

these criticisms, I recommend this book to anyone who is new to the area of the ageing workforce and who requires a sound examination of the main issues. The book does demonstrate the importance of the topic and the need for further in-depth analysis and for attention to the possible solutions to the difficulties faced by older workers and their employers.

Cranfield School of Management,
Bedfordshire, UK

EMMA PARRY

doi:10.1017/S0144686X09990249

Carmel Gallagher, *The Community Life of Older People in Ireland*, Peter Lang AG, Bern, 2008, 384 pp., pbk £44.00, ISBN 13: 978 3 03911 386 6.

As one older person interviewed in this book noted, ‘they [older people] kept the country ticking over until the Celtic Tiger arrived’ (p. 184). Ireland’s recent rapid economic growth has stalled but it wrought huge social changes which impacted directly on older people. In the process, the lives of older people have become central to debates about the social fabric of a changed country. Older people are at the heart of debates about issues such as rural isolation, declining cohesion and the role of the Church. Early in this book, Carmel Gallagher notes that in Arensberg and Kimball’s celebrated *Family and Community in Ireland* (1968: 162), the authors suggested that rural Ireland in the 1930s had become ‘in some ways an old person’s country’, and suggested that ‘they live long because they have so much to live for’. Gallagher’s book examines the lives of older people, in a rural (Rathbeg, County Donegal) and urban (Rathmore, Dublin) setting, and explores what it is that older people in these two pseudonymous field sites live for.

Using both ethnographic and survey methods, Gallagher’s account focuses squarely on the idea and reality of community in a rapidly changing society. She views community as a ‘pattern of social organisation and culturally defined way of life’ and stresses the importance of seeing it through the lens of geographic localities in which layers of multiple social networks (for example friends, families, neighbours and fellow church-goers) are bounded by everyday routines and interactions. The author’s avowed intent is to provide a humanistic account of ageing in Ireland and to focus on the meaning of life for older people. Gallagher is careful not to take her two field sites out of context. The policy frameworks which shape the ageing experience are rendered in sufficient detail for the reader to understand the development of policy relevant to older people in Ireland during the last half century, and to grasp how this relates to the nature of communal provision of care and support that involve voluntary activity. Her aim is not to catalogue what care and support is provided, but rather to describe what people gain from involving themselves in its provision, but in a context where, to quote the 1988 report *The Years Ahead*, ‘as much as half of the home help services, almost all of the meals-on-wheels and laundry service, and a sizeable proportion of day care centres ... are run by voluntary organisations’ (Department of Health 1988: 25) this contribution is not unimportant.

The author structures much of the material around the survey data – moving from an overview of the contexts of ageing and old age in Ireland, and social

policy, to provide an account of leisure and social activities, the meaning of place, and significant communal settings. The ethnographic and survey data allow the author to restore to apparently mundane activities (such as bingo) a sense of their positive unintended benefits in terms of social connectedness and shared social experience. The author is at pains to stress that all such activities have a value beyond the purely instrumental. She mobilises survey data to demonstrate that, in both communities, there is a strong relationship between older people maintaining interests and involvement in community, and their enjoyment of life. The broad exploration of place and relationships promises more than it delivers, however, and the reader is left with tantalising glimpses of how the account and argument might be more fully developed. Those expecting a rich ethnographic account may be disappointed by this book. Despite the praiseworthy attention to detail and the rigorous, sensitive and sophisticated analysis of multiple data types, the voices of older people themselves fail to break through. Those unfamiliar with urban or rural Ireland might feel hard pressed to visualise the world that Gallagher portrays. There are neither images nor case studies or cameos to help break the author's third-person narrative account, and I found that many of the themes were underdeveloped, especially in relation to the author's focus on meaning making. Nonetheless there is much to commend this book: readers will learn how older people in two very different parts of Ireland reside in and create communities through their involvements in local life. Students of Irish culture and society and of older people in Europe will find this book indispensable for developing an understanding of the ageing process in modern-day Ireland. This book is a welcome addition to the literature on social connectedness and social activities and their role in creating meaningful and positive experiences in later life.

References

Arensberg, C. and Kimball, S. 1968. *Family and Community in Ireland*. Clasp, Ennis, Ireland.
 Department of Health 1988. *The Years Ahead: A Policy for the Elderly*. Stationery Office, Dublin.

Digital Health Group,
 Intel Corporation, Ireland

SIMON ROBERTS

doi:10.1017/S0144686X09990250

Mary Maynard, Haleh Afshar, Myfanwy Franks and Sharon Wray,
Women in Later Life: Exploring Race and Ethnicity, Open University Press/
 McGraw Hill Education, Maidenhead, UK, 2008, 208 pp., pbk
 £22.99, ISBN 13: 978 0 335 21525 6.

The authors of this book are a team that conducted a qualitative study with 150 older women from four ethnic groups in the north of England that was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council's *Growing Older* programme. The research findings that form the basis for this book relate particularly to the United