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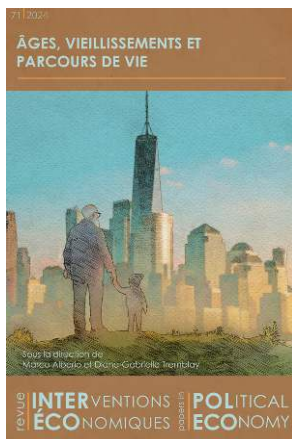
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Âges, vieillissements et parcours de vie

Marco Alberio et Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay (dir.)

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## Marion Repetti et Toni Calasanti, (2023). *Retirement Migration and Precarity in Later Life*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2023, 151 pages.

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- 1 The trend of migratory flows has traditionally been characterized by a significant movement of young people leaving poorer countries for richer ones, a typical flow from countries of the Global South to the Global North. However, a closer analysis of the diverse aspects of migration reveals that there is a segment of the elderly population who are migrants and, more than that, experience migration later in life. Among these groups are the elderly – typically retirees – who decide to leave wealthy central countries to move to less developed countries than those where they were born. This phenomenon, known as retirement migration, is the subject of the book "*Retirement Migration and Precarity in Later Life*" by Marion Repetti and Toni Calasanti. Intrigued by the phenomenon that seems to "contradict" global trends, the authors question what motivates retirees to leave affluent nations such as the United States, England, and Switzerland to relocate to economically less prosperous countries like Spain, Mexico, and Costa Rica. Contrary to the notion often discussed in existing literature that this phenomenon serves merely as an avenue to further indulge in privileges, the authors examine the dimensions of precarity and uncertainty accompanying the migration decisions of this demographic.
- 2 In the initial two introductory chapters, Marion Repetti and Toni Calasanti embrace the concepts of the Global North and Global South to scrutinize the migration phenomenon, thereby departing from conventional Western geographical boundaries and methodological nationalism (Anderson, 2019). The Global North comprises economically affluent regions characterized by substantial capital accumulation, advanced technologies, and significant international political influence, while the Global South is typified by regions with underdeveloped economies, low living costs, inexpensive labour, and limited international political influence. By using these

concepts, the authors aim to highlight that, just as these dynamics of power, hierarchy, and inequality are constructed in these regions, the migration flows of the elderly also reinforce these dynamics.

- 3 Two distinct trends characterize this migration phenomenon: one involves privileged retirees moving for former colonies, while the other, the more recent trend involves workers impacted by neoliberal policies. The authors focus their research on this latter type of migration, which entails retirees from the Global North relocating to less developed nations to gain enhanced access to healthcare, housing, food, and leisure opportunities. Despite facing precarity in their countries of origin, the authors delve into the complexity of the phenomenon in the initial chapters: while these immigrants are subject to austere social and economic policies at home, they leverage their Global North privileges to pursue improved lives in Global South destinations.
- 4 Looking at five dimensions of precariousness - financial and labour market insecurity; lack of assistance in welfare state policies; age-related social status precariousness; health-related precariousness; and precariousness related to access to necessary assistance - in this book, the author interconnects aging, ageism, socioeconomic structure, social status, health status and assistance regimes. In this context, precarity emerges as a crucial concept, encapsulating the array of risks and uncertainties stemming from the challenge of accessing adequate resources for personal well-being. As the authors articulate, precarity encompasses both a structural dimension, - shaped by neoliberalism, globalization, and the volatile labour market -, and a social dimension, marked by the anxiety and uncertainty generated by these conditions.
- 5 In the third chapter, it is highlighted the dichotomous phenomenon among the elderly in central-economy countries: having experienced the advance of social welfare policies in their youth and now having to deal with the decline of these policies, thus preventing them from enjoying the benefits promised for the future.
- 6 The historical examination of social welfare policies in the studied countries (England, USA, and Switzerland) reveals the evolution of welfare state measures and the subsequent erosion of state support, particularly concerning pensions and healthcare. The emergence of neoliberal principles during the 1980s intensified the transfer of responsibility to individuals, a process that contributed to a sense of precariousness and vulnerability. Despite differences between countries, what becomes evident is that retirement systems perpetuate inequalities and precarity by either linking retirement benefits to previous income or requiring high healthcare costs. In other words, the economic precarity already felt earlier in life may worsen in retirement, resulting in significant levels of poverty among the elderly, especially among women.
- 7 Furthermore, the causes of precarity also arise from other social transformations: the new configurations of the labour market and contemporary family formations. Transitioning to the empirical phase of the research in Chapter Four, the authors delve into the life narratives of individuals who relocated to Spain, Costa Rica, and Mexico primarily due to challenges faced in the labour market. These challenges, coupled with factors such as age, socioeconomic status, gender, and personal life events, contribute to circumstances of uncertainty in their countries of origin.
- 8 In the analysis, two distinct groups emerge those who retired before the official age and those who retired at the appropriate age. The authors emphasize that early retirement occurred due to economic instability, including prolonged unemployment,

