

John A. Vincent, Chris R. Phillipson and Murna Downs (eds.) (2006). *The Futures of Old Age*. London: Sage. Published in association with the British Society of Gerontology, 255 pp.; ISBN 978-1-4129-0108-6 (pbk)

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Current societal responses to the challenges that ageing societies pose tend to dramatize the consequences of the demographic bomb by taking into account all or most of the potential detrimental effects that are associated with it. Such reactions, often vested as horror scenarios, are bound to political agendas and questionable perspectives on future societal developments. The expert field of gerontology, with its impressive knowledge, is increasingly challenged to counteract such enormous pressures and to reintroduce the necessity of referring to solid databases, trustworthy projections and to counteracting perspectives on this trend. In this respect, it seems that all national gerontological associations should deem it necessary to do what the British Society of Gerontology (BSG) has now done: publish a book to “provide a major assessment of the different changes involved in the future of old age and to reflect upon options for key areas affecting older people” (p.XIII). The aim of the BSG is clear: “an attempt to stand outside immediate commercial and political pressures and to use the best of current research-informed insights to enable us to look into the futures of old age over the next generation” (p.XIII). To speak deliberately of “futures” in plural is an attempt to mirror the increasing “diversity and uncertainty of what lies ahead” in the next thirty years (p.1).

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In the introduction, the three editors (John A. Vincent, Chris R. Phillipson and Murna Downs) state the limits that they have imposed on their contributors: that all chapters be condensed and not exceed *ca* 10 pages at most. The book itself is organized into seven main parts: "The Future of the Life Course" with contributions from Blaikie, Bengtson/Putney and Dannefer/Miklowski, "The Future of Social Differentiation" with papers by Walker/Foster, Arber and Nazroo, "The Future of Retirement and Pensions" with contributions by Price/Ginn, Evandou/Falkingham and Minns, "The Future for 'Self' in Old Age" with papers by Biggs, Gubrium/Holstein and Coleman/Mills/Speck, "The Future of Health and Well-Being in Old Age" with papers by Victor, Downs/Bruce and Bond/Corner, "The Future of Family and Living Arrangements for Older People" with contributions by Harper, Davidson and Peace and finally "Globalization and the Future of Old Age" which includes contributions by Vincent, Phillipson and Warnes. It is clear that it has not been easy for all contributors to follow these rather strict rules regarding page limits. A quick glance at the various chapters shows that contributors with the most recent data sets had a comparably easier time to stick to these limits than those whose contributions were based on theoretically-informed reflections. All things considered, it is remarkable how this pressure to condense knowledge and ideas under the guiding principle of wanting to shed light on the "futures" has produced a remarkable volume that could and should serve as an example for other European gerontological societies.

The division of this volume into seven parts proves to be a useful way of breaking down the field of ageing into dynamic complexes that are mutually interconnected. An example of this dynamic approach to the field can be found in the discussion of the future of the life course with its pressure to look at an increasing degree of diversity in a globalized social environment (which questions more than ever the traditional models of an "institutionalized life course" (Kohli) with basically "three stages" (also present in the contribution of Warnes) without losing sight of what classical modes of social differentiation (by social class, but also by gender as well as ethnic divisions) have to offer. In this respect, attention should be paid to the contribution of Arber, which reflects the logic of "futures" as a mode of orientation for research-informed perspectives

in the field of gender particularly well. The issue of retirement and pensions is equally well addressed in the empirically sound study by Evandrou/Falkingham. The cultural constructions of the "self" and its theoretical reflections in ageing research as well as its open questions are convincingly put forward in Biggs' contribution. Coleman *et al.* discuss the important subject of increasing disenchantment with the adequacy of the traditional church affiliations in their chapter in light of the fact that future older cohorts might not be true adherents of the institutions of established religion. In the health-part of the book, I also found – in accordance with the guiding principle of "futures" – a very convincing contribution by Victor about longevity regimes in which she discusses three scenarios of health development for the older part of the population. Equally impressive is Sarah Harper's contribution about the future of family life transitions in which well known demographical facts about family transitions are put in a distinctly future-oriented perspective in order to give a comprehensive picture of a developmental pattern with contradictory implications.

The last part on globalization and the "futures" of old age is in my opinion the most problematic one. This is, perhaps, understandable since the topic must be particularly difficult to tackle since the complexity of international processes does not lend itself to generalizations particularly with regard to old age. Concentrating on the international scientific scene Vincent makes, however, a strong point in his analysis of anti-ageing medicine and its multidisciplinary foundations when he suggests that we look at this movement as a war on old age. While these problematic implications are well observed it still remains an open question whether this cryptomoral answer is a sufficient reaction if the social sciences are to cope with the overwhelming biomedical influences in ageing research that we are witnessing at the moment. Phillipson's and Warnes' central topic is transnational and international migration and their effects on old age. While Phillipson devotes some space to defining and discussing globalization in a risk society framework and goes on to decipher the effects of globalization on older people, he only touches upon the societal level and does not spell out the implications of his own research on the impact of these trends on the changing roles of older people, the family and support networks. In this particular part of the book we see clearly

that the page limits imposed on these authors have in fact limited them from exploring their respective topics in detail. A more detailed and therefore longer contribution would have served, in my opinion, the purpose of exploring this particular topic better. This applies to Warnes' contribution as well since despite the fact that his piece is intellectually refined, the page limits do not allow him to fully explore the issue of residential flexibilities resulting from migration streams and changes in the life course regimes that his empirical research on these subjects has brought to fore. His conclusions make, however, a quite impressive statement for the development of future gerontology in an international perspective; a perspective that is very much needed at this point in time.

Despite the fact that this volume is based exclusively on the British situation (albeit with some minor examples from the Anglo-American world) and that comparative references and data from other European welfare states are missing (the exemption being the contributions by Harper and by Minns), this is an interesting contribution to the debate on the "futures" of gerontology. Surely one could say that one should not complain since this is after all the BSG's vision for our field. True...or almost true: a chapter about the challenges of international comparisons in ageing research would certainly not have been out of place in this volume. Hopefully next time - in the second edition.