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Parting Editorial

This year IJAL celebrates its 10th anniversary and this Special Issue marks the event. In the call for papers we emphasized that we “would like the issue to include personal reflections either on the role of theory as eye-opener in gerontology, the potential of theorizing in our area of research and reflections around specific fields of expertise in gerontology.” We are pleased that we can present thought-provoking contributions that are eye-openers in their own right, illustrating how impressions from other subject fields and interests result in theoretical development.

Simon Biggs has used historical and personal experiences to identify eye-opening concepts. The discussion culminates in two issues that challenge cultural adaptation – generations becoming approximately the same size and finding an age-specific purpose for a long life. *Stephen Katz* focuses on the role of personal career events as eye-openers and reflects on five moments to think critically about gerontological theory. *Hans-Joachim von Kondratowitz*, born and raised in West-Berlin, identifies an escapist biographical urge to engage in border-crossing contacts and relates this to recent research on ageing regimes in the Mediterranean region. Finally, *Julia Twigg* discusses how intellectual and academic influences, long-term personal interests, and her own ageing have led her to the subject of dress and age.

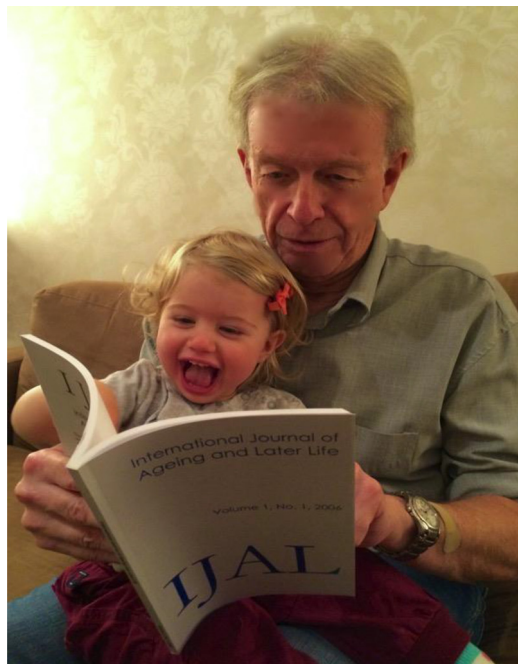
After ten years as Editor-in-Chief and with IJAL established as a renowned open access journal on ageing, this is also an opportunity for me to step down after the next issue. Working (more than) full time at a higher age is, as Simon Biggs puts it in his contribution, “just more of the same, offering few opportunities for new and age-specific existential exploration”. For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose – such as gerotranscending, grandparenting and focusing less on work.

In this context I would like to take the opportunity to thank all who have contributed to making IJAL a success in its segment of ageing research

during these 10 years: Associate Editor *Håkan Jönson*; Editorial Assistant *Karin Lövgren*; The Editorial Board (see p. iii); Linköping University Electronic Press (*David Lawrence* and *Peter Berkesand*), Datapage (*Tikoji Rao*, *Jincy Joby* and *Chitra Swaminathan*); Co-Action Publishing; all authors and reviewers; and finally, my closest co-workers to the very last: Associate Editors *Peter Öberg* and *Sandra Torres*, and Editorial Assistants *Laura Machat-From* and *Joy Torgé*.

From volume 11 (2016), Peter Öberg has accepted to take over as Editor-in-Chief, an encouraging decision for the continuation of IJAL as a channel for cultural and critical gerontology.

Lars Andersson
Editor-in-Chief



Retiring Editor-in-Chief and Molly, enthusiastic future reader of IJAL.

Theorising ageing and the question of a long life: eye openings

By SIMON BIGGS*

Abstract

A life course perspective, drawing on historical and personal experiences, is used to identify eye-opening concepts that can be used to make sense of the world in terms of personal and social ageing, in the context of intergenerational relationships. Two issues have been identified that characterise a challenge to cultural adaptation: that of generations increasingly becoming approximately the same size as they move from demographic triangles to columns, and that of finding an age-specific purpose for a long life. An analysis of contemporary problems facing gerontology and social policy is given, drawing on the need for complementary life priorities and enhanced generational intelligence. Implications for work, generational rivalry and precarity are examined along with some conclusions on the role of eye-opening conceptual development.

Keywords: ageing, inequality, intergenerational, life course, precarity, psycho-social, work.

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Eye Openers and Personal History

The first book that opened my eyes was by Young and Willmott (1957). It described working class life in Bethnal Green, in East London. It was a world that by the time I came across the work, had all but disappeared. But it spoke to me about something that I recognised. It made sense of the world. I could identify it. It was the world of my own grandparents, and it was the first time I came across a series of ideas that reflected my own common-sense experience back to me. In the mid-1970s, as a teenager, and as an English male, who considered himself more of a Londoner than a Brit, the heady days of hippydom were over, and the grim realities of recessionary conflict were openly on the streets of Romford Market, where I worked a stall at the weekends. Given a choice between the recruiters of the National Front and the Hard Left, I chose the left. At about his time, my father, who had worked for London Transport's "Green Line" busses lost his job. He took another job, on lower pay and involving lesser skills, and hated it. By age 55, he was redundant again. He took early retirement to make way for the boomer generation, although we didn't have a name for them then. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise as he had 8 years to do what he wanted. He didn't live to draw his state pension although he had paid into it since the age of 14, and on his death bed he said to me in a moment of exhausted astonishment: "but I have so much more to do." During this time, as Jung and De Beauvoir tell us, I never really thought about old age – it was a foreign country. I was immortal and there was a new world out there to get to grips with. What's more I had the manual, another eye-opener, and it was called the *Communist Manifesto*. Here was a book that not only explained the hidden workings of the social world but also told those with eyes to see, what to do about it. Even better, once you had read the manual, there was a whole army of follow-up books by the same author, and his followers, to explain in great detail how the whole thing functioned. But I found myself drawn to those parts that explained everyday experience to me: alienation, commodity fetishism, and the new and exciting world of the "personal being political." I was also reading the work of Erving Goffman (1961) on the management of self in everyday life and the writings of R.D. Laing (1961) on self and other. Goffman was a great character. I had met him when I was collecting lunch tickets (as a PhD student at Birkbeck College). He immediately started talking to me,

of all people, asking me how I liked the conference, what were the interesting things I noticed. Maverick curiosity, however, did not enamour him to the rest of the lunch queue and my brief brush with genius was over. This was an eye-opener in a different way. Here was a real person, not simply the remote authority of words on a page or the podium, but a controlled eccentric who first experienced, then explained what he saw, in mental hospitals and identifying with the stigmatised, and wrote it up. It made me realise that writing and theorising were possible.

By the time I got my first “real job,” I was working as a community psychologist in East London where my mother’s family had lived. (Somewhere at home, I have a small box photo of my grandfather eating a sandwich while sitting on a steel girder overlooking what I think is Paddington station.) I had ended up with a strong sense of place and a positive sense of my grandparent’s generation – as progressive politically, international in outlook, and as persons to love. But times were unlovely. Thatcher had come to power in the same week I got the post, and while it took a few years for the ugliness of her vision to emerge, the Thatcher–Regan alliance changed the world. To the one, the fruits of which we are still being forced to eat. After the defeat of the Miners in 1984–1985, like many, I turned inwards. Had started a family and realised I had to get real career wise. While my community psychology job was principally concerned with youth and young adulthood, working with older people had been a key part of the team’s activity and led to a number of intergenerational projects under the tutelage of Mike Bender and Alison Cooper. They had been the first in the United Kingdom to take psychology out of the clinic and into social and community settings, and while the unit was short lived, their ideas had a profound influence on me. It may help explain why I have always been attracted to applied issues and theories and even now, am working with an agency whose strapline is “Working for an Australia without Poverty.” To this day, I keep carrying a book around with me, *Social Psychology and Social Relevance*, written by Alan Elms in 1972. I got it second hand and as far as I can tell it has otherwise sunk without trace. But in terms of eye openings, it linked the academic to the practical and pointed out that these interconnections worked.

However, like many people drawn to academic work, I am not a natural extrovert, and while working in community psychology and undertaking

psychotherapy as an expected part of psycho-social practice, I became interested in the work of C. G. Jung. Jung's explanation of the indeterminacy of gendered identity, that the life course is marked by radical shifts in outlook and that each person has the capacity to develop those parts of themselves submerged by social conformity made sense. It explained, at least to me, how internal and external worlds connected and put the changes in priority that happen to people across the life course in conceptual perspective. Here was another tool, building on, but with much more flexibility, the stage theories of Erik Erikson that explained the ways that different age groups understood their worlds and the priorities they faced. By the time I arrived at the UK Social Work Agency (CCETSW) and picked up the brief on "the elderly" – the one that nobody else seemed to want – and even before I had encountered this thing called gerontology, certain concepts were already in place to interrogate the place of older people in society. A sense of social justice, an awareness of the tension between the social and the personal, and an interest in life course change and intergenerational identities, enhanced by a belief that ideas could change our worlds for better and for worse.