precarious jobs, low wages, ageism, and health problems. Among those who retired at the correct age, it was perceived that the decision to migrate was also related to the impossibility of maintaining primary expenses in the home country. For both groups, migration became a solution in the face of the inability to continue working or maintain a stable standard of living.

- 9 Gender emerges as a crucial category in this chapter, highlighting both the higher risk of poverty faced by women and the more precarious conditions they experience in retirement compared to men. Many women retire early due to a lack of job opportunities in an unstable and discriminatory labour market. Their accounts reveal that economic precarity results from poorly paid part-time jobs combined with family responsibilities or divorce settlements that leave them financially vulnerable.
- 10 Looking at the lives of the interviewees in destination countries, it is evident that precarity does not necessarily cease. Retired immigrants who move abroad to reduce basic expenses (such as healthcare, food, housing, and public services) continue to face risks of returning to instability. By pointing to a dynamic phenomenon of precarity, the authors demonstrate that institutional and political changes (such as Brexit), and potential economic and social changes, may minimally affect the stability built by these individuals. In other words, migration as a solution proves to be only a palliative, considering that the living conditions of these individuals may change again depending on the social and economic dynamics that may arise. These transformations in institutional dynamics, both in destination countries and countries of origin, can affect relative stability, also affecting future projections.
- 11 Continuing with the discussion on career paths, aging emerges as an issue through all the narratives. The experience of aging within their respective contexts significantly diminished individuals' capacity to secure or maintain employment, even among those in the most favourable professional positions in terms of remuneration. The authors underline that the marginalization of older individuals in society, particularly within an unstable and flexible job market, exacerbates their prospects for well-being.
- 12 One of the distinctive features of this book is to present that precarity, often spoken of to characterize the contemporary lives of the younger generation, is also a significant element for older individuals and has age discrimination as its central point. Chapter Five addresses ageism in various spheres, including retirement policies and healthcare, the labour market, and interpersonal relationships. It is in this chapter that the authors analyze the repercussions of the aging process of these individuals based on their experiences and perceptions of ageism both in the country of origin and in the destination country. In a society centred on work as the primary means of social integration, these retirees encounter dynamics that predispose them to social exclusion, irrespective of their social class. Perceived as burdens on society, older individuals endure the consequences of being marginalized, not seen as autonomous, valuable contributors, and, most importantly, as subjects of rights. Gender assumes a crucial role in these dynamics: the overlapping oppressions coming from age and gender leads many women to feel invisible within their native countries, resulting in their diminished value across various spheres of life. The intersection between age and gender makes them unwanted and marginalized during aging, and migration, in this context, offers an experience in which they feel more included and visible.
- 13 The chapter demonstrates that seeking a new place to live outside one's home country also becomes a mechanism for confronting negative experiences (experienced or

anticipated) of ageism. Not that negative experiences related to age are motivations for immigration, but the different way they are treated in the new destination emerged as a positive element for their well-being. The experiences of the group analyzed in this book show that migration to countries in the Global South brings a sense of greater recognition, value, and autonomy. Respondents reported that intergenerational relationships were different from their past experiences: they felt treated with more respect and visibility.

