

Editorial

After five years, I am handing over the editorship of the journal to Tony Warnes. I am delighted with his appointment since he was an energetic and successful Reviews Editor of *Ageing and Society* between 1987 and 1997 and has supported the journal in many other ways. As chair of the British Society for Gerontology between 1995 and 2000, he was very active in establishing international and multidisciplinary links, and I am sure that his continuing commitment, contacts and wealth of knowledge (evident indeed in this edition) will serve the journal well.

Last year I presented a paper at the Third International Symposium on Cultural Gerontology held in Visby, Sweden. For this, I reviewed the 117 articles that were published in volumes 17 to 20 of *Ageing and Society* (Bytheway 2002). Including a variety of surveys (but excluding national census data), the 117 articles draw upon interviews with approximately 22,500 older people and include the quoted words of about 490 (many of whom are introduced to the reader with pseudonyms and personal descriptions). In this respect, I feel that older people have a real presence in the journal and that this has generated valuable insights into later life in a range of contrasting societies. That said, it is also true that the vast majority of contributors to the journal are based in, or linked to, universities and only a very few make any reference to their own sense of age or to any personal alliance with organisations of, or representing, older people.

I was struck by the heavy dependence of the studies being reported on samples of older people, and the extent to which contributors had gained access to these samples by negotiating with other agencies. Revealing and exciting though much of this research is, grounded as it is in the worlds of care, I felt that it tended to reinforce rather than challenge an underlying ageism. I was reminded of the ‘acquiescent functionalism’ that Peter Townsend exposed so vividly in the very first edition of *Ageing and Society*. Almost inevitably, questions about how ‘we’ cope with their ‘dependency’ is reflected in discussions of what we have learnt from ‘our’ samples. So I concluded my review with a wish to see in future articles in the journal, evidence of three shifts in the position of gerontology:

- away from a focus on ‘the elderly’ and towards (i) ageing in general and (ii) extreme age in particular;

- away from the planning, management and delivery of age-specific services and towards the detail and routines of everyday (and every-year) life and changing social relationships;
- away from idealised models and processes of ageing and towards an interest in how people talk about and act upon their age.

I have learned over the last five years that the production of *Ageing and Society* is essentially a collective effort. The Editorial Board is named on the inside cover and its support and guidance has been invaluable but there are, in addition, several hundred other colleagues who have contributed, primarily through reviewing submissions. With very few exceptions, this has been done diligently and fairly and without payment or formal acknowledgement. Admittedly reminders are occasionally needed, but I have been witness to a commitment to the development of research and understanding that would be difficult to exaggerate. The large majority of these colleagues are, I am sure, regular readers of *Ageing and Society* and so I am pleased to have this opportunity to express to you my appreciation of your contribution to sustaining the quality of the journal.

Literally between starting and completing this editorial (such is the course of life and changing social relationships), I have learned of the death of Peter Laslett. Peter was a member of the first Editorial Board of the journal, and he edited an excellent and influential special edition on history and ageing (*Ageing and Society*, 4.4). He is perhaps best known in gerontology for his work in the 1980s on the third age which challenged the ageism of the day, both through academic endeavour and through the actions he took in helping set up the University of the Third Age in the UK. More generally, he made inspiring use of empirical evidence in exposing the error of many popular assumptions about life in the past. For all this we are indebted to him.

Bytheway, B. 2002. Positioning gerontology in an ageist world. In Andersson, L. (ed) *Cultural Gerontology*. Greenwood Publishing Group, Westport, CT.