Gerontology and Ideas

All this may sound a rather odd way of starting a piece on theory as an eye-opener. In many ways, theories are a route out of being determined by events. They allow us to stand back and try and work out what is going on. And in this way they help us determine what to do about it, with whom and in what direction. They affect our interior as well as exterior worlds, the ways we think about our own ageing, our interaction with others and the factors that determine our life circumstances. They make sense of the world, the historical period we find ourselves thrown into and the stage of life we are grappling with, puzzled by and trying to understand.

There is a saying attributed to Bob Butler (Moody 1986), the author of *Why Survive?* and key player in the making of North American gerontology, that gerontology is an amalgam of science and advocacy. He was in part alluding to how closely gerontology followed current events and used its evidence base to promote the interests of older adults. Reading his

comments through Foucault, we now know that power and knowledge are never entirely separable, as politics influences which research is considered relevant and paid for, and it is often also a question of which voice is dominant and who is advocating for whom. For social gerontology, the relationship between social circumstances, policy and the expectations placed on us as we grow old has always been a vexed one and, as Carroll Estes et al. (2001) in the United States and Chris Phillipson (1998) in the United Kingdom have tirelessly reminded us, is contingent on structural inequalities that interact intimately with people's everyday lives. My background opened my eyes to political economy as an explanation of how injustice operates, but I was also interested in how people build protective arrangements to insulate themselves from negative events and to build bridges to the wider world.

So, while my own theoretical position has evolved over time, it has been based on a combination of psycho-social and political-economic concepts and wondering about the relationship between the two. For me, this crystallised around how personal experience interacted with developments in social policy and other less formal social discourses such as those associated with adult ageing and the life course. This process often became associated with barriers to self and collective expression such as social ageism and, in its most extreme form, elder abuse. It became clearer to me that the strategies people used to manage their everyday identities were closely connected to their experience of ageing in others and in themselves. Rather than being caught in a war with their own bodies (Featherstone & Hepworth 1991), I saw the core contradiction being between a mature imagination that could not be expressed and social attitudes that shaped the legitimising forms of expression that were made available to them (Biggs 1999). This grew out of my reading of Jung, De Beauvoir and the gradual understanding that social ageism was a powerful, if at the time rarely acknowledged, means of perpetuating inequality and marginalisation of adult ageing. But how, I asked myself, did it operate in everyday life? Here the work of Judith Butler and Kathleen Woodward had an important effect, not so much that I read them deeply, but that they reopened my eyes to the way that people presented themselves and maintained threatened identities through a series of performances and masquerades. It resonated with Jung (who didn't like

personae, or the first half of life very much) and with Goffman's work on the presentation of self.

As mainstream social policy began to catch up with many of the proposals made by critical gerontology – for example, that age is not simply a matter of biological decline, no compulsory retirement age, the recognition of age discrimination and elder abuse as explicit social problems – it became clear that a new form of critique, paying greater attention to process rather than content was needed. The co-option and accompanying distortion of once radical concepts to justify the privatisation of social welfare and the erosion of pensions security, the requirement to work rather than the option of staying working, the increasing precarity that a new policy turn was bringing to ageing in mature economies, made it a priority to re-evaluate what a contemporary critical approach might be. Little by little, it seemed that the aims of a radical gerontology had been turned inside out. They had now become a means of legitimising the erosion of the conditions for a good life and to eclipse what was both problematic about and the special potential of a long life.

Changed Priorities in Intergenerational Context

All this required a re-examination of the processes that led older people to be both marginalised and devalued. The ground had changed, but the contradictions remained. At the interpersonal level, this showed itself as a lack of empathic understanding of the age-other, a tendency to perpetuate midlife priorities way beyond their shelf-life and a need for what Ariela Lowenstein and I came to call generational intelligence (2011). We both saw intergenerational relations as a great source of strength and of misunderstanding, which could easily become as Martin Kohli (2005) had suggested, a new field on which wider political and economic rivalries would be played out. Not that they are themselves a source of inequality, but as a cloak, covering deeper contradictions within society.

The continuities that had driven earlier critical thinking – staying in work, avoiding bodily ageing and social inclusion – appeared less and less satisfying, both intellectually and as a solution to changed economic and demographic circumstances. It appeared that the shifting sands of economics were not a secure enough material base on which to understand the

distinctive idiom of a long life. Discontinuity lay in the changing priorities suggested by different age-related projects and the existential questions that become increasingly pressing as one grows older, a sort of life course materiality. These are important if we are to discover the special contribution of a long life and critically examine the degree to which the self is in harmony with priorities that are life course specific.

In this context, a focus on age-specific life course priorities, arising from psycho-social thinking, appeared to be a more precise material base on which to build meaning and purpose than economic instrumentalism alone. It also set up an interesting way of recognising the complementary nature of generational difference. Yes, we do have different priorities as we grow up and age. We need to recognise rather than deny this and build of it a source of intergenerational strength, rather than competition and insecurity. The tension here is principally to do the boundaries that are set around age-otherness. When othering is combined with social ageism, it becomes a negative phenomenon (Phillips et al. 2010). However, recognition of otherness is also a key part in respecting the particular qualities of an age-specific experience and, in this sense, is the first step in not assuming that one's own position explains and supersedes the priorities of others. This it seemed to me, at least, provided a way of finding something special about ageing, an addition to critical gerontology and a move beyond "within age" thinking.

Two Questions, Two Problems

The combination of recognising that different age groups have different existential life priorities, that dominant groups tend to erase the perspectives of other ages and that this meant that intergenerational relations had to be consciously negotiated, set the scene for a new set of questions and the problems generated by new solutions. Furthermore, changing demographics raised the parallel question of the sort of cultural adaptation that was needed (Biggs 2014a). It seemed to me that we were facing two core questions. First, how do we adapt to a situation where generations will be of approximately the same size? That is to say that as societies change from traditional to mature economic structures, we will have moved from a demographic triangle with many children, whittled down to a few aged

survivors, to a column shape in which each generation consists of almost the same number of persons. Second, what is the purpose of a long life? Which is to pose the question, are there age-specific purposes, priorities and projects that arise from longevity itself?

Under contemporary circumstances, it appeared that two problems were rising as responses to demographic change: one reflects an international consensus on work as the solution to a long life and the other an emerging tension in the public domain around intergenerational relations.

Work and a Long Life

In terms of working longer, Thibault Moulaert and I (2013) have claimed that this marks a shift from holistic to restricted policies of social inclusion, using the stick of reduced pension eligibility, backed up by productivist ideology. Alan Walker (2009) has expressed his frustration at the limited interpretation of active ageing, in terms of prolonged working life, that has come to dominate international policy. From the current perspective, work, as the solution to the question of a long life, has several disadvantages. First, it is unclear how far it fits with specific life course tasks, or whether it is simply “more of the same” and an extension of midlife projections onto a different phase of life. In other words, work may not allow the self-development promised by longevity, where there is so much more to do. Second, it is very much a “within later life” position. Although this solution addresses wider fiscal problems, in terms of generations, it does not really look beyond the presumed needs of older adult workers alone, which may form an answer for professional older adults, and doesn’t readily place the extension of working life within the context of wider intergenerational processes and social inequalities. Third, work is assumed to be a relatively age-neutral and therefore power-neutral environment – while at the same time it is one’s ability to compete, regardless of social categories, on the same ground of productivity – that determines social value. Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, work can be used as a means of avoiding the challenge of a long life. By relying on extrinsic work status, one is not forced to confront one’s own intrinsic value that emerges as such props to identity are stripped away.

Work, then does not emerge as an adaptation to a longer life at all, rather it is simply a continuation of existing strategies. At root, it really is just more of the same, offering few opportunities for new and age-specific existential exploration.

Intergenerational Relations

In 2015, the Council for the Defence of Universities took out an advert to attract student votes for its policies. They made seven points. The fourth of which reads: “the current fees system shifts the entire funding burden from older people – whose university years cost them comparatively little or nothing – to the next generation.” The *Fairness Index* of the Intergenerational Foundation (2015) between people under 30 and those over 60 highlight a sharply widening gap between generations. In Australia, the Grattan Institute (2014) had published a similar report, *The Wealth of Generations*, indicating that government policy should change public pension policy to reduce the benefits held by older generations to pay for the needs of other age groups. In fact, both reports cite the rising costs of housing, education and low wages as serious problems facing people in their twenties and thirties – none of which in themselves are generational issues. In both cases, a deterioration in the prospects of younger generations relative to older generations was seen to require a programme of “intergenerational rebalancing” also known as reduced support to older adults.

