

Reviews

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Philip B. Stafford (ed.), *Gray Areas: Ethnographic Encounters with Nursing Home Culture*, School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, New Mexico, and James Currey, Oxford, 2003, 317 pp., pbk \$24.95, ISBN 0 930618 30 1.

Residential care has been the subject of some of the best ethnographic work on the lives of older people. This is hardly surprising, since the defined, controlled and semi-public nature of the setting allows for observation and analysis to a degree that is not possible in relation to more ordinary and private day-to-day lives. As a result, we have a rich tradition of work that focuses on the lives of older people as they are lived out within residential settings. Life at home for a frail older person is, by contrast, much more hidden. Within this tradition, work by Jaber Gubrium and Haim Hazan has long been held in particular esteem, and this book presents a series of articles, gathered from an advanced research seminar that was inspired by their work.

As always with such collections, the chapters cover various subjects and approaches, but all are broadly united by their emphasis on ethnography and on the detailed processes of making meaning. Savishinsky, for example, explores the meanings of food in the institution and the ways in which it is entwined with issues of conflict and control. Vesperi presents a detailed analysis of a particular narration between a researcher and a resident, attending carefully to the subtleties of the interchange at a linguistic level. Stafford provides an interesting overview of past and current American work in the tradition. Central to the book is the perception of the nursing home as a contested site of meaning, a cultural space caught between the rival discourses of medicine, social care and day-to-day living. Here basic features of human existence such as food, the body, possessions, sexuality, sickness and dying become contested domains, open to rival interpretations, and subject to regimes of power. In such settings walking becomes ‘ambulation’, food ‘diet’, and eccentricities ‘behaviours’. Stafford’s and Henderson’s chapters are particularly good on these themes. Several chapters address the role of relatives within the nursing home, and Shield provides a fascinating analysis of the mutually wary relations that subsist between family members and nursing assistants. Chapters by Rowles and by High and Perkinson explore further dimensions of this difficult relationship. All in all, this is an excellent collection that expands our understanding of residential care and of the lives lived out under these regimes.

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Rajgopal Dhar Chakraborti, *The Greying of India: Population Ageing in the Context of Asia*, Sage, New Delhi, 2004, 467 pp., hbk \$54.95, ISBN 0 7619 9802 0.

The Greying of India is a timely reminder that population ageing has become one of the leading demographic issues in many developing countries, particularly in Asia. With the rapid decline of fertility and mortality, along with increased longevity at older ages, most Asian countries, especially in the South and East, have experienced a substantial increase in the proportion of older people in the population. For example, India has a rapidly growing share of the population aged 60 years and above (8 per cent in 1995 and 21 per cent in 2050), and among its neighbours in central South Asia, Kazakhstan and Sri Lanka have a higher percentage of older people, which reflects substantial declines in both fertility and mortality since the 1950s.

Using mainly secondary data, this book investigates the demographic and socio-economic characteristics and conditions of older people, and the relative role of fertility, mortality and migration in the determination of India's ageing population. It uses UN projections to investigate the future trends and patterns of ageing in India and other south-central Asian countries. The author provides a wide-ranging discussion of the implications of population ageing for socio-economic development programmes, health care, savings, investments, consumption patterns, work-force participation, migration and social security. The role of the family in supporting older people and the major policy options to overcome the challenges and risks faced by those who are frail are also extensively analysed.

