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Critical Gerontology: Perspectives from Political and Moral Economy. Meredith Minkler and Carroll L. Estes (Eds.). Reviewed by Martin Tracy, Southern Illinois University.

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and practice through a feminist lens. It demonstrates the richness of using a truly multicultural framework for analysis. This book is a testament to the hard fought struggles for justice by "everyday" women.

Cheryl Hyde
San Francisco State University

Meredith Minkler and Carroll L. Estes (eds.), *Critical Gerontology: Perspectives from Political and Moral Economy*. New York: Baywood Publishing co., 1999, \$ 35.00 hardcover.

Some contemporary social science research and policy analyses seeks to explain who gets what, when, where, how, and why by examining the interdependency of social, economic, political, and cultural factors that shape policies. The emphasis on systemic factors is characteristic of various models used to analyze social policies for economically vulnerable populations, such as welfare recipients and many of the elderly. One impetus for comprehensive macro analytical frameworks in research and analysis is the growing recognition of dynamic and complex processes that form the basis of poverty for any population, including: inadequate social programs, low wages, single parenthood, mental illness, drug and alcohol addictions and abuses, discrimination, inadequate education, and other factors that contribute to marginalization. Thus, macro analytical tools are helping to reshape conceptualization of poverty by examining the characteristics of low-income individuals who are "socially excluded." While there is no single explicit definition of social exclusion, it generally refers to an individual's restricted access to employment, cash transfers and personal social services, as well as to avenues of participation in decisions about programs and policies that affect them.

Analytical frameworks, such as those concerned with issues of social exclusion, examine diverse causal factors that tend to view the concept of poverty as multidimensional. They are particularly attentive to the constantly evolving environmental factors that can prolong economic and social dependency. Recent studies on social exclusion of low-income groups in Europe, for example, use analytical methods that seek to understand social features

within a systems framework that focus on the interdependence and interactive patterns among people, groups, and institutions.

This edited text makes a significant contribution to the discussion on systemic analytical models that seek to explain interdependency. It particularly builds on the notion of "critical gerontology" as an analytical approach to social gerontology that seeks not only to understand the social construct of aging, but to alter it by challenging assumptions that are often based on individual, rather than structural causes. While the text focuses on gerontology within a comprehensive and interdependent context, the theoretical basis is applicable to any population.

This text has two primary goals. One is to enhance the properties of critical gerontology as an analytical method, the foundation for which was laid by an earlier volume in 1991. The new text updates the evolution of critical gerontology by embracing a political economy perspective of complex diverse issues that impact the interaction between race, class, gender, and aging. A political economy framework is also used to better understand the administrative devolution of health and welfare policies for the elderly; the gendered nature of work, poverty, and retirement; and the myths and realities of political power of the elderly.

The second goal of the text is theory building. This entails both the discussion and the application of current uses of political economy in gerontological studies. In addition, the introduction and several subsequent chapters examine the role of using a model of moral economy to complement the political economy analytical framework. Moral economy is effectively used to examine differences in health programs cross nationally, between the United States and Canada. A moral economy framework is also used to explore differences in moral assumptions relative to fundamental decisions regarding policies and programs based on notions of social reciprocity and shared responsibility. One chapter on the moral economy of interdependence is notably illuminating on this topic.

Five topic areas are covered in the text: 1) theoretical frameworks; 2) rethinking dependence, interdependence, and the political power of the old; 3) devolution, crisis mentality, and the transformation of health and social programs for the old; 4) race, class, gender, and aging; and 5) work, retirement, social security,

and productive aging. The material covering each of these topic areas is well balanced and well presented.

One relatively minor critical observation is that nearly half of the chapters in the text are reprints from earlier works. While most of these chapters are a good fit, there is some lost cohesion in that they were not composed specifically for this book and, thus, do not necessarily adhere to an overall edited framework. For example, a chapter on women's retirement income from an adapted and updated 1995 report, while providing very useful information, deviates from the use of a political or moral economy framework.

This text is a very welcome addition to the study of gerontology and the advancement of viable macro analytical frameworks. It would be particularly useful for research and for graduate curricula both as a content and a methods text. Because of the universal applicability of the analytical models to virtually any social welfare system, its appeal is not limited to aging studies.

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