Putting aside the growing empirical evidence that younger adults appear neither to dislike nor see their elders as a burden (see Biggs 2014a for a brief review), the rivalry solution has a number of problems.

While generational rivalry recognises generational difference, it becomes stuck in a binary antagonism without rising to discover an encompassing intergenerational solution. No foundation on intergenerational relations then, but rather a fixation with a particular generational position and enhancing its advantage. Generational rivalry steps beyond the within-age horizon noted for “more of the same” solutions, but rather than attempting to resolve ambivalence around age-otherness, opts for conflict. In this sense, it would be an example of low generational intelligence – thinking that cannot take the position of the other into account. Furthermore, while it is

gerontologically commonplace to say that unlike other forms of difference, we all, with a bit of luck, move into the place of the age-other over time, this approach appears stuck in a form of present centredness. Learning from past experience rather than envious anticipation of something that has not yet happened redirects energy to considering how the advantages of previous generations may be re-built and regained from a longitudinal and life course perspective. Competition between generations is essentially fruitless at a macro-temporal level, as one is eventually competing against one's own future.

There is, however, another way of seeing intergenerational relations, as a simultaneous experiencing of the erosion of current and future life chances. Both are becoming more precarious. Guy Standing (2011) has argued that the processes of increasing globalisation have created precarity in everyday life, marked by job insecurity, discontinuity of identity and lack of time control. These, he argues, would include young adults who may well have an education but find themselves in work that has little security, poor pay and no obvious career pathway. There are certainly indications that a long life is also becoming a precarious one, including information in The International Labour Organisation's World Social Protection Report 2014/15 (2015) and the Australian BSL Social Exclusion Monitor (2014). The likelihood of an increasingly precarious ageing would be exacerbated by lengthened statutory retirement ages, questions over availability and forms of work, plus inadequate and unaffordable care and support services (Biggs 2014b). Precarity forms a common site for generational solidarity now, and for all our futures. Perhaps, it can open our eyes, also, to the common yet complementary interests of generations and the possibility for self-conscious social change.

Eye Openers: Some Concluding Comments

In terms of theory, then, it would be wrong of me to say this or that theory was in itself an eye-opener. Rather, conceptual development emerged through a happy discovery of theories that explain the world and personal experience in a way that helped make sense of it and suggest alternatives. A further conceptual leap is to work out how such concepts can be applied to persons with very different experiences, such as those

associated with age. And in that sense, it consists of an amalgam of personal experience, empathic ability and historical circumstance. Once you have worked out your theory, you can apply it to interrogate all sorts of conundra. When it ceases to make sense, you can see if there is some way of rethinking what's been going on to start the concepts moving again.

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Five eye-openers in my life of critical gerontology

By STEPHEN KATZ*

Abstract

This paper is a personal account of five “eye-opening” career experiences in the author’s life that illustrate how biographical events shape opportunities and inspire knowledge-making in critical gerontology. Borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu’s methodological concept of “fieldwork in philosophy,” this account suggests that critical thinking only becomes meaningful in the lived contexts in which it is grounded, negotiated, transformed, and shared. Thus theoretical ideas about ageing, despite their abstract nature, have historical and unpredictable stories of their own that are worthy of a “fieldwork” approach. The paper also emphasises that the “critical” in critical gerontology includes a strong reflexive and self-critical dimension about the subjective conditions of doing gerontological research, especially in the face of gerontology’s claim to be an objective science.

Keywords: critical gerontology, biography, reflection, history of ideas.

For this special issue of the *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* celebrating its 10th anniversary, an invitation was sent out to write about our “personal reflections on the role of theory as eye-opener in gerontology.”

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In response I wish to extend this invitation to focus more reflexively on the role of personal career events as eye-openers in thinking about critical gerontology. Writing reflexively is challenging because it is an exercise in defamiliarisation to step back from our ideas and see how they came about. But where I have done this before, I have learned a great deal about my own thinking (Katz 2008). And when I read with interest about the reflexive careers of others, I see how their personal stories illuminate aspects of scholarly fields beyond the purview of their published works. For example, Clifford Geertz's (1988) book, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, is a wonderful introduction to how classical anthropologists constituted their discipline both as fieldwork scientists and as literary authors. In Sociology, there is a rich background of stories that remind us of how ideas overflow texts and reveal their nomadic and political nature. For instance, without the risks taken by Antonio Gramsci's partner Giulia, and her sister Tatiana, we would have no *Prison Notebooks* (Lauretis 1987). When Max and Marianne Weber visited America in 1904, they met W. E. B. Dubois and William James who inspired them to think and write about new ideas regarding religious cults, race relations, women's rights, and the moral dilemmas of democratic society (Scaff 1998). Urban Sociology developed with Georg Simmel and Louis Wirth not only because of their sociological inventiveness but also because Simmel lived in Berlin, the largest metropolis in Europe in the early 20th century, when he wrote "The metropolis and mental life" in 1903 and Wirth lived in bustling, multicultural and agonistic Chicago when he wrote "Urbanism as a way of life" in 1938.

The lives and environments of idea creators are important resources for understanding their ideas. Pierre Bourdieu captures this sense of ideas as living moments when he characterised much of what he did as a theorist as "fieldwork in philosophy," a phrase he borrowed from philosopher John Austin (Bourdieu 1990). For Bourdieu, philosophical fieldwork provides a key methodological inquiry into how ideas change and become embedded as socially meaningful. Thus, Bourdieu believes that good theory closes the gap between lived and abstracted worlds, and as evidence, he points to cases where this has happened, such as the intercultural use of "classificatory schemes" that began with Durkheim and was carried forward in the anthropological work of Marcel Mauss, Mary Douglas and Claude Lévi-Strauss

(1990: 24–26). Similarly, I have argued that a reflexive-oriented fieldwork approach can be useful when looking at gerontological theory (Katz 2003). Bernice Neugarten's (1988) account of her career or W. Andrew Achenbaum's (2013) recent biography of Robert N. Butler, which Achenbaum treats as a "life review" following Butler's own conceptual method, are but two examples of how our gerontological ideas flow from often unpredictable biographical circumstances.

In my own work I have also tried to see where ideas live and breathe in gerontology. In chronicling gerontological handbooks I examined the textual vocabularies, literary designs and rhetorics by which gerontology represents itself as an authority on ageing (Katz 2000a). In a related study I traced the currency of the master-concept "activity" in gerontology as a theoretical model, a cultural ideal, an empirical instrument, a healthcare regime, a political rationality and a discursive resource (Katz 2000b). In a similar vein, my colleague Barbara Marshall and I have explored the meaning and ubiquity of "function" and "functionality" in relation to ageing (Katz 2006; Katz & Marshall 2004). More recently I have worked on the meaning of "lifestyle" in gerontology (Katz 2013) and the applications of new ideas about memory loss, cognitive impairment and neurocultural developments in the ageing field (Katz 2012; Katz & Peters 2008). In this latter area Kevin Peters and I have published a special issue of the journal *Dementia* (Katz & Peters 2015) entitled "Voices from the field: Expert reflections on mild cognitive impairment," a series of nine interviews with leading researchers who talk about the intermix of their lives and ideas in order to explain their views on why the concept of Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) is so uncertain.

These stories, lives, ideas and investigations include eye-openers, to return to the theme of this writing. Indeed, the founding of Geriatrics in the early 20th century by Ignatius L. Nascher began with a very personal eye-opener. As Lawrence Cohen describes that founding moment:

Nascher later would retell the birth of geriatrics as the narrative of an epiphany, generated by an encounter with an old woman patient he had as a medical student. Visiting a slum workhouse with mostly elderly inmates, young Nascher and his medical preceptor are accosted by a woman complaining of her pain. The preceptor ignores the woman, and finally Nascher gets up the courage to ask why they are not trying to help her. "It's just old age," his preceptor explains. It is at this point that Nascher recounts the realization that

founded (and continues to dominate) the field: *it's not just old age*. In the declaration of old age's normality, Nascher had the vision of geriatrics. (Cohen 1998: 62)

Eye-openers, such as Nascher's, are critical moments that fold biography into thought in ways that evoke surprise, coincidence and the unexpected. Ultimately they can lead to new field-making questions, such as the one that sparked Nascher to ask how medical science can identify the relationship between the normal and the pathological in ageing; something we are still asking. In this spirit I want to reflect upon five eye-opening moments that pushed me to think critically about gerontological theory and connected me to wider questions about knowledge-making in the ageing research.