- 14 When attempting to elucidate this phenomenon, the interviewees attributed it to cultural disparities between their countries of origin and their destinations. Natives are perceived as kinder and more respectful towards the elderly, providing greater well-being and a sense of belonging. It is crucial to note that the positive experiences of the elderly in their new countries do not eliminate the existence of ageism in these places. On the contrary, they argue that being perceived as privileged by developed and wealthy nations grants migrant seniors a distinct "pass" compared to native seniors. The differential treatment they receive does not arise from cultural differences but rather from disparities between the Global North and South. By migrating to these destinations, retirees not only take advantage of local resources, low cost of living, affordable incomes, and cheap labour but also benefit from the social relations established between the Global North and South over time.
- 15 Instead of just portraying the precarious situation of the elderly, the authors contextualize these experiences from a post-colonial perspective. The relationship between central and peripheral locations complexifies the understanding of precariousness and its relationship with geopolitical dynamics. In chapter six, the authors illustrate how precariousness coexists with privilege, as the prospect of a stable life in a new destination and a favourable social status are rooted in global social inequalities and the enduring legacy of colonialism. The author highlights three key elements of the privileges enjoyed by these individuals, stemming from unequal global relations: transnationalism (the ability to cross borders with ease and regularity); the socioeconomic positions of the interviewees about natives (exploiting the cheap local labour market and the cost of living related to expenses such as rent); and how they are treated in the destination country (the feeling of inclusion stemming from an idealization of natives, portraying them as more compassionate, especially women seen as natural caregivers). In essence, the integration experiences of these individuals also inform their perceptions of natives: it is through experiencing their privileges that they formulate their perspectives on the native population. Although the interviewees partially recognize their privileges, they believe they are helping the natives by seeking better economic and social conditions in their territories. The chapter also raises questions about ageism in the destination societies of elderly migrants, questioning whether they are genuinely less ageist or merely more submissive to colonial power. It can be said that looking at the construction of colonial relations, the idealization of natives is a way to ensure power and separate the "self" from the "other".
- 16 Another innovation of this book is that it separately addresses the idea of assistance and health. In chapter seven, the authors revisit the main element concerning the life precariousness of these individuals and the impact of ageism, now related to access to healthcare and caregiving services. By directly addressing the relationship between age, caregiving, and health, the authors show how the way older people are treated in healthcare systems points to a social construction where older people are devalued

compared to younger ones. Even those who do not need direct medical care may require regular support due to reduced mobility, cognitive decline, or other specific needs associated with aging. Typically, this type of assistance is not necessarily considered healthcare or medical assistance by public policies, making these policies complicit in neglect, and reproducing institutionalized ageism. In the exposition of this chapter, the devaluation of the health and healthcare of older individuals becomes another factor of precariousness, making migration a means of dealing with this reality. The comparison between the systems of countries demonstrates that destination countries are seen as better systems with lower costs. The type of assistance provided and the cost to be paid would be more advantageous for these immigrants. In addition, the possibility of low-cost daycare is an attractive point of view for retired immigrants.

- 17 However, when the interviewees indicate a differentiated treatment with more kindness and care, the authors draw attention to the possibility that this treatment - different from what they had in the country of origin - stems from the "economic and ethnic" privileges (p. 108) of these individuals. Gender disparities are particularly notable in these contexts, with women from the Global South often depicted as an underpaid and stereotyped workforce, while simultaneously being idealized as "perfect caregivers." When portraying the destination country as a "care paradise" (p. 113), the interviewees inadvertently perpetuate stereotypical perceptions of natives, reinforcing power dynamics and inequality through their migratory experiences.
- 18 In the concluding chapter, Reppeti and Calasanti condense the primary findings and reflections of their research, highlighting a "neo-liberalization" (p.119) of life. They underscore the dwindling state support for care and healthcare, the prevalence of a volatile and uncertain market, pension schemes with minimal state intervention, and the escalating individual burden of societal issues. Adopting a purely economic mindset across institutions, the state, and different spheres of life has led to the elderly being increasingly perceived as burdensome. Migration therefore becomes an individual strategy for a problem that, as we have seen, is social. It is important to note, however, that despite addressing issues of class and gender in their analyses, little is said about the ethnic-racial question. After all, racism is one of the cornerstones of coloniality and new relations of coloniality. Hence, acknowledging the privilege of "gringos" immigrants also entails recognizing the processes of racialization unfolding between host countries and countries of origin.
- 19 In the examples provided in the book, precarity and privilege are intricately woven into the same narrative: what may appear contradictory manifests as a precondition for the experiences of immigrants. The imperative to flee precarious conditions in the Global North compels them to relocate to even more vulnerable locales, a trajectory facilitated by the inherent privilege these individuals hold in comparison to the native population of the destination country. Migrants from the North to the South make use of global power relations rooted in post-colonial structures to reinforce their socio-economic status at the expense of the local population. The authors ultimately invite us to consider how the concept of precarity is fundamental to understanding human life, bearing in mind that this condition affects various contexts and different stages of life. Moreover, the book prompts us to question the value of human life today in a context of constant and intense devaluation.

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