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## Book Review / Compte rendu

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*Critical Questions for Ageing Societies* is a book essentially designed for teaching, opening (rather than ending) with a useful glossary and devoting 10 of its 11 chapters to themes based on actual student questions. The book ends with review exercises and several appendices with added pedagogical materials. At the outset, given that it is a teaching text, some photographic or other images would help enliven it. The choice of topics is timely and relates directly to current theoretical and political debates about aging populations. Readers may find some slippage in distinctions between mainstream and critical gerontologies, but Carney and Nash make it clear that a critical attitude is crucial to exposing the ageist myths prevalent in popular media, government policy, and public perception. Further, aging research on familiar issues of life course, demography, care, identity, generation, and gender is incomplete without a critique of their social and structural contexts. These principles are strongly evident in Chapter 1 on population aging. However, Chapter 2, on the “ageist zeitgeist” (not defined in the chapter or the glossary) seems oddly outside the book’s critical bent, with its delineation of stereotyping attitudes framed by processes of acquisition, expression, reinforcement, and internalization, stemming from conventional social psychology. Also lacking are the social contexts for these stereotypes and the important age studies literature on images, media, cultural narratives, and history of ageism.

Chapter 3 returns the book to its critical goals to discuss the development, capitalization, and neoliberalization of British pension programs and the devaluing discourses of successful aging, all of which have threatened retirement with declining resources and expectations of self-reliance. Chapter 4 is an examination of care and biomedical gerontology, reiterating that care is not a liability but a public good, yet shaped by limited provisions, domestic burdens, and bureaucratic hurdles. Here the authors offer a helpful statement on how mainstream and critical gerontological research differ: “For biomedical gerontologists, the emphasis is on health and the curing and prevention of disease. For critical gerontologists, the emphasis is on human rights, carers’ and women’s rights, and the prevention of elder abuse” (p. 69). This is one of the book’s strongest chapters because it connects the intimate worlds of personal care with larger problems of social justice, class/status stratification, and gendered labour. Its judicious and effective use of statistical information, a feature throughout the book, is also welcomed, as gerontological texts typically exhaust readers with displays of numerical data.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine questions of difference, diversity, and intersectionality, highlighting how class/income differences, ethnicity, gender, and LGBTQI\* sexualities are sites where multiple forms of discrimination, income disparities, denied opportunities and rights, violence, and hardships in later life are experienced. Chapter 6 challenges the assumption that gender differences are “neutralised” by age, outlining how pension and social security, caregiving burden, and the twinning of ageism and sexism constitute female life courses through an accumulation of disadvantages. In relation to men, the authors suggest that where older men are “barred from the workplace” (p. 96), they become more part of the home and private sphere, such that “the process of relegating men to the private sphere is surely as harmful and limiting as the exclusion of women from the public sphere throughout the lifecourse” (p. 96). However, I am not sure many feminist gerontologists would agree with this equation.

Chapters 7 and 8 tackle generational relations and political problems of solidarity and conflict between young and old, with a critique of persistent ideologies of intergenerational antagonism. This is also one of the few discussions about generational aging that includes a section on grandparenting and the role of grandparents in domestic economies of care. The important mention of climate change as a generational issue could be expanded. Chapter 8 probes deeper to critique the various stereotypes of the baby boom generation in relation to age-segmented voting patterns and social activism. Again, these chapters do not deny the importance of contemporary demographic change or lengthening longevity, but put these in historical and political perspectives. Living a long life, the theme of Chapter 9 on the sub-field of cultural gerontology, takes the book on a departure from earlier structural analyses to focus on the sub-field’s interdisciplinary literature and its wide range of research topics. This coverage gives the chapter a more rambling and less coherent format. A key text is Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs’ *Cultures of Ageing* (2000), but an updated reference would be useful as would inclusion of more cultural gerontological work being done outside of the United Kingdom.

In the concluding Chapter 10, (Chapter 11 is a series of chapter-based tests), the authors provide a book summary and invite readers to think about “next steps”, such as the need to reflect on ageist language and practices, including our own and those of others, and pursue critiques of both in order to better represent and engage with the realities of aging. Carney

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and Nash also contend that their book is anchored to two theoretical traditions, political economy of aging and post-structuralist approaches. I think the first is obvious, but the second is far less so, although the authors claim in the preface that their “book is unashamedly post-structuralist in its approach” (p. xxi). Post-structuralism is a major theoretical movement that has indeed inspired critical approaches to aging; but, outside of the few pages devoted to it in Chapter 10 (with no definition in the glossary) that evoke the term to mean moving beyond structural explanations, there is little to support a post-structural theoretical basis to the book. This observation may be a quibble in light of how *Critical Questions for Ageing Societies* ties together so many of the germane problems of our time,

particularly the long-term consequences of living under successive neoliberal regimes that have intensified the insecurities, inequalities, and vulnerabilities of growing older. The structure of the book also serves this purpose because it allows readers to start with any chapter and move back and forth across the text, eventually encompassing a robust sense of how critical gerontology and its advocates have shaken up our understanding of aging worlds and what we can do to change them.

Review by Stephen Katz, PhD,  
*Department of Sociology and Trent Centre  
for Aging and Society, Trent University*  
[SKatz@Trentu.ca](mailto:SKatz@Trentu.ca)