The Samburu of Kenya: Elderhood Matters

The first eye-opener was in the summer of 1973. I was a 21-year-old undergraduate at York University in Toronto when I registered for a course that took place in Kenya. With little background in African studies, I excitedly joined a group of 35 students and two professors as we travelled to northern Kenya to settle in an old game lodge amongst the Samburu people. The Samburu, like the Masai, are traditional pastoralists who command a brilliant knowledge of the ecological relationships of their livestock, water and weather patterns, pasture environments and associated kinship structures including a sophisticated age-grade system based on the achievements of elderhood. Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, was called Mzee which is an honorific term for "old man." Paul Spencer, the chief Samburu ethnographer entitled his first book *The Samburu: A Study of Gerontocracy in a Nomadic Tribe* (1965). The Samburu concept of life-course is such a powerful organising principle that it was impossible for me not to see how their respect for ageing put our culture's contempt of it into relief. I was amazed to learn how elders could bless and curse. For example, in a culture where the job of young warriors to protect their cattle can sometimes involve killing predators and raiders, the guilt (*ngoki*) of killing must be cleansed by all warriors being blessed by their ritual elders. The elders also permit the go-ahead for the major life-transition ceremonies such as male circumcision and marriage for younger Samburu. For the Samburu, age is the

imaginative resource that turns their dry savannah pasture lands into an agricultural fairground of dance and spirit. It is not surprising that Paul Spencer's second book about the Samburu was called *Society and the Dance: The Social Anthropology of Process and Performance* (1985). These learning experiences in Kenya opened both my eyes and mind to new ways of grasping the meaning of age and the diversity of cross-cultural age systems, which would greatly influence my future ideas about gerontology.

Critical Theory and Gerontology

My second eye-opener was inspired by two moments. In the Fall of 1984, I was teaching a social science course at York University. One of the assignments was for students to select an essay topic from a list I provided and one of the topics was on "ageing and old age" which only one student picked. A few weeks later the student came to tell me that there were very few reference books in the massive York library on her topic and those that were on the shelves were mostly out of date. I visited the library myself and saw that the section on ageing was embarrassingly sparse, especially compared to adjacent shelves of sociological material on social inequality, difference and identity. My student had been right in identifying a critical gap in the sociological literature and I thought that if ageing was so poorly represented in a large university library, what did this indicate about the general representation of ageing in society? Further, I realised that the critical forces revitalising other fields of knowledge had somehow bypassed gerontology despite the imaginative thinking of some of its early founders. I returned to advise my student to change her essay and write instead about the state of gerontology itself. She also developed a qualitative component and interviewed older women about what they thought about gerontology and gender relations. My student submitted an excellent paper and went on to develop a career in the gerontological field.

Later in the summer in 1985, I entered the PhD program in Sociology at York University in Toronto while continuing as a part-time instructor there. My studies began with a bang in a seminar taught by visiting professor Ernesto Laclau, whose work was mapping out the controversial

political logics between Marxism and poststructuralism. Laclau taught us about Judith Butler, Derrida, Foucault, Gadamer, Gramsci and Lacan, and their importance to theorising non-class social movements such as feminism, populism and environmentalism. I learned that while new kinds of poststructuralist theory were radicalising sociological thinking, this was not being translated to ageing research. When I combined this realisation with the experience of my student, I became interested in where the new critical theoretical work could find common ground with the study of ageing and how could they matter to each other. This question then became the inspiration for my PhD thesis and later for my book about the theoretical development of the gerontological sciences entitled *Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge* (Katz 1996).

Nobody Is Old: Canadian Snowbirds in Florida

My third eye-opening moment arose during a fieldwork project in 1999, where I travelled to the west coast of Florida to study Canadian snowbird communities. Snowbirds are mostly retired individuals or couples who spend their winter months in the warmth of Florida, Arizona, Texas and other “warm-belt” states or “sun-city” enclaves. In Europe there are parallel patterns with northern Europeans living in Spain or other Mediterranean areas. My project was to explore how older mobile Canadians were creating new spatial arrangements as they inhabited mobile home “parks” and gated communities near Florida’s coastal areas. I was also curious about American–Canadian relationships in such communities. I chose to do my research in Charlotte County because it is one of the fastest growing retirement regions in the world with an average of 40–50% of the population being 65 years or older. It is also a popular area for Canadians who live in estates identified by Canadian references, such as Maple Leaf Estates and Victoria Estates.

However, when I went to talk to people about their snowbird lives in Charlotte County, I faced a dilemma. Although the county’s services, housing, medical centres, restaurants and banks have practically been reinvented to cater to its older populations, almost everybody I talked to said they were neither “old” nor did their chronological age reflect

who they really were. When I asked to meet older residents at some of the estates, I was pointed to somebody else. "Oh, you want the Murray's next door, they're old!" Then again, the Murray's would point me to somebody even older in their opinion, and on it went. Everybody was retired, but nobody was really old. When I asked people if they took advantage of "early bird specials" at restaurants and "discount days" at the malls, most claimed that these were for "old people," not for them. While the language of seniorhood and active ageing was acceptable, the language of "old" or "elderly" was not. If health problems developed, these were seen as due to accidents, poor diet or just bad luck, but not due to ageing. Once at a supermarket, I asked the (older) manager if he could ask some of the part-time older workers if they would meet with me after work. Only one fellow showed up, who told me he was the only older person there since the rest were just "retired guys" looking to make a little extra money.

I thought there has to be some way to self-identify for these people based on age beyond the vague category of "senior" or "retired," but what was it? Marketing firms have this problem as well as they try to define age-based demographic targets for their products. At the same time, our youth-obsessed, anti-ageing culture devalues all that is associated with age, such as wisdom, memory, tradition and generation and leaves behind far too few identities that meaningfully represent the ageing experience. Yet advocates demand more age-friendly and age-relevant housing, fashion, technologies, transportation and financial products, all of which require some form of positive age-identification undiluted by the postmodern blurring of age categories. But for those who live through age-related poverty or disability, their suffering is unfairly characterised as the outcome of individual failure to participate in supposedly empowering lifestyles that accord with responsible consumerism and the erasure of being old. The popularity of ideas like "successful" and "productive" ageing in American gerontology also promotes this untenable situation. So how can we identify this unmentionable human state that really is old without being trapped in discourses restricted either to positive or negative imagery? This was an eye-opening question for me as my fieldwork lead to a critique of our culture's coercive asymmetry between the subjective "feeling" of age and the body's outward manifestations of it. After Florida, in addition to a paper on snowbirds,

I wrote a conference paper presentation entitled, "Doing fieldwork on ageing when nobody is old," which helped to articulate my encounter with ageing identities within my own culture.

Sex, Age and Functionality

My fourth eye-opener happened on a cold winter afternoon in 2001 at Trent University in one of our senior common rooms. I was catching up with my colleague Barbara Marshall about her new research on sexuality. The "Viagra revolution" was upon us and we were chatting about the consequences of this wonder drug for older men and, more widely, for the concept of sexual performance itself. We realised that our work had much in common since we were both concerned with the social and gendered construction of the ageing body and the development of consumer, pharmaceutical and lifestyle industries around later life. We also discussed how sexuality in this case was becoming modelled according to a medical concept of "functionality"; hence, the traditional problem of impotence was being transformed into one of "erectile dysfunction." The opportunity to embrace Barbara's ideas on age and sexuality provided me with a new understanding of the construction of the ageing body as an assemblage of molecular functions.

After that meeting Barbara and I started exchanging ideas and organising literature searches and writing plans. I had already acquired some great historical materials on the medicalisation of the ageing body from the Wellcome Library for the History of Medicine in London to add to my readings in gerontology about functional health. Barbara had a wealth of data to share on sexuality, medicine, gender and pharmaceutical treatments, plus her own innovative work on gender and critical theory. Central to this eye-opening experience was co-authoring publications. In our research and writing, Barbara and I were so synchronised that we quickly wrote a manuscript entitled, "Forever functional: Male sexual fitness and the ageing body," a wordplay on Robert Wilson's *Feminine Forever* (1966), the bestseller about the power of hormone replacement therapy to prevent the supposed calamities of menopause. After our paper was published in the journal *Body & Society* (Marshall & Katz 2002), we had enough ideas

and material to write four more papers which we published between 2002 and 2012. Ten years of our successful sharing of ideas and publishing papers together has led us now to investigate new areas of research and join with others in funded projects that continue our interests in the ageing body and society. Our work has also become one of the main features of a new Centre for Ageing and Society at Trent University.

What's Critical about Critical Gerontology?

