Book Review

Review of Joy, Meghan. *The Right to an Age-Friendly City*: *Redistribution, Recognition, and Senior Citizen Rights in Urban Space.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's. 2020. Price: $37.50 (Paperback); e-Book (coming soon).

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In 2007, the World Health Organization introduced its age-friendly cities (AFC) framework as a resource for cities as they deal with the "challenge" of an aging population (WHO 2007, 3). The goal is to create accessible urban environments and programs for seniors so that they can remain active members of their communities. Advocates focus on the benefits of counter framing an aging population as an economic burden. A positive framing of aging instead highlights that, with the right supports, seniors can continue to be independent and active members of their communities. Yet researchers have argued that the impact of AFC policy on the lives of seniors has been limited (Buffel and Phillipson 2016). In the context of Toronto's age-friendly policy, Meghan Joy addresses why and how this is so in *The Right to an Age-Friendly City*.

Joy presents a case study of the Toronto Seniors Strategy, the governing body of the city's age-friendly policy. The author defines this policy as a "holistic, place-based approach claiming to tackle ageism by improving social, physical, and institutional environments based on the needs of senior citizens and their non-profit representatives" (162). The book begins by explaining the inception of the Toronto Senior Strategy and the policy actors involved in the city's age-friendly landscape within the themes of health, transportation, housing, recreation, and social planning. It is dizzying to follow the institutional organization of age-friendly policy. This is not because the author does not do well in sketching the institutional landscape but because of the organizational expanse and complexity of the policy apparatus. As Joy notes, "there's scarcely a realm of local government responsibility that is not relevant to the production of an age-friendly environment" (24).

The analysis and the corresponding structure of the book follow the three pillars of Engin Isin's (2008) "right to the city" framework. The first pillar is "Redistribution" which addresses the needs and wants of different target groups of urban residents. The goal of redistribution is universal inclusion, which is notably achieved by "'positive discrimination' for certain groups so that they can achieve the same outcomes as others" (16). "Recognition" speaks to the rights of urban residents to identify, through participatory decision-making, the inequities that redistribution will address. Yet none of this can be achieved without local government and other policy actors having adequate financial and legal capacity to see it through. This, the third pillar, Isin calls the "Rights *of* the City," and it is exactly this level on which Joy's research focuses. If neoliberal austerity is a limiting factor in effective AFC policy, Joy posits that by studying how AFCs work through this "right to the city" framework, we might in turn better

understand "how neoliberalism actually works" (Joy 2021, 6). Joy explores this through various actors involved in the creation and implementation of Toronto's age-friendly policy. Her methodology consists of interviews with councilors, city staff, non-profit staff, politicians from federal and provincial governments, and senior citizens involved with the Toronto Seniors Forum, a branch of the Toronto Senior Strategy that works to ensure that voices of seniors are heard.

The author finds in AFC policy and local governance what Newman in 2014 deemed a "landscape of antagonism" (quoted in Joy 2020, 14): policy actors, whether institutional or individual within AFC policy hold disparate ideas and challenge opposing political approaches (14). Joy's participants identified differences between non-profit and governmental approaches and navigated the tensions between their own ideas and the ideological and financial constraints of their institutions. For example, the city staff involved in increasing senior accessibility on transit are frustrated that their work is "measured…on 'short-term cost effectiveness' rather than 'efficiency and equity'" (167). This can be seen in the 2018 version of the Toronto Seniors Strategy which, rather than restructure city transit to increase accessibility to seniors, focuses on training seniors on how to use transit and on campaigns to encourage a "culture of civility" towards seniors (167). Interesting, too, is how Joy's participants grapple with the tension between combatting ageism and the 'active aging' framework of AFCs. Indeed, Joy shows how the goal of universal accessibility both obfuscates and moralizes the vulnerability of seniors, supporting her doubts on the claim that the Toronto Seniors Strategy promotes a positive view of aging and effectively combats ageism.

Joy is a political scientist and does not introduce her interview participants beyond their policy roles, such as 'academic' or 'representative of an agency.' Coming from an anthropological background, I was left wanting to know more about these individuals and what constitutes their experience of and relationship to this work. Further, I could not help but wonder how seniors who are served by the numerous programs implemented by the Toronto Seniors Strategy feel themselves about the efficacy of these programs. Still, Joy's work would be instructive for anyone researching age-friendly cities in general, and the lives of seniors in Toronto in particular, as it provides extensive groundwork for anthropological research into the mechanisms of age-friendly policy and concretely elicits questions as to how this policy affects the lived experiences of people (Tate 2020). Further, the book's conclusions reflect many current anthropological conversations, such as the failure of positive aging frameworks to address ageism in a meaningful way (Calasanti and King 2019). Practically, Joy warns that policies like AFC that emphasize supporting and increasing independence may result in funding cuts to long-term care, despite the COVID-19 pandemic revealing the urgency of the exact opposite.

Creating a city that can support seniors and their diverse needs shows itself by all accounts in this book as an immense task. Furthermore, 'age-friendly policy' is problematized as an effective approach to reach this goal. Still, this approach to urban aging has taken off globally; to date there are 1329 cities and communities in 51 countries that have adopted local policies following the AFC framework (WHO 2021). Understanding how it works, and why it doesn't, is crucial if we take seriously the ambition to achieve a just and equitable city for urban citizens aging across the life course.

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