The book has six chapters and most present a wide range of topics and theories pertaining to ageing. Each chapter provides sufficient data and extensive literature to understand the ageing phenomenon, particularly in eastern and south-central Asia with special reference to India. Chapter 1 provides a broad overview of ageing in Asia. In Chapter 2, which delves into the processes that cause population ageing, the author argues that although population ageing is related to changes in both fertility and mortality, fertility is the dominant factor. The role of migration in changing the age composition of a population is also examined. Fascinating use is made of bivariate and multivariate analyses to explore these issues. Chapter 3 discusses definitions and determinants of ageing under the heading 'What is ageing?'. It would have been more helpful if this conceptual framework had appeared before Chapter 2. Chapter 4 deals with the links between ageing and development and has a lengthy discussion of the implications for productivity, supply of labour, consumption, housing, healthcare costs, capital formation, politics, society, women and deprivation. The status of frail older people and family support in India are investigated in Chapter 5. In the final chapter, the author explores the idea of 'graceful ageing', which is similar to the terms 'active' and 'healthy' ageing used by UN agencies, as a model by which to improve the wellbeing of older people. The author clearly indicates that 'graceful ageing' is 'a process of optimising opportunities for physical, social and mental wellbeing throughout life, in order to ensure a healthy independent, quality life in

older age' (p. 306). It is commendable that the author draws on qualitative and quantitative measures throughout these chapters.

This book will be valuable for students and researchers in demography, social gerontology and allied fields, as well as for general readers who wish to understand the status and process of ageing in the developing world, particularly in Asia and India. Although the book covers many aspects of ageing in Asia, it neglects the positive consequences of ageing in India. Although in general older people are viewed as a liability, they remain a valuable asset, especially in Asian countries, where they occupy a very significant place in the family and society.

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Christopher A. Faircloth (ed.), *Ageing Bodies: Images and Everyday Experience*, Altamira, Walnut Creek, California, 2003, 299 pp., pbk \$27.95, ISBN 0 7591 0236 8.

The nine chapters in this collection are organised, as the title indicates, in two sets: 'Images' and 'Everyday Experience'. The organising theme is the puzzling neglect of the ageing body in contemporary social gerontology. It is one of the ironies of mainstream social gerontology that the material body has by and large been ignored. As Faircloth asks in the introduction, 'is it not the physical body that readily marks us as ageing?' (p. 1). In her chapter on the physical care of the ageing body, Julia Twigg cogently draws attention to the absence of the body in an analysis of the everyday practices of bathing the older body by care-workers in the community. For a number of reasons, these mundane and yet vitally important activities have been neglected by the very experts concerned with care in the community, in which the physical body is concealed under a veil of managerial and administrative discourse.

Part One opens the debate with an inventory of images of the ageing body from diverse sources. From the UK, Bill Bytheway describes a content analysis of a collection of photographs compiled in 1977 by the celebrated veteran American photographer, Imogen Cunningham, and compares his assessment with the contents of the January 2002 issue of the British popular magazine, *Yours*. Betina Freidin's study, which draws on data from focus groups in Argentina, examines both the ways in which lay persons attribute meaning to the dead human body and the influence these representations exercise over their willingness after death to donate organs for transplantation to another living human. Elizabeth Markson explores images of the body and mind of the older woman as constructed in a random sample of films produced in the USA between 1929 and 1998. The concern she shares with all the contributors to this volume is the extent to which these images 'convey or negate the narrative of ageing as decline' (p. 81).

The last chapter in this section, by Peter Oberg, forms an effective bridge with Part Two, where lived experiences of the ageing body are examined more closely. On the basis of a postal questionnaire to a random national sample of 1,997 men

and women aged 20–85 years, Oberg asks how far images of the desirability of a youthful body, identified by many sociologists as a pervasive characteristic of consumer culture, actually influence the personal experience of growing older in everyday life. His finding is that those who responded experience a distance between their subjective age and their chronological age: in other words, they don't necessarily feel as old as they look. In this connection, he makes a significant observation concerning the interaction between public images and private life: 'It is necessary to recognise ageing as something individuals have to engage in and make choices about – instead of seeing ageing as something that just “happens” to people' (p. 110).