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, my research and writing had increasingly become part of a network of thinkers grouped under the banner of "critical gerontology," an interdisciplinary sub-field consisting mostly of humanities and social science scholars who challenge the assumptions of mainstream gerontology and biomedical models of ageing. Historically, the idea of "critical" harkens back to the critical theory of mid-20th century Marxists of the Frankfurt School for whom reflexivity was a methodological component of their critiques of political ideologies, cultural formations and instrumental methodologies. However, the approaches developed in critical gerontology expand upon this earlier orientation by advancing new research in political economy, feminism, social constructivism, the Humanities, the sociology of the body, cultural studies, media and technology (Calasanti & Slevin 2006; Cole et al. 2010; Gilleard & Higgs 2013; Twigg & Martin 2015). My own work has also been motivated by Michel Foucault's idea of "critical curiosity," a style of thought that evokes "a readiness to find what surrounds us as strange and odd; a readiness to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way" (Foucault 1997: 325). Such critical curiosity fuels the essays in my book, *Cultural Ageing: Life Course, Lifestyle and Senior Worlds* (Katz 2005). Further, I have been influenced by the arguments advanced by Achenbaum (1995) and others that critical, philosophical and interdisciplinary impulses have been at the source of gerontology from the beginning. However, modern gerontology's pursuit of scientific status and affiliation with medical specialties has meant the loss of this broader creative foundation and the sense of gerontology as an art as well as a science. As such, critical gerontology can be seen as both returning to

its historical and intellectual roots as well as mapping out new research trends and radical directions.

As a self-identified critical gerontologist, my eye-opener came about during a symposium at The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) in 2007. I had been invited to be part of a symposium on "Gerontology and critical theory: Recent applications and emerging issues." My paper presentation was about ageing and functionality and a well-known American gerontologist was lined up to be the discussant. However, before the symposium occurred I was told by several colleagues that the discussant was not pleased with this idea that gerontologists could be divided between critical and mainstream camps, although this was not the topic of my paper. And when the discussion came up, he made it very clear that the purposes and goals of critical gerontology were not only unclear but served little purpose. After all, he aggressively argued, gerontologists have always been critical thinkers because of their critique of ageism and support for age-advocacy movements. Further, researchers in the social sciences have imported sociological ideas about social inequality and political economy into gerontology for decades and still feel no need to self-identify as critical gerontologists.

Despite the discussion period becoming heated and at times unpleasant, it was an eye-opener for me. While I had written about the need to clarify the meaning of gerontological criticality in the past, here was a face-to-face confrontation about it. If we are to defend critical gerontology we must be careful in explaining it. Many people research women, but not all are feminists. Many people research labour, but not all are Marxist-oriented political economists. And many people study ageing, but not all are critical thinkers. So what distinguishes "us" as critical gerontologists? Where are we really pushing the boundaries of gerontological theory? And who are we calling "uncritical" and why? In subsequent and very helpful email exchanges with colleagues from that conference, I thought more about defining critical gerontology and I began to outline what I consider some of its basic parameters, which I accumulated into a paper entitled "What is age studies" (Katz 2014) for *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. As I wrote the paper I had the GSA discussant's response in mind. His exchange with our symposium presenters reminded me that criticality has to be convincingly demonstrated and not just assumed, and that

finding the critical threads in any field must include a reflexive process of self-scrutiny.¹

Conclusions

I have been very fortunate that the Kenyan Samburu, my York University student, my PhD course with Ernesto Laclau, the Canadian snowbirds in Florida, my colleague Barbara Marshall and my GSA symposium discussant have given me the opportunities to stop and reflect on my work. They have allowed me to see how ideas have a life of their own as they wander across boundaries, limits, expectations and disciplinary conventions into shared thought spaces where eye-opening and idea-making are part of the same process. I could add other moments to these five eye-openers as they continue to intercept my thinking and push my work in unexpected ways. Sometimes the eye-opener has been a book, such as reading Julia Twigg's (2000) *Bathing: The Body and Community Care* whose focus on the bath and bathing has inspired me to look similarly at the ways falls and falling for older individuals are micro-sociological moments that reveal our wider cultural ambivalence about ageing. Or sometimes it is just a statement whose reflexive message keeps echoing in my mind such as Jon Hendricks saying that, "if we cannot see ourselves in our explanations, perhaps we should pause before proffering these explanations to the profession" (Hendricks 2008: 113). But overall, whatever the sources of inspiration that drive us to think and write about ageing, when our work and careers are looked at reflexively, they provide exciting individual portals into how biography, imagination, ideas and circumstance are connected to our pursuit of critical perspectives.

¹There is a wider discussion about the relationship between age studies and gerontology developed in organisations such as the North American Network in Aging Studies (NANAS) and highlighted in the radical writing of Margaret Morganroth Gullette (e.g. Gullette 2013). However, there is general agreement that age studies is characterised as embracing non-scientific and non-medical approaches to age and ageing across the life-course, stemming from those fields often excluded in mainstream gerontological organisations and journals, such as the Humanities, performance/media/cultural studies, History and Philosophy.

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Aging worlds in contradiction: gerontological observations in the Mediterranean region

By *HANS-JOACHIM VON KONDRATOWITZ**

Abstract

This article discusses the existing and developing aging regimes in the Northern and Southern rim countries of the whole Mediterranean region which are all undergoing considerable social and political transformation processes. It is argued that several eye-opening theoretical interventions for such a gerontological project may lead to some methodological problems and pitfalls, which have to be dealt with productively. Central collective concepts of such an analysis (as the change-oriented “modernization effects” of societal aging and the continuity-oriented gaze at the “unity of the region”) have to be reconsidered and ought to be more differentiated in order to allow smaller social entities (such as kinship and community systems and their connectivity) to be central orientations for analyzing poverty and care management in old age in the Mediterranean region. How to reconnect such a rather micro-political agenda with large processes and big structures of aging policies in the region however still remains an open question.

Keywords: modernization, welfare states, culture/s, differentiation, Mediterranean region, Southern Europe, aging regimes.

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Exploring Social Gerontological Research in the Mediterranean Region

To be active in the domain of gerontology came to me rather as a surprise, as an unforeseen turn of my professional build-up in sociology. Up to my first encounter with gerontology starting in 1978, I was more concentrated on debating and challenging evidence and assertions of social history, social systems theory, organizational sociology and sociology of knowledge. Then, during an extended qualification stay in Ann Arbor, I was for the first time introduced to this new and multifaceted field consisting of different social science approaches and presented as “gerontology,” in which I have been actively engaged since. Its special attractiveness for me always rested not only in the blending and negotiation of methodologically diverse theoretical approaches but also in the more direct confrontation with urgent empirical issues and problems.

From there on, it has been my prime interest to engage myself most of all in border-crossing contacts and to develop perspectives for international comparative research in gerontology. Among those orientations, the development of socio-gerontological expertise in the Southern European countries has caught my special attention for some time; an interest which has been intensified recently by visits and careful observations in different countries there. The dynamics of social gerontological inquiry in Europe demonstrates that relevant social science research from the Southern European countries, such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, Malta and Greece, has developed stronger than ever. Such advancements have also complemented and reweighted the traditionally powerful medical and geriatric traditions in all these countries. In the aging field, these scientists and social workers have organized and stimulated many new and comparative approaches in family, social network, community and welfare-state research.

An inter-European social research group has aimed at making some of these developments and their results more visible in a comparative manner. Its ambition has also been to extend this perspective to the dynamics and crystallization of the aging process in the *whole Mediterranean region*. Therefore, aging in the Southern Arab and Turkish shore countries has been considered empirically and included in the analyses of the research team (Troisi & Kondratowitz 2013a).

Such an undertaking to enlarge research perspectives needs a plausible justification. It can be found in the complex theoretical framework, which will operate as the basis for the “eye-opening” experience in giving incentives for gerontological analyses. In other words, in order to develop a promising strategy for research, it is helpful to check the following four options in the theoretical repertoire and to distinguish different levels of concern.

- a. For the level *long periods* and *large processes* characterizing the Mediterranean basin, the theoretical perspective lies in the important heritage of a *histoire totale* (*total history*) as elaborated by the French *Annales* School (Revel & Hunt 1995). This interdisciplinary program has served as an attempt to analyze long periods of social and economic history in cooperation with the analysis of social structures by using the idea of different acceleration passages of historical time for distinction. Beyond historical-demographical research, research on changes in images of old age and their persistence would be gerontologically highly relevant.
- b. Another eye-opening experience has been the presence of theoretical and empirical work in *social and cultural anthropology*, in particular by their numerous and comprehensive studies on kinship systems in comparative analyses (Sahlins 2013; Schweitzer 2000). The critical position of the aged in these contexts, their supportive roles in family connection and their rather jeopardized role in case of manifest dependency has been discussed and researched for the Mediterranean region.
- c. *Discourse analysis* has a particular relevance for analyzing dynamics in the Mediterranean, especially for its highly relevant concept of *Orientalism*: a way of imagining, emphasizing, exaggerating and distorting differences of Arab people and cultures as compared with those of Europe and the United States (Said 1979, 2003). It has often involved seeing Arab culture as exotic, backward, uncivilized and, at times, even dangerous. Stereotyping in this orientalized vein has pictured the aged as “wise elderly” and as mentors, retreated from society, but experienced with knowledge about special secrets in the conduct of life (Orientalism 2015). It would also imply the analysis of implicit power structures and the lasting impact of social class in these contexts.
- d. In working with the Mediterranean setting, specific eye-opening experiences are produced by the debate about *post-colonial studies*.

