

resources, including spiritual resources, to bounce back after spousal bereavement. Martin *et al.* follow this up with their review of research into centenarians, reinforcing the interplay of personal, cognitive, social and economic resources. They make the important point that studying centenarians is not just of academic interest – we can all learn from centenarians about how to utilise our strengths and resources in order to have more enjoyable and healthier lives, regardless of how long we live. Ong and Bergeman focus on socio-emotional resilience, reinforcing the importance of social connection. They make the strong point that ‘resilience is not about trees. It’s about forests’ (p. 252) – no one can become resilient on their own: resilience develops in an ecological context. Kessler and Staudinger then cite evidence to show that older people can draw upon their emotional reserve capacities to develop emotional resilience.

Moen and colleagues broaden the discussion yet further with their ecological framework, citing individual stories that show that each person is different and that it is not necessary (indeed it may not be useful) to have a ‘prescription’ for resilience. Sawyer and Allman then focus on mobility, emphasising that people live their lives in a ‘life-space’ which includes social and environmental resources and that mobility is not just about individual functional ability. The book concludes with Gergen and Gergen’s fascinating postulate that the common conception of the lifecourse as one of getting ‘old’ and consisting of ‘decline’ is socially constructed and it is within our power to create many alternative visions of the ageing experience.

There are a few limitations to this book, which I hope will be addressed in future editions. While it is very scholarly and well researched, I would have appreciated more stories and illustrative examples, and more focused practical suggestions about the implications of the research. Also, much of the research is of middle-class, relatively affluent people in western societies. I would have liked more research into non-western cultures and marginalised and oppressed groups of older people, with at least tentative practical suggestions about how the theories of resilience described in the book could be used to develop resilience in these other groups of older adults.

In summary, this is an excellent accessible book which should appeal to a broad range of practitioners, researchers and policy makers interested in optimising quality of life in the later decades of life.

School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy,
University of South Australia

ROB RANZIYN

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Alan Walker, David Gordon, Ruth Levitas, Peter Phillimore, Chris Phillipson, Margot E. Salomon and Nicola Yeates (eds), *The Peter Townsend Reader*, The Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2010, 696 pp., pbk £24.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84742 404 4.

Peter Townsend was a leading British sociologist. Anyone who has examined his ‘Complete List of Publications 1948–2008’ will be aware of his immense

and wide-ranging contribution to social science both nationally and internationally. According to Alan Walker, the overall editor of this collection of readings, Townsend was involved in the initial stages of producing this volume and would have written an introduction to it had it not been for his sudden death in June 2009. The book is, however, a very fitting celebration of his life's work. As Walker argues in his introduction to the book, the scope of Townsend's scholarship was remarkable, reflecting the connections he could see between social problems. All his intellectual endeavours were underpinned by his desire to tackle injustice and inequality and to create change. Hence his theoretical arguments were always backed up with meticulously acquired empirical data, both quantitative and qualitative. He was, as Walker says, not only a skilled researcher, theorist and policy analyst, but also an active and successful campaigner. He was co-founder of the Child Poverty Action group in 1965 and the Disability Alliance in 1974, and amongst his many successes were the development of sheltered housing for older people and the introduction of Attendance Allowance in the UK.

The book is organised into eight sections, representing major areas of Townsend's work, each assembled and introduced by an expert in the field: sociology and social policy (Alan Walker); international welfare (Nicola Yeates); poverty (David Gordon); inequality and social exclusion (Ruth Levitas); health inequalities and health policy (Peter Phillimore); older people (Chris Phillipson); disability (Alan Walker); social justice and human rights (Margot E. Salomon). The readings span Townsend's lengthy writing career and include extracts from some of his books, book chapters, journal, newspaper and magazine articles, and campaigning literature. In each section, the readings are organised more or less chronologically and this, together with the editors' introductions, enables the reader to see how Townsend's ideas evolved over the years. The editors have had to be extremely selective in their choice of extracts but despite this, there will be several surprises for many readers. I found plenty, such as an article published in 1976 in the *New Statesman*, 'How the rich stay rich', an article in the first volume of *Critical Social Policy* published in 1981 'Guerrillas, subordinates and passers-by: the relationship between sociologists and social policy', and an article published in *New Left Review* in 1995 'Persuasion and conformity: an assessment of the Borrie Report on social justice'. Although only eight of the 58 extracts are related specifically to older people, the whole book should be read by any gerontologist who wants to understand the connections between social structures and social issues which affect older and younger people alike, such as poverty and social exclusion, inequality, health and disability. Furthermore, Townsend developed a truly international perspective and many of the extracts in this book will assist gerontologists in understanding the global context of ageing and social policy.

The section on older people put together and introduced by Chris Phillipson includes six readings. The first is a chapter on 'The family system of care' from *The Family Life of Old People* (1957), Townsend's classic community study of Bethnal Green. An important message to come out of

this chapter, one that people still need to be reminded of, is the reciprocal nature of caring relationships between younger and older generations. Also included are extracts from another of Townsend's classics, *The Last Refuge* (1962). Phillipson has selected one of the later chapters, 'Some effects upon old people of living in residential homes', where Townsend articulates his argument that residential care for older people should be abandoned as an instrument of social policy. Both these chapters demonstrate Townsend's literary talent – his ability to write so evocatively – as well as his formidable analytical skills. I was pleased to see that Phillipson makes some reference to the photographs which are published in *The Last Refuge* which were taken by Townsend himself. Townsend also took a great many photographs when conducting his research of family life in Bethnal Green. Unfortunately, despite his pleas to Routledge & Kegan Paul for some of these photographs to be included in *The Family Life of Old People*, the publisher refused, claiming it would 'lower the tone' of the book.¹ It might have given Townsend great pleasure if some of them finally could have been published in this volume.

Townsend's original contribution to the first edition of *Ageing & Society* published in 1981, 'The structured dependency of the elderly', is also part of the section on older people. It is matched by a contribution he made to the 25th anniversary edition when he was invited to reflect on his original thesis of structured dependency and here he emphasises the importance he attached in his later years to the use of human rights legislation to monitor and tackle injustice. Margot E. Salomon has included extracts from a later version of this paper in her section of the book on human rights.

The other two readings Phillipson has selected are on retirement and on pensions. The former is a paper published in *Occupational Medicine* in 1955, 'The anxieties of retirement', which reflects concerns at the time about the impact of retirement on older men. The latter is Townsend's critique, published in 1999, of the Labour Party's policies on pensions, the 'minimum pension guarantee' and 'stakeholder pensions'. In addition, Alan Walker includes an extract from a chapter published in 1973 on 'Elderly people with disabilities' which discusses the failure of policy makers to acknowledge disablement amongst older people and the consequences.

It is impossible to do justice to this book in a short review but it is a very valuable collection of extracts which any serious student or teacher of gerontology, and indeed sociology and social policy more generally, should read. It demonstrates that Townsend's writings over the last 60 years are as relevant today as they were in the past. Furthermore, given its length, this book is excellent value for money.

NOTE

- 1 The correspondence between Townsend and the editor at Routledge & Kegan Paul, together with the photographs he took, are now deposited in The Peter Townsend Collection at the UK Data Archive, University of Essex.

Visiting Research Fellow The Open University, UK

JULIA JOHNSON