Representations of older people actively engaging with the processes of bodily change predominate in Part Two. Living practices of ageing are vividly and engagingly described in the sociological researches of Julia Twigg, in Emmanuelle Tulle's research on veteran runners, and in Steven Wainwright and Bryan Turner's evidence of ballet and ex-ballet dancers' perceptions of their ageing bodies and the effects on a career which has a relatively short span. Issues surrounding the sexual body are sensitively outlined in Dana Rosenfeld's chapter on the gay and lesbian body by reference to the narratives of women and men, aged 64–89 years, interviewed in-depth in Los Angeles. Interestingly Rosenfeld's contribution is the only chapter to discuss in any detail the historical context in which the contemporary experience of growing older is realised. She argues that changes in social attitudes to homosexuality 'produced a new set of tensions – between those who believed that homosexual desire was an essentially private affair whose extrusion into the public (heterosexual) sphere was an incompetent act and those who saw homosexual desire as both a private and a political matter whose collective invocation in public contexts was both competent and necessary' (p. 198). This message has important implications for the construction of variations in the public imagery of the ageing body and its potential as we move into a culture where variations in intimacy and sexuality apparently become more socially acceptable.

Faircloth has provided a service to gerontology in compiling an engaging resource which fuels speculation on the shape of things to come. The overall message is, as Oberg argues, that there is no one unitary biologically ageing body to which the diverse cultures and personal experiences can be reduced, and there is certainly no single prescription for positive ageing or how to avoid what has been described as the 'misery perspective' of decline (p. 13). In their characteristically precise sociological review of empirical research into the visibility of the ageing body, Gubrium and Holstein show how the body intrudes into social life in various ways during later life, and how these situational variations in the visibility of the ageing body shape the experience of ageing. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that the cultural sky is the limit as far as ageing is concerned, but the good news is that the current waves of social and cultural change are creating greater opportunities for improvisation on the theme of the ageing body than existed in the not too distant past.

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Gemma M. M. Jones and Bère M. L. Miesen (eds), *Care-Giving in Dementia Research and Applications*, Volume 3, Brunner-Routledge, Hove, East Sussex, 437 pp., pbk £19.99, ISBN 1 58391 189 8.

This book is aimed at health and mental health professionals who work with and care for people with dementia. Some chapters in the book have an academic focus whilst others emphasise practical ‘hands-on’ approaches to care-giving. In the introduction, Gemma Jones comments on the speed at which changes are taking place in the world of dementia care. It is to be hoped that practitioners who read this book will be inspired to advance the trend by translating some of the innovatory practices that it reports into mainstream practice.

Volume 3 of *Care-Giving in Dementia* takes the same multi-disciplinary approach and follows the same thematic pattern as the previous volumes. Part 1 explores models and theories; Part 2 looks at interventions in care facilities; Part 3 discusses topics related to care-giving issues; Part 4 focuses on family and professional care-givers; and Part 5 examines ethical issues. There is some cross-over between the sections, for example in Part 3, Jones examines ‘The loss of meaningful attachments in dementia and behavioural stage-specific implications’, and provides examples of attachment behaviours and discusses theories of attachment. This is followed by suggestions for some stage-specific activities that can be used as interventions in care facilities.

The chapters which I found had the greatest impact described interventions with people with dementia that aimed to improve their quality of life and the quality of care. In these chapters, the authors used case studies and research evidence to support their work, for example, on the development of support groups for people with dementia (Marshall and Mapes), music therapy (Broersen and van Nieuwenhuijzen) and Sonas aPc – a multi-sensory intervention that aims to activate the potential for communication (Hamill and Connors). There is limited research on support groups and music therapy because of methodological difficulties, but their proponents argue that the contribution these interventions make to the wellbeing and self-esteem of the person with dementia justifies more research.

One of the innovations reported on in an earlier volume, the Alzheimer Café, is now finding its way into mainstream practice in the UK and elsewhere. One hopes that readers of this volume will be inspired in the same way by Hogewoning-van der Vossen’s description, in Chapter 5, of the innovative process in a Dutch nursing home where, over three years, the focus in care-giving was changed from the traditional medical model to a psychosocial model by introducing a ‘lifestyle’ approach. The author describes in detail how a cultural change in the relationship between professional care-givers and residents was needed to facilitate the change process.