In this view, modernity seems to create quite different dynamics of distinction and it favors divergent formations of civilizations. S. N. Eisenstadt describes this whole process of multiplication as “a story of continual development and formation, constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs of modernity and of distinctively modern institutional patterns and of different self-conceptions of societies as modern – of multiple modernities” (Eisenstadt 2006). Its radical consequence of an “untranslatable alterity” (Krishnaswamy 2008) would question any possibility of meaningful comparative work among the two parts of the Mediterranean. In this complex region, modernization in the field of aging can therefore be expected to take shape simultaneously in a quite contradictory and multifaceted way (Troisi & Kondratowitz 2013a).

It is the objective of this article to discuss not only the productive quality but also the difficulties of *two central concepts* for a gerontologically sensitive analysis coming from these given approaches: *modernization* processes and *unity* visions for this whole Mediterranean basin.

Aging in the Mediterranean Region I: The Paradox of Modernization

Concepts of modernity in use today are clearly challenged by the post-colonial debate (Knöbl 2007). In order to connect the implications of this debate to the subject of aging, certain dominant themes from the relevant literature have been presented as points of orientation and inquiry. One might call it a specific “check list” of social indicators to be looked after in both parts of the Mediterranean (Kondratowitz 2013a; Troisi 2013a):

- Rationalization processes and embedded performance orientations along the life course
- The general demographic outlook for each country as well as in a comparative perspective
- Employment of elderly and societal retirement strategies
- Trends of extending and professionalizing service deliveries in the areas of health and care
- Strategies of social control and assuring security for old age

- Long-term migration trends along the life course from countries and regions
- Continuous religious affiliations of its population over the life course
- The complex family dynamics in respect to the position of the elderly
- Advances in gender positions and aging
- Media and telecommunications impact with respect to old age
- First processes of increasing democratization and consequences for the societal position of the aged

All these indicators have been based on evidence from a theory of *reflexive modernization* as it has been notably put forward, for example, by Beck and Giddens (Beck et al. 1996; Giddens 1990). Its formulation has been already in critical distance to the classical modernization approaches with its structural–functionalist background (Kondratowitz 2013a). In these classical approaches, aging has been addressed as a consequence of an epochal demographical transition with decreasing fertility and developing longevity patterns with important social impact on education and gender positions. Such a perspective has had a tradition with a special emphasis on the countries of the Southern rim and has been elaborated, for example, in studies of the French Institute for Demographic Studies (INED) in Paris (Courbage & Fargues 1992; Lerner 1968). Other socioeconomic observers have described modernization deficits by stating a sharp divide between the two rims of the Mediterranean Sea: Northern rim countries characterized by low fertility rates and quite a high standard of living (including relatively fair conditions of life for the aged except for poverty groups), contrasted to Southern rim countries with still high rates of population increase, but a comparably weaker economic standing and very insecure life conditions for the aged (Rees et al. 1996).¹

¹ Constructing the field of inquiry as “Mediterranean region” requires an extra effort to mobilize information and data along this specific regional definition. The usual data collections of World Bank, UN, WHO, OECD, etc., do not follow this cultural understanding, but normally group data together according to geographical or political criteria (e.g. the grouping of “MENA-countries,” which means Middle East North Africa countries).

As is well known, arguing with a modernization approach in any gerontological publication is irksome: modernization has been a prime example of misperceiving the position of the aged as potentially powerless and as being subject to discrimination. There are however more fundamental reasons to reflect about the traditions and dynamics of the modernization paradigm. In his Russell Sage lectures, Charles Tilly has identified several “pernicious postulates of twentieth century social thought.” In his words, these assumptions state: “. . . the main processes of large-scale social change take distinct societies through a succession of standard stages, each more advanced than the previous stage. . . . Differentiation forms the dominant, inevitable logic of large-scale change, differentiation leads to advancement . . . The state of social order depends on the balance between processes of differentiation and processes of integration; rapid or excessive differentiation produces disorder . . .” (Tilly 1984).

However, they are altogether misleading. As he discusses in more detail: “stage theories” (e.g. Rostow’s economic growth theory) only pretend an internal coherence and standardization, but often this assumption dissolves in empirical tests. And most importantly: while differentiation is undoubtedly an important process of change, nevertheless “. . . many of the fundamental changes in our era actually entail de-differentiation . . .” (Tilly 1984), understood here as long-term expanding generalizations of similar characteristics. “Many social processes involve de-differentiation: linguistic standardization, the development of mass consumption and the agglomeration of petty sovereignties into national states” (Tilly 1984). In times of globalization, an increase in media stereotyping influences and communication technology effects could be added. Therefore, this simultaneity of global de-differentiation and, for example, further differentiation in aging situations may produce several “layers of differentiation” with diverging long-term or short-term ranges – a process to be followed with the “check list” above. This would be a program for future research strategies.

Since it is not possible here to go deeper into the details of such research, it might be worthwhile to point to an additional dimension: the implicit political use of the Mediterranean agenda, in which the topos of modernization and aging plays a decisive role (Revel & Levi 2002). Looking at the researchers of our group, one can see an apparent two-sidedness of argumentation. There has been a clear disparity in the *self-representations*

between social scientists from the Northern and Southern rim concerning modernization effects of aging. It is striking that all contributions from the Southern shore seem to favor a quite hopeful and reaffirming image of modernization for the aging phenomenon in their countries. When these observers render critical comments, such criticism centers predominantly on successes of ongoing modernizations not yet realized. And their disenchanting comments often signal social and political frustrations about delays and opposition (Arun 2013: 320–321; Courbage 2013: 206–209; Gouiaa & Sibai 2013: 356; Kronfol & Sibai 2013: 339–341). One is therefore inclined to see this as a clear votum for distinct changes in the overall life course regimes in these countries, including old age. “Modernization” turns out to be almost a formula for conjuring societally just and progressively minded aging regimes.

Somehow this stands in contrast to the mostly cautious skepticism and critical views on missed policy opportunities from which several contributors of the Northern rim have tried to translate such modernization effects into political strategies of implementation (Chiatti et al. 2013: 247–252; DaRoit et al. 2013: 164–168; Lopes 2013: 226–229; Simonazzi & Deriu 2013: 116–118; Triantafillou & Mestheneos 2013: 137–141; Viazzo 2013: 25–27). Another group of Northern shore contributors interpret modernization in their countries rather as still unfinished business to be further developed within a new design for a welfare state dominated by the societal impact of aging (Troisi 2013b: 289–292; Yecovich 2013: 267–269). Therefore, these discrepancies reflect not only different degrees of mobilization of social and medical expertise in the Mediterranean region but also different institutional conditions to process and implement such specialist knowledge into the wider political arena. Moreover, modernity seems to create quite different dynamics of distinction, and it favors divergent formations of a potential civilizational impact of aging.

Therefore, in the complex Mediterranean region, modernization in the field of aging takes shape in a quite multifaceted way and forms new shapes of aging regimes. The Southern-shore countries are characterized by a considerable lack of qualified jobs necessary for ensuring full employment of any age and gender, and this in a demographic situation with a still high fertility (which will not last in a longer time perspective). In these societies, formal employment is not a dominant feature and moreover is

often state-connected. People are provided with pension schemes, often in need of urgent reform, and with no post-retirement strategies; at the same time, unregulated and low-paid informal work structures prevail, which will not allow systematic savings for old age. In addition, such regimes are still care-centered and make use of the dominance of nonprofessional family and community care, but by qualifying services by a developed gerontological expertise (as e.g. in Tunisia and Lebanon) (Troisi & Kondratowitz 2013b).

Aging in the Mediterranean Region II: "Unity" as an Obscured Vision

Why does this idea of an essential unity exist on both shores of the Mediterranean Sea, denying any essential rift between the two parts? Looking at its intellectual heritage, for the historian Fernand Braudel in the *total history* tradition, the idea of a *unity* of the Mediterranean has been central in designing and deciding the method of his famous study on the Mediterranean world (Braudel 1966). Such a perspective would assume that there is a general comparability across quite a variety of historical periods and places in this world region under observation. Moreover, "unity" implies that there would be an implicit consistency in integration modes and in commonly shared values. Even the wide distribution of plant vegetation (such as olive and palm trees), and of geographical characteristics such as certain coastal structures, have been brought in as markers of similarity. Unity perspectives on the Mediterranean however also mirror a level of imagery, of social and cultural constructions and circulating myths, which all center on sharply contrasting the creative, flexible and imaginative "South" with the cold and rational "North" of Europe (Kondratowitz 2013b).

