

access to a number of services, which prevents them from integrating into society.

The third section explores age-friendly residential areas as an important element in creating friendly communities for all ages. This is based on the examples of development projects in rural areas of Arizona and Japan, such as a Japanese coffee shop that is run by older local residents, providing a comfortable environment for other older residents.

The fourth section of the book shifts the focus from urban realities to the countryside and small towns. It presents studies conducted on the East Coast of the USA and rural Japan, which examine the possibility of revitalising struggling communities. In this section, the authors conclude that providing an aging rural population with jobs and developing intergenerational networks in rural areas will make staying and working in rural areas more desirable for younger residents.

When analysing the strengths and weaknesses of this volume, it should be noted that it offers the reader an excellent opportunity for a critical look at changes, successes and models in creating age-friendly communities, as well as more practical examples of applying such knowledge to reach this goal. One of the book's strong points is the variety of academic perspectives it provides. The authors of the volume seek to reject reductionism as the dominant paradigm in the study of aging by considering the issue from a number of different scientific points of view.

The book gradually shifts its focus from separate stories and accounts of individual people to studying the complex problems and challenges associated with the construction and design of age-friendly communities across the globe. However, one of the publication's major shortcomings is its lack of a clear conceptualisation of the topic. The authors fail to develop their initial attempts at considering aging and the role of environment in the context

of aging in different communities of different countries and conceptualising the idea of the 'environment' or developing the life course theory that they discuss at the beginning of the work.

The book's chapters on practical applications and case study leave no room for delving deeper into the theoretical basis of the work. Readers do not have an opportunity to analyse aging and comfortable environments from the standpoint of life course theory or in terms of ever-changing ideas and definitions behind the book's central approaches and concepts, such as environment and community, which are used repeatedly throughout the volume.

In addition, also worth criticising is the concept of life course, which has only been mentioned in the volume, but not used in any capacity. Many issues, such as intergenerational cooperation in cities and rural areas and the role of age-friendly communities could be assessed from the life course point of view, presenting a more practical look at life course theory and validating the approach and its role in practical studies in sociology, gerontology and urban planning.

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Verdery, Katherine. 2018. *My life as a spy: investigations in a secret police file*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 344 pp. Pb.: US\$28.95. ISBN: 978-0-8223-7066-6.

A decade after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Law 187/1999 granted Romanian citizens access to files on them compiled by the communist secret police, the *Securitate*.

As a NATO citizen and a primary target of state surveillance, Katherine Verdery requested access to the dossiers on her that had been assembled during her research in the Socialist Republic of Romania. Totalling 2,781 pages, her file contains reports from a whopping 70 informers, from casual acquaintances to intimate friends. Unlike other citizens seeking access to their file, Verdery did so in a dual capacity: as a legal 'victim' of state surveillance and as a researcher investigating the repression of foreign scholars during the Cold War. In *My life as a spy*, Verdery reviews the *Securitate's* meticulous accounts of her activities, officer and informer reports, and detailed records of her correspondence. She complements this archival research with excerpts from her field notes from the 1970s and 1980s, and with recent interviews with some of the informers featured in her file and even some *Securitate* officers, *securiști*. Emerging from these multiple layers of data, the volume constitutes a self-labelled 'hybrid sort of work' (p. 28) which contributes to the emerging field of secret police studies but is set apart by the reflexive and humble tone running through it.

Tracing nearly 40 months of research between 1973 and 1988, Verdery builds an intimate and detailed account of secrecy, trust and surveillance in communist Romania. Following an unfortunate foray near a military base, her first surveillance file was opened in 1974. In turn, her collection of what the *securiști* termed 'socio-political information' in the village of Aurel Vlaicu rendered her a military spy rather than doctoral student. The *Securitate's* suspicions of military spying were, however, dropped only a year later. By far the largest part of her file coincides with Verdery's return to Romania in 1984 for a year's research on the formation of national ideology. Mirroring Ceausescu's increasingly paranoid surveillance regime,

this year marked a shift in the *Securitate's* suspicions concerning Verdery – from the 'FOLCLORISTA' acquitted of all charges to 'VERA', a dangerous spy and agitator of the Hungarian minority in Cluj, known to conspire with vocal critics of the regime. Her surveillance file culminated in 1988 with the *securiști* preparing penal charges against 'VERA', foreseeing her arrest. Luckily, Verdery left Romania before the *Securitate's* plans came to fruition.

Alongside this captivating account of her research, Verdery builds an ethnographic theorisation of surveillance expanding outside the confines of her *Securitate* file. She instead documents the inherent sociality, multiple facets and blurred boundaries of spying. During her time in Aurel Vlaicu, she describes how her interlocutors actively spied on her through gossip, rumour and ultimately through informer reports to the *Securitate*. The self-evident notion of informer as perpetrator is, however, turned on its head when one of Verdery's interlocutors reflects on the harm sustained by interacting with the anthropologist. In return, Verdery attests the blurred boundaries of the various roles involved in spying: the informer, the target and the officer. Rather than clear-cut positions, each 'function' is located within the circumstances of the person's life, their family, employment and the current political milieu. Verdery also applies this social and contextual lens to the unidimensional 'evil' portrayal of the *Securitate* and its officers. Without refuting the harm caused by the secret police, she theorises the *Securitate* as thriving not merely because of its ability to perpetuate terror and fear, but owing to its manifold tactics to control social networks.

While her volume delivers these ethnographic reflections on spying, Verdery does not shy away from documenting the emotionally charged mission of reviewing her file. She reflects on the difficulty

of reconciling with her interlocutors' betrayal, the violation of the *Securitate's* incessant shadowing and the frustration with her mistakes as a budding ethnographer. Documenting her thought processes via field notes and reflections, Verdery marks the gradual change from highly personal responses to 'thinking about it as a researcher' (p. 189). In doing so, she questions the resemblances and distinctions between anthropology and spying. The 'constant effort to experience with our whole being' (p. 291) doubled by the unceasing reappraisal of

our experiences mark the key difference between the anthropologist and the spy. Through these personal yet generalisable observations, Verdery's memoir-cum-ethnography poses essential questions for novice and seasoned anthropologists alike. It encourages us to reflect on harm and responsibility, while also serving as a manifesto for ethnographic reflexivity and for the dedication to experience fieldwork with our whole being.

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