Some of the authors take a more academic perspective in discussing the biological and psychological processes of dementia and their related theories. In some of these chapters, as by Arendt on the metasynthesis of the neurobiology of Alzheimer’s disease, an assumption is made that the target audience of this book will have a grounding in the subject. Whilst this chapter provides a fascinating

insight into the advances in the neurobiology of Alzheimer's disease, a full comprehension requires a prior knowledge of the physiology and biochemistry of the brain. In contrast, Jones in Chapter 3, draws on the 'bookcases in a library' metaphor, and uses simple easy-to-understand diagrams as a teaching tool to explain what happens to memory and cognitive ability in Alzheimer-type dementia.

In the final section of the book, two thought-provoking chapters by Cees Hertogh discuss ethical issues in relation to autonomy and the ability of people with dementia to make decisions. He asks some particularly challenging questions in Chapter 18 about the significance of advance directives made before the onset of dementia. This chapter is of particular relevance to professionals in The Netherlands, where the new euthanasia law states that an adequate living-will can replace an oral request from the patient if he or she 'is no longer able to express his/her will' (p. 401). Hertogh argues that in dementia cases the 'presence of such a document causes at least as many problems as it solves' (p. 403). By drawing on contributions from leading practitioners in the United Kingdom and Europe, this book succeeds in promoting the latest advances in the complex field of dementia care. It provides an invaluable and inspiring reference book for professionals in this field.

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Carroll L. Estes, Simon Biggs and Chris Phillipson, *Social Theory, Social Policy and Ageing: A Critical Introduction*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2003, 191 pp., pbk £15.99, ISBN 0 335 20906 8.

I was delighted to be asked to review this excellent little book. The reputation of the authors encourages high expectations and these were not disappointed. The volume is presented as a textbook – with short bullet points, an introduction and a summary conclusion to each chapter. It is an ideal student text and has become 'essential reading' for my undergraduates, but also accomplishes more than a mere summary of the current state of critical gerontology. Because social science in general and social gerontology in particular is so fragmented, and because there is a plethora of research from diverse perspectives, achieving a synthesis – a concise coherent overview – is itself a creative achievement.

The book's stated aim is to develop the critical perspective within social gerontology with the purpose of explaining, rather than merely describing, contemporary ageing. Gerontology is seen as multi-disciplinary and applied, but currently trapped 'within a discourse subordinate to biomedical and related concerns' (p. 2). For the authors, policy and theory are not value-neutral; rather their key starting point is critically to examine the social construction of social issues and policy debates and to reveal the assumptions and interests behind them. Their aim is to integrate the inter-personal level, middle-range theory and large social-structural perspectives in a single, historically-informed understanding of later life.

The book is short – 192 pages of which 28 are bibliography – and divided into nine chapters. The first outlines the purpose of the book and its critical orientation.

It presents a history of critical gerontology and emphasises the importance of adding feminism and globalisation to the traditional agenda. Chapter 2 discusses the development of social gerontological theory in a historical context. The excellent summary is also a critique of the ‘microfication’ of old age. Chapter 3 analyses the relationship between identity and adult ageing, in particular it treats identity as something negotiable and managed. There is a clear analysis of the tensions between over-structured and under-determined identities in old age. Feminist approaches are discussed in Chapter 4 together with their implications for social policy. I found Chapters 5, 6 and 7 particularly effective in moving the critical agenda forward. Chapter 5 dissects the concepts of productive and successful ageing and subjects them to a critical analysis that clearly reveals their ideological character. Chapter 6 provides a devastating assessment of the role of biomedicine in the social construction of old age. It locates medical ethics in the power relationship between professional expert and older patient. The effects of globalisation including challenges to the nation state and transnational ageing are the topics of Chapter 7, which includes an excellent account of social policy and global institutions. Chapter 8 considers the politics of ageing and the possibilities and limitations to collective action by older people. Chapter 9 is a short conclusion that aspires to ‘provoke alternatives’ and set out future tasks. The book ends with an appeal to combine social structural and humanistic perspectives in gerontology. The book is a model synthesis.

The wide range of scholarship and expertise marshalled to cover all these topics and present them within a coherent framework is a real triumph. This overview is all the more welcome, given the characteristic micro-specialisation of gerontology and the diversity of fields that use an ageing perspective. The book is comprehensive and well referenced and it provides students with much needed study tools and stimulation. The chapters are equipped with sections, short paragraphs, lists and summary bullet points. The structure plods on occasion and the fluency of the prose, while excellent in places, is uneven. The concision does mean that on occasions the arguments might have been elaborated with benefit. However, the excellent comprehensive referencing gives students and scholars the opportunity to follow these arguments through.

My criticisms are minor compared to the book’s breadth and depth of coverage. In a few places the arguments would have been strengthened by use of additional material. For example, in the chapter on the politics of old age, more might have been made of non-conventional forms of resistance to the medicalised, atomised ageing body. The authors rightly refer to ‘apocalyptic demography’ and are correct in locating the ideological routes of population ‘problems’, but more demographic details would have been useful for students. Also, the authors’ concern to neutralise the oppressive implications of neo-liberal ‘generational equity’ debates may have led them to undervalue the need for a radical political economy of generations. The orientation of the book is the anglophone world, particularly the UK and the USA. It certainly covers globalisation issues, but perspectives from the developing world are not strongly represented. There is a strong French critical tradition which could have been used to good effect, as in Chapter 8, to enhance the understanding of the French collective resistance to ‘pension reform’ (*c.f.* Viriot Durandal 2003).

It is necessary to ask the big questions and not to let the unspoken agenda of the medical model dominate the study of old age. I see this book as a lighthouse: it throws penetrating beams of light that illuminate the murky darkness of ignorance on old age; not necessarily a uniform light, but definitely a beacon rather than a siren call. In the fog of the medicalised obfuscation of old age, this book sounds a loud warning blast. Estes, Biggs and Phillipson successfully provide a demonstration of the continuing power and relevance of the critical perspective. As teachers, we are gifted with a first-rate text.

Reference

Viriot Durandal, J.-P. 2003. *Le Pouvoir Gris: Sociologie des Groupes de Pression de Retraites [Grey Power: The Sociology of Retired People's Pressure Groups]*. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris.

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R. Sean Morrison and Diane E. Meier (eds), *Geriatric Palliative Care*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, 430 pp., hbk £50.00, ISBN 0 19 0514191 1.

This large edited collection, which incorporates contributions from many luminaries in geriatrics and palliative care, covers an extensive and impressive range of topics in geriatric palliative care. It is timely, for the subject has developed very rapidly over the past decade, and a comprehensive textbook addressing some of the primary concerns that connect geriatrics and palliative care was needed. This book strives to apply the principles and practices of palliative care to the care of older people who are dying whilst, at the same time, bringing to the reader's attention the considerable developments in both social gerontology and geriatrics during the past two decades.

The introduction chronicles recent demographic changes in relation to older people in the USA. It bridges palliative care and geriatrics in western societies; for example, the extent to which most 'dying' takes place at home accompanied by the care of family members. Those however with cognitive impairment or dementia, those who are very old, and particularly women, are more likely to spend their last few years in residential care. This has implications for the delivery of care, particularly in the terminal phase. It raises the central question, 'When is palliative care appropriate in geriatric medical care?' and begins to provide answers by identifying the different reasons for considering palliative care for older people. An excellent table lays out the 'Staging of palliative care during the course of a chronic illness'. The introduction stresses the similarity between the principles of geriatric and palliative care, and observes that 'dying and death is now a geriatric phenomenon'.

The book has five parts: 'Overview: the social and cultural context of old age and frailty', 'Disease and syndrome-specific aspects of palliative care', 'Symptom distress in older patients', 'Communication', and 'Structures of care for the chronically ill with palliative care needs'. Parts 1, 4 and 5 are of particular interest

to social gerontologists. The opening chapter in Part 1, 'Variability in end-of-life care in the United States', resonates with the UK experience. Several chapters in Part 1 are rather 'touchy-feely' and seem out of place in a textbook of this strength, but clearly play to an audience that may appreciate an account of existential issues written in a non-academic way. Curtis and Patrick have appropriately packaged the concepts of 'quality of life' and 'quality of dying' for physicians. Callahan and Topinkova's chapter on age and rationing refreshingly debates the claims of older people for palliative care resources. Emanuel and co-authors explore ethical issues of geriatric palliative care, and explain in particular the 'special obligations to elders and the terminally ill' (p. 57). The last chapter in Part 1 explores the important topic of diversity, but, within the space allowed, it inevitably generalises, and the suggestions for caring for patients of diverse backgrounds are overly prescriptive.

The long Part 2 has chapters on heart disease, cancer, stroke, dementia, lung diseases and renal diseases. Whilst most are targeted at physicians, that on 'Frailty and its implications for care' addresses issues of interest to practitioners and researchers alike. Part 3 examines symptom distress in older patients, the last chapter of which by Goy and Ganzini, on 'Delirium, anxiety and depression', is relevant to research. The three chapters of Part 4 focus on communication, a fundamental topic in both palliative care and geriatric medicine, and rehearse many arguments in palliative care, possibly reinforcing the impression that this book is primarily aimed at geriatricians. To illustrate, Tulsky's chapter on 'Doctor-patient communication' states that 'clinicians must *tibrate* (my emphasis) the content of information given according to their assessment of patients' capacity to integrate such information' (p. 327)! Teno explains the differences between advance care planning and advance directives, an area potentially of interest to British practitioners and policy makers.

The final part explores the sites and funding of care. The chapter on palliative care in the nursing home is rather laboured, and at times patronising. Like some other chapters, it omits references to relevant non-US research findings (such as Hockey and Clark 2002; Katz and Peace 2003). Nevertheless, it covers important issues, such as the assumption that most nursing homes have a strong rehabilitative and restorative focus and the implications thereof for terminal care. It also highlights some difficult problems, such as decisions to transfer older people from residential settings to hospital, the poor quality of medical and nursing care, and the psycho-social implications for care-givers. The chapters on home-and hospital-based care are informative and, like others, refer to funding arrangements for palliative care in the United States, which differ from those in the UK and Europe. I highly recommend this comprehensive textbook to all those working with older people who are dying. Despite minor reservations, it fills a very important niche and should be essential reading for those training in geriatric medicine, gerontology, palliative care and related disciplines.

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Britt-Marie Öberg, Anna-Liisa Närvänen, Elisabet Näsman and Erik Olson (eds), *Changing Worlds and the Ageing Subject: Dimensions in the Study of Ageing and Later Life*, Ashgate, Aldershot, Hampshire, 2004, 207 pp., hbk £47.50, ISBN 07546 3272 5.

In February 2001, the newly-established Institute for Studies on Ageing and Later Life, at Norrköping, Sweden, gathered together a number of gerontologists from Europe and North America. The basic aim was to consider ways of ensuring that gerontology was in tune with the changing lives of older people. The meeting concluded by identifying four basic priorities: contextualising old age in the whole life; starting with the experiences and opinions of older people; recognising heterogeneity; and incorporating the humanistic-historical dimension. To advance this agenda, the Institute has now produced this edited collection of ten papers by contributors to that meeting.

It is a stimulating and varied collection, a mixture of original research and analysis with reviews of current literature. All the chapters contribute to the overall aim, but I found five particularly interesting. First, John Macnichol offers a challenging discussion on age discrimination and, in particular, on recent policy developments in the UK. Rather beguilingly, he begins by detailing the case for being 'against' age discrimination. Then, he identifies and discusses several problems with this position: how legislation stipulating minimum ages in relation to driving *etc.* is indisputably acceptable; how some discrimination is positive; and how there are problems in defining the group to be protected by legislation. Although the bulk of his analysis is focused rather narrowly on the American experience of legislation relating to the employment of older men, it is set within the wider context of gender and income.