These ideas have not remained unchallenged. Several observers have been dissatisfied with the determinism of Braudel's work, which always included geographical studies, vegetation research and climate history (Horden & Purcell 2000; Tilly 1984). These critics would look at the Mediterranean as a network of micro-regions, of "micro-ecologies," seen as an arrangement of loosely connected, but quite diverse entities (Horden & Purcell 2000, Part Two). These ecologies constitute a rather fragmented landscape with a profoundly uncertain environment and an unpredictable

climate situation. This asks for consideration of the “connectivity” between such micro-ecologies in order to find similarities and differences (Troisi & Kondratowitz 2013a). Economic and social exchanges, intensive maritime traffic in commerce and interactions in and between several micro-ecologies are means of demonstrating this quality by coping with the risks of an ecologically fragmented world. Particularly in the social sciences, there was skepticism toward such propagators of a unity of the Mediterranean (Aboulafia 2011; De Pina-Cabral 1989; Marino 2002). In contrast, there was an increasing tendency to point to the forces of *differentiation*, to an apparent logic of developing diversity in physical and social dimensions of this region.

This reencounter of the figure of differentiation has often been connected to the myth of a Mediterranean *culture* as a conceptual bridge for standardizing somewhat similar social complexes and appearances (Kaser 2014; Steinberg 2002). Usually there are three characteristics named as alleged “culture traits” of the Mediterranean in both parts, sometimes summed up as a “Mediterranean paradigm” (de Pina-Cabral 2013) with repercussions for the situation of the aged:

1. Existence and attribution of certain strict moral codes for the regulation of everyday life – the dominance of “archaic” gender-based conceptions of male *honor* and its compliment female *shame* from preindustrial times have been studied critically (Albera 2006; Gilmore 1987; Lisón-Tolosana 2001). Anthropological critics in an orientalist vein see this claim rather as a particular way of Northern and Western countries to stereotype the Mediterranean countries as especially backward oriented, anti-modern and as questioning their ability to reform society because of these supposedly deeply rooted value orientations (Gilmore 1987; also cf. the discussion of “mediterraneanism” in Herzfeld 1987).
2. The strong *familialism* is seen as another dominating element of such culture in all its aspects and consequences for the aged:
 - the highly regulated social fabric of positioning family and kin members hierarchically and collectively, making individualistic options of privacy extremely difficult to realize;
 - following marriage strategies of relatives and kin, with early marriages for women resulting in large age differences

- between spouses, also including considerable decisions in favor of endogamy;
- promising emotional and economical security in intergenerational and wider community networks of villages and neighborhoods;
 - the existence of patronymic associations of patron–client, non-kin relationships which might develop into local *clientelism*, acting as patron–client relation and/or making use of direct access to public means for private aims (Georgas 1989; Inglehart & Baker 2000). However, empirical evidence for strong “modernization pressures” on this type of familialism is particularly well documented for the Southeastern European family (Kaser 1995).
3. The everyday confidence in smaller networks and their informal capacities for support might be responsible for a potential lack of “public spirit,” and more so, a rather stable feeling of *distrust against anonymous institutions* and *large-scale bureaucracies*, foremost against a dominant power position of the Catholic or Orthodox church, but most of all against the regulating impact of a central or local state (Kaser 2014).

Despite research on such a questionable concept as “culture,” the quality of uniqueness of societies nevertheless remains of importance for empirical comparative work. Most observers agree that it is worthwhile to concentrate first of all on societies as historically unique entities, which nevertheless may have developed quite different solutions for similar problems. Comparative work ought to concentrate particularly on this uniqueness of societies, which are ever more characterized by an increasing uniformity and “de-differentiation” in an age of globalization (Sztompka 1988). As one way of approaching this uniqueness, Scandinavian sociologists (Knudsen 1999) have introduced the term of “deep culture” in order to signify characteristic attributes in the collective consciousness of the inhabitants of a certain region, nation-state or alike, which has been formed and solidified over time. As traditions and consistent value settings, they have the potential to function as “path dependencies” of the analysis of welfare states.

In what respect the conceptual framework of “culture” (in whatever definition) will be empirically convincing is a matter of designing

appropriate research strategies. Using comparative SHARE data, Litwin has shown that cultural dimensions play a certain role in establishing bonds in old age. His recommendation has been that the social networks of older people should be seen within their unique regional milieu and in relation to the values and social norms that prevail in different sets of societies (Litwin 2009). Research based on the Immigrants and Retirement Survey (PRI) in France (Attias-Donfut 2013; Attias-Donfut et al. 2006) has allowed us to point to life choices of different aged migrant groups not only in respect to, for example, their religious beliefs and preferences but also with respect to the intensity of social connections that shape the choices of their transnational behavior. Therefore, it is obvious that using “culture” in empirical aging research needs to be specified according to local or regional conditions and normative settings. This will be necessary especially in the case of *elder care*, which in some Southern rim countries already is of prime importance as mentioned in the conclusions from the project (Troisi & Kondratowitz 2013a).²

However, in light of recent political and social ruptures, whether the *unity* perspective for the Mediterranean will continue to work as the basis for empirical social research remains an open question. Today, arguing in favor of this “unity” often serves as a unifying ideology of intellectuals from the Northern rim to essentially distance world regions, particularly Central and Northern Europe as contrasted to the Mediterranean region (Kondratowitz 2013b).

Departing Worlds? Musings of an Aging Gerontologist

Born and growing up in a cutoff spot on the central European landscape called West Berlin, I was for endless years confronted with the existence of borderlines around me. To get out of this closed shop and to start breathing again had to be my imperative decision. Involuntarily blessed with such an escapist biographical urge, it has been my prime interest to engage myself most of all in border-crossing contacts and to develop

² As an example for such regionally centered analyses of the respective care situation in Egypt, cf. Boggatz 2011, using data sets from a Coptic-orthodox background. However, the study was written before and in the early revolutionary times and would need also a reassessment under the new political conditions.

perspectives for international comparative research in gerontology. Once more seeing resentment strategies and neo-nationalism taking over is a highly unwelcome encounter with a past long imagined as over, once and forever.

At the moment, the perspectives in the Mediterranean region can serve as a prime example of these distortive processes of mutual border setting. This has been shown above also in testing the “eye-opening” theoretical approaches: central collective concepts in use, as the change-oriented “modernization effects” of societal aging and the continuity-oriented gaze at the “unity of the region,” have been shown to be conceptual decisions which could not help to grasp the social dynamics of aging there. They ought to be more differentiated in order to allow smaller social entities (as kinship and community systems and their connectivity) to be central orientations for analyzing poverty and care management in old age.

Therefore, returning to the old divide between the “North” and “South” of Europe means following a long tradition of mutual mystifications and unfulfilled expectations for change. Several attempts to establish programs and agreements between Southern EU countries and Non-EU countries of the Mediterranean region have not been successful. Movements for a “Mediterranean Union” fell through not only because of different interests inside the EU but also because they could not offer any lasting political solutions for hot topics such as Israel and Cyprus (Kondratowitz 2013b). During the ongoing *Euro-crisis* the European welfare states of the Northern shore and their socioeconomic determinants have now been at the center of attention, clearly distracting considerations away from the problems of the Southern-shore countries, contributing to a further mutual alienation. Instead, several countries have been subjected to military interventions from outside forces.

This blatant incompetence to negotiate any Mediterranean cooperation has certainly helped to accelerate the violent uprisings since 2011 in most of these Southern-shore countries, which all have demonstrated an extraordinary degree of disillusionment and frustration. This has also enormous pressure on the life courses of people and how they perceive themselves. The economic hardships of unemployment and absent job perspectives for younger cohorts have been discussed for some time in both parts of the Mediterranean region (Dhillon & Yousef 2009; EUROSTAT 2015).

However, now the aged have come more into the center of attention as a justified new subject in world perspective. They have been perceived predominantly in a context of increasing poverty and in desperate as well as in needy life situations. This has given a surprising rise to more intensive gerontological expertise from internal and international sources in several countries, such as Tunisia and Lebanon, in order to study family relations, given support structures and health policy imperatives.

