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Miriam Bernard and Thomas Scharf (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Ageing Societies*, Policy Press, Bristol, Avon, 2007, 200 pp., pbk £24.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 86134 890 6.

As Chris Phillipson notes in his forward, critical gerontology, with its roots in political economy, feminism and humanism, emphasises the relationship between economic policies and differential experiences of ageing. The organisation of modes of production, to appropriate that old chestnut, and the accompanying hierarchical ramifications of social class, gender and ethnicity, not to mention social policy considerations, usher individuals toward either an advantaged or disadvantaged old age. The foregoing are not fuzzy intangibles but part of the stock of social and human capital that differentiate life's chances. Phillipson observes that over recent decades a subtle shift has occurred as scholars have alloyed their structural perspective by giving voice to older persons, inviting them into the passionate dialogue, and enlisting their help in analysing the values underlying scholarly examinations of old age. Like any first-rate primer, *Critical Perspectives on Ageing Societies* recounts not just the history and genealogy of critical theory (nodding to that eminence grise, Peter Townsend, and to various mothers and fathers with their *bona fides* within the friar's lantern of political economy), alloyed by human rights and social justice appurtenances, but also enunciates applications and simultaneously provides glimpses into the future. Along the way, the contributors make clear that acknowledging the value basis of critical theory is not enough to ensure that sustainable conceptualisation will supplant 'broadsheet politicking'.

Many of the contributors to *Critical Perspectives on Ageing Societies* are familiar voices, what is arresting here is that they are near their best. Part I includes the editors, Holstein and Minkler, the sagacious Peter Townsend, and Robin Means. Holstein and Minkler have been on a decade-long campaign to bring critical thinking to the notion of 'successful ageing'. Here they remind the reader that evaluative mindsets can be masked by neutral-sounding terminology. They step beyond facile critiques, however, 'bringing elders back in' (Dennis Wrong lives!) and by adopting enough standpoint perspectivism to please Dorothy Smith.

Almost anything Peter Townsend writes ought to be required reading. What an empty place social gerontology will be when we no longer have his voice to correct, cajole and caution us to raise the bar without lowering our guard. The created dependency highlighted in his eloquent essay of nearly 30 years ago has been a touchstone. Here he contributes his insights into how globalisation of the marketplace is changing the face of dependency. My own take is that multi-nationals have gained leverage as well-intentioned but avowedly localised state policies have lost traction. Altruism is a tough sell if moral economies are driven by spreadsheet logic. Among Robin Means's points is that clean entitlement certification seemingly outranks addressing emerging needs, preserving dignity and quality of life.

In Part II, Ruth Ray asks social gerontologists to put themselves front and centre in their own research and examine their own reflexive stance. Next, Johnson, Rolph and Smith take the reader on a virtual tour back to the care facilities that Townsend visited in the late 1950s to see what transpired subsequent

to his research. I found the ethical issues discussed utterly captivating. In Chapter 8, Bytheway, Ward, Holland and Peace ask what roles researchers play in the distillation of their results. They wonder whether narrowing the focus excludes the very people experiencing the risk.

In the last and unfortunately abbreviated section, Moody along with Warnes and Phillips cast their gaze ahead. Moody is on his game, posing pertinent and insightful questions about social justice and just desserts. Joining the chorus, it would seem the globalised perspective on moral economy and deciding what is fair and just is fraught with ambiguity – Moody in prime form. Finally, Warnes and Phillips scrutinise the accumulated contents of the journal *Ageing & Society* to decipher who are the players, who are the power brokers, and who gets included or excluded from discussions of who is helping whom in old age. All those years ago when Malcolm Johnson launched *Ageing & Society* I expect he did not anticipate how very crucial the journal might become to the gerontological enterprise.

Despite being a series and anthology editor myself, I cannot distinguish whether editors or authors have provided the thrust to this finely-honed collection. Bernard and Scharf are to be lauded for bringing together an exemplary panel of scholars and have polished their collective contributions to good effect. Are all the significant contributors to critical theory present? Hardly, there simply is not enough room. Are the omissions fatal? Heavens no, there is ample food for thought already. Are some of the chapters anything less than stellar? I would be hard-pressed to identify any that could have been displaced by marquee players. I recommend *Critical Perspectives on Ageing Societies* to all scholars attuned to the need to attend to macro-level considerations of the ageing experience.

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Mary Marshall and Margaret-Anne Tibbs, *Social Work and People with Dementia: Partnerships, Practice and Persistence*, Policy Press, Bristol, Avon, 2006, 256 pp., pbk £17.99, ISBN 13: 978 186134 702 2.

In the United Kingdom social workers have a key role in assessing the support needs of people with dementia and arranging and reviewing services. Nevertheless, the profession has yet to engage fully with continuing developments in dementia-care research and practice. As the authors of this book acknowledge, in some settings social work with people with dementia and their carers is ‘a creative and responsive process’, while in others it ‘is limited to competent form filling’ (p. 2). Mary Marshall and Margaret-Anne Tibbs are broadly optimistic that the creative approach is on the ascendent; their purpose is to guide and encourage this trend. Social-work texts on dementia are still a rarity and this book is a substantially revised and updated edition of a work published in 1996. Given the rapid developments in dementia research and care, it also serves to update the more recent book, *Social Work and Dementia* (Tibbs 2001).

The opening chapters provide contextual information that sets the scene for optimism grounded in realism. Chapter 1 outlines the shift from the old culture of