Chapter 5 by the eminent Swedish historian, Brigitta Odén, focuses on the care of older women in ancient times. This ranges impressively from 200,000-year-old fossils to 17th century obituaries and early 20th century correspondence. Her own research has focused on the letters of Selma Lagerlöf, a 'famous cultural personality' who died in 1939. Given my current research into the significance of birthdays in later life, I was interested to read that Lagerlöf's long-standing depression was lifted by celebrations for her 70th birthday when she met Henriette Coyet. This led to a lengthy correspondence and, for Lagerlöf, a 'growing zest' for life.

Chapter 6 returns to the contemporary world. Els-Marie Anbäcken discusses the difficulty of achieving a shared conceptual framework for a comparative study of home-help services in Sweden and Japan. This was not just a matter of vocabulary and translation. Rather, the greater problem was in the differing assumptions about who the home-help was serving. In Sweden, it was the older person; in Japan, the care-giver. Anbäcken describes how she was 'startled' to

realise that, despite close communication with Japanese colleagues regarding the preceding fieldwork, they still approached the data analysis from very different perspectives. She goes on to discuss in detail the differences between the two countries in what constitutes 'the ideal life and care for the elderly'. Her final comment offers words of warning to anyone embarking on cross-cultural research. She argues that comparative research involves 'a chronic element of reflexivity' in the contrasting and reciprocal mirroring of conversations that take place between the collaborating researchers.

Chapter 8, by Isabella Paoletti, turns our attention to the early 1990s when the European Community funded action projects in various cities, including Perugia in Italy. The aim was to 'make visible older women's contributions to the community, as well as to point out their specific needs and problems'. In contrast to Anbäcken, rather than focus on the comparative aspect of this initiative, Paoletti examines the impact of the invitation to participate on older women in Perugia. Drawing upon the literature on identities and membership categories, she first demonstrates the familiar response: those who joined the Older Women's Group of the Senior Citizen centres rarely used terms such as 'old' and 'elderly', and they sought to distance themselves from 'the elderly' and to deny their own age. Paoletti then offers evidence from group conversations that shows how identities are changed when age is made 'institutionally relevant', providing opportunities such as international travel. She concludes that the way in which the category 'old' is used depends upon the occasion, the setting and the conversationalists' various purposes. Categorisation depends upon the interpretative work of members, both in producing and in understanding talk.

The fifth chapter to catch my eye was the last. Following a biographical opening, Kees Knipscheer discusses four concepts that have guided his 30-year career in gerontology: age, generations, time and context. He then considers the contemporary position of 'the elderly' in the modern welfare state, and finally concludes with some thoughts about the overall aim of the book. These are organised under six headings: (1) talking about age (echoing Paoletti's chapter); (2) the meaning of the post-retirement period (echoing issues raised by Macnichol); (3) the meaning of the parent-child relationship in old age (discussed earlier in chapters by Hammarström and Närvänen); (4) the frame of reference related to age – here he touches on issues of ill-health, dependency and care discussed in several of the earlier chapters; (5) myths about ageing (corny though this might be as a heading, Knipscheer uses the splendid example of the decision of the Dutch Ballet Dance company to challenge the 'myth' that only young people can dance by developing choreographies for people between 40 and death) and (6) cross-cultural qualitative studies (well exemplified by Anbäcken).

After reading the book, I had only one reservation: that despite so much attention to language and the meaning of words and concepts, the entire book is written in English. The only exception (apart from references to non-English literature) is in Anbäcken's chapter, where the significance of a few Japanese words is explained. In Paoletti's chapter, however, only the English translation of the transcribed conversations of her informants are presented. Language is so important that it is no longer acceptable to pretend that all languages can be automatically and unproblematically translated into English. Nikander (2002)

exemplifies an English language book that handles linguistic issues well and includes bilingual transcriptions. That apart, the book works as a stimulating agenda for further research and I am happy to recommend it to gerontologists and to libraries.

Reference

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