Another open question remains: in what way are there signs of an aggravation of intergenerational conflict, which often has accompanied revolutionary upheavals and has materialized in the public arena? For the members of the young unemployed middle class, in many Southern rim countries, "old age" seems to stand for the continuous experience of power abuse, of venality and corruption, of privileges and patronage of long-term social elites from the upper and administrative class and from the military. Demonstrating a secure economic standing and belonging to a certain age cohort could bring especially older men into immediate suspicion of participating in the forgone dictatorship, as a direct supporter or at least as being a protégé of the overthrown rulers: the "Varnish-despots," who tried to give a signal of eternal youth by darkening their white hair with black shoe-polish (Kepel & Rupnik 2015). In the aftermath of the Tahrir uprisings in Egypt, reports from direct activities of younger students and neighborhood groups of youth, connected by social media, have also demonstrated this critical attitude toward older elite members and community elders (reports by J. Winegar and T. Swedenburg in: Sowers & Toensing 2012; Kondratowitz 2013c). On the contrary, the experiences of civil war, the continuous destruction of neighborhoods and threats of family dissolution, mostly in Libya, Syria and Lebanon, seem to have produced a new spirit of direct intergenerational cooperation and the establishment of community support – here and there even by establishing initiatives to help bridging clan, tribal and religious separations.³

³ At the moment, one possibility to get more detailed information about the present situation of the aged (particularly in the "failed states" of Libya and Syria) would be to check the objectives and activities of internal help and support groups in Southern-shore Mediterranean countries (for Syria e.g. the reports and activities of Adopt-a-Revolution: adoptrevolution.org) as well as to study respective HelpAge-International projects (if available) in some of these countries (e.g. for Gaza

But several observers are not content with merely deploring the existing rifts. In the whole region, ideas of withdrawing and preaching a self-sufficient existence as national societies in a populist vein have gained in influence. Resentment production is on the rise. The most bizarre example of such reflections has materialized in the debate about the founding of an Anti-German “Latin Empire,” supposedly consisting of France, Spain and Italy – at least in the eyes of Giorgio Agamben, its architect, in following old plans of the philosopher Kojève of 1945 (Agamben 2013; Howse 2004; Lepenies 2013). Such ideas for the EU members of the Northern shore countries reflect not only a culturally and historically defined separation but also present an apparent economic division in conducts of life and of maintaining welfare-state securities.

Meanwhile, intellectually blueprinting new empires on the map of the Mediterranean has not only been a privilege of Agamben. Now the Islamic State is trying militarily to form a new Islamic state in Iraq and Syria. In order to prove its legitimacy, the Caliphate claims even to care for the elderly in its sphere of influence. Thanks to the pamphlet of the first female Islamist group, the Al-Khanssaa brigade of 2015, one can learn about the Home for the Elderly (men!) in the Nineveh province of Northwestern Iraq. “The State tries to stop men and women to prevent it [gender mixing] as much as it is possible. . . . The Caliphate has also cast under its cloak the elderly, men and women. Its slogan reads, ‘there is none among us who is not merciful to our small and respectful towards our elderly’ ” (Women 2015).

What seems quite familiar at first sight nevertheless has an undertone: respect declarations as a disguise for a hidden contempt against aged men as useless dependents no longer able to productively participate in the expected victory. A quite worrying outlook for old age to maybe only be used as the “last reserve” in the final battles of the Caliphate. We know by experience that several dictatorships in decline have done so before.

strip/West Bank-Palestine occupied territories). However, as a first review of all the civil and social group contacts for Mediterranean countries (available via the Anna Lindh-Foundation Euromed) demonstrates: the topics of engagement they discuss concern almost exclusively children, youth and women, and educational opportunities and medical service facilities for these groups.

But what if this Islamic state – contrary to expectations – is rather solidifying as a new political force in that region? At any rate, the aging regime looming here promises to be a rigid and authoritarian rule that will affect all social and generational relations in these areas.

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Dress and age: the intersection of life and work

By *JULIA TWIGG**

Abstract

In this article I outline the influences, intellectual and personal, that have led me to the subject of dress and age, a topic that I have explored with great enjoyment over the last decade. These have their roots in earlier academic and personal interests, and one of the aims of the article is to show how these different spheres of life and work intersect. I discuss this under three broad headings: intellectual and academic influences; long-term personal interests, particularly in history and the aesthetics of dress; and the impact of becoming an older woman.

Keywords: fashion, body, age, identity.

Introduction

My current work focuses on dress and age. In this article I hope to show how I became interested in such a subject and how matters of theory and personal life can intersect. I am interested in the ways in which dress is part of the cultural constitution of later years, operating at a directly bodily level, and the ways this has wider resonances for how we study and

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understand age as a social category and experience. I locate these interests in the wider context of the emergence of what has been termed Cultural Gerontology.

Intellectual Developments in the Field of Gerontology

My interest in dress and age arose naturally out of earlier work on the body and embodiment. Initially, I looked at the body in terms of long-term care, focussing in particular on the provision of washing and bathing, and of personal care more in general, and I argued that carework needed to be conceptualised as a species of bodywork (Twigg 2000). In subsequent work, I explored the features of this category of work across a number of employment sectors (Twigg et al. 2011). This opened up for me a more general interest in the role of the body in ageing. And at this point, it struck me that one of the principal ways in which the body is experienced and known in age is through clothing and dress. After all, dress is the vestimentary envelope of the body: it is what is primarily seen, and it is central to how the body in age is presented socially. As such, it provides a route into debates around the constitution of age, in particular the complex interplay of cultural and physiological elements in this.

In the early, heady days of body studies, some analysts approached the body as if it were wholly constituted through discourse, caught in a web of signs, unknowable in any other way, virtually denying it any physiological base. Since then, its concrete reality has been recovered and re-asserted intellectually (Crossley 2001; Shilling 2003; Williams & Bendelow 1998), partly in response to work on pain, but also age – for, as many observers through the centuries have pointed out, ageing is not optional. It was indeed always implausible to see the body simply as a product of culture. What was needed at this point was more work that could explore the complex interplay between physiological and cultural elements.

As a result, rather than being an absent present, as Öberg termed it in his seminal article of 1996, the body has become one of the central topics of social gerontology. My own work has contributed to this development, partly through work on bathing and washing (Twigg 2000), but more strongly in relation to clothing and dress (Twigg 2013, 2015). Dress is wholly cultural, but it intersects with the materiality of the body in age in ways

that open up some of the central debates in social gerontology. Debates concerning, for example, the status of age as a social identity: the degree to which we are perceived, ordered and judged by our position in an age hierarchy, and the ways in which this does or does not give meaning and shape to our lives; and the role of material culture – in this case clothing – in supporting or undercutting this, enabling us to perform or to resist age in differing ways. Dress also addresses debates on the moral regulation of age: the ways in which older bodies are policed and disciplined in distinctive ways and how this relates to the new freedoms, but also new demands, of consumption culture.

The new focus on the body was also linked to the influence of the wider Cultural Turn that occurred across the social sciences and humanities in the late twentieth century, associated in particular with post-structuralist, feminist and queer theory. Its impact came relatively late to gerontology, only being fully felt in the last decade or so. Since then, however, under the label of Cultural Gerontology it has become widely influential (Andersson 2002; Gilleard & Higgs 2000, 2013, 2015; Katz 2005; Twigg & Martin 2014), so much so indeed that it now represents some of the most lively writing in this area. With Wendy Martin, I have edited *The Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology* (2015) that provides a position statement of this area.

The field of dress allows us to explore some of the theoretical themes emerging from these developments in relation, for example, to identity, performativity, moral regulation, governmentality and resistance. And it has done so, moreover, in ways that enable us, as gerontologists, to bring new insights into bear on mainstream social science, which has until recently ignored the topic of age. For example, the ways in which dress expresses and signals social and personal identity has been a theme of sociological and psychological literature for many years. But these perceptions had not been developed in relation to age, although, as I argue in the next section, they are central to how age is expressed, and indeed performed, at a bodily level. Performativity in Butler's (1990, 1993) original conception indeed had its roots in dress, though her focus was on cross dressing and drag. In relation to age, these ideas have been taken forward and developed by Laz (1998, 2003) through her conception of the "accomplishment of age," which draws on parallels with West and Zimmerman's concept of gender as a form of "accomplishment."

Here age – like gender – is seen as something that is repeatedly accomplished or performed by an individual, though it is at the same time something that is collective and interactive. Dress can clearly be part of this.

Dress is also an arena of moral regulation in which older bodies are policed and disciplined in distinctive ways. Particular meanings and dangers attach to dereliction in dress in old age in, for example, the harsher judgements that apply to torn, stained clothing when displayed by the old, compared with the easy tolerance of ripped jeans and scruffy dress in the young; and the ways such sartorial lapses in the old signal a more general moral collapse, the threat of descent into pitiable, derelict old age, with the result that it becomes important to maintain a certain standard in age if one is not to fall outside mainstream society. This is a long-established theme in relation to old age culturally, but it has acquired a new emphasis with the arrival of new modes of governmentality in age, new disciplinary requirements linked to the wider bodily perfectionism that has increasingly marked the consumption-mediated world (Bordo 1993). Increasingly, these have been extended to older women also, so that they have become integrated into the mainstream through a common culture of consumption. With these new opportunities, these new expressive freedoms, however, have come new disciplinary requirements, so that older women are drawn into the same modes of self-government that have been internalised to younger women. Dress also provides an arena for the exploration of themes of resistance. How far, and in what ways, can, and do, older people use clothes as forms of resistance to the dominant meanings of age? In my study of older women and dress I certainly identified elements of this, though I also found strong themes of conformity, with expressions of the need to be “careful” with regard to dress in an age