a scholarship which provides a welcome corrective to our typical view of transnational migration as the domain of young people pursuing economic ends or safety. As Repetti and Calasanti put it, “the classic distinction in the literature between younger ‘economic’ migrants and ‘older leisure-lifestyle/amenity-seeking’ retirement migrants is misleading” (121). The scholarship on retirement migration also explicitly connects internal migration (as in American seniors’ migration to the Sunbelt) to international migration, whereas most scholarship on transnational migration ignores antecedent, ongoing, and much larger flows of migration internal to nation-states.

The book’s main argument is that retirement migrants experience multiple dimensions of precarity, in contrast to the prevailing view that retirement migrants are a privileged group of migrants moving from the Global North to the Global South for pleasure and leisure, like tourists. Repetti and Calasanti provide an excellent overview of the literature in Chapter Two. Precarity has been noticed in the scholarship on retirement migrants, particularly among women, for example, the work of Liesl Gambold (2013). Overall, I agree with Repetti and Calasanti that seniors’ vulnerability has not been emphasized in the retirement migration literature.

The dimensions of precarity that Repetti and Calasanti examine are ageism, finances, social inclusion, health, and assistance with daily activities. These forms of precarity are dynamic, changing with reforms in welfare state policies or with the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. They usefully differentiate between long-term care and medical care as comprising different dynamics and concerns, giving each its own chapter in chapters six and seven respectively.

Ageism was the form of precarity that surprised the authors, and it was not originally part of their research. Although ageism did not directly induce their change of residence, migrants mentioned relief from ageism as a benefit of their relocation. The authors rightly raise the question of whether retirement migrants were not subjected to ageism because of their privileged status as migrants from the Global

North prevails over their age status. However, they are not able to answer this intriguing question directly through their research.

Interestingly, the authors found, among their interviewees, several early retirees who had lost their jobs or saw a decline in health in their 50s resulting in retiring earlier than expected in comparison to the standard life course. These early retirees were in a more precarious situation, receiving a reduced benefit due to taking their pension early or not being able to access healthcare benefits available to older adults (in the case of Medicare for U.S. citizens). As other research has shown, single, older women expressed the greatest financial vulnerability. In the Conclusion, the authors also raise the question of whether their focus on those who moved permanently resulted in their finding a greater degree of precarity, as those who retained multiple residences, including a residence in their home countries, may have been wealthier.

Repetti and Calasanti have a relatively superficial analysis of retirement migrants' "global privileges," which they attribute somewhat vaguely to "global power relations rooted in postcolonial structures" (92) without laying out what these exactly are. They discuss the tendency of retirement migrants to "exoticize local populations, take for granted their privileges over the latter, underpay them for their services, and acquire land at prices that are affordable for them but inaccessible to the local population" (92). For instance, retirement migrants could afford to purchase domestic services that help with daily activities. In addition, they often flew under the radar in terms of local regulations, such as not registering their residence or car and not paying taxes in the host country. Even so, the migrants considered themselves to be benefitting the local economy through spending money and hiring domestic servants. Some of the weakness of this structural analysis derives from interviewing only retirement migrants, rather than trying to understand the impact of retirement migration on the host community, as Matthew Hayes (2018) trenchantly does in Cuenca, Ecuador. The book provides no reflection on how retirement migration connects to the Marxist concept of surplus population developed in relation to labor migration and the location of the costs of the reproduction of the labor force (Meillassoux 1972, Murray 1981) or an analysis of how retirement migration affects which countries globally are bearing the costs of elder care (Coldron and Ackers 2009).

The book's structural analysis is stronger in relation to the neoliberal restructuring of the welfare states from which retirement migrants originate. As the authors say, "retirees' decision to migrate can be seen to result from the incapacity of neoliberal welfare states to ensure a decent old age for all of their citizens" (42). They closely detail the degree to which different aspects of social protection are transnationally portable in each of the sending countries: from state pensions to public health insurance and citizenship and residency requirements. They examine how retirement migrants creatively navigate these state policies. Social protection policies thus function as regimes of mobility (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013), enforcing and thwarting both mobility and stasis among older adults.

From an anthropological perspective, the book is slim on contextual detail, relying primarily on interviews. I would have liked to have learned more about the communities chosen by older adults, the migrants' economic and social relations with one another and locals, the mythologies and narratives they share among themselves, and their impact on the local economy and landscape. The level of depth is no doubt the result of the book's breadth, in drawing on interviews in multiple towns in three host and three sending countries. Thankfully, little attempt at comparison across these contexts is made. Instead, the multiple contexts are folded into the analysis of different forms of precarity, a framing that makes sense and which reads quite smoothly. The writing is generally clear, although there are some repetitions between chapters, as if the authors intended each chapter to stand on its own.

The book primarily contributes to migration studies. For anthropologists of aging, it raises important questions about how social class differences and other inequalities like gender affect the experience of aging, whether global privilege (or other forms of privilege) might protect against ageism, and how inequality and mobility are shaped dynamically by fragile and eroding welfare states, affecting older adults' wellbeing in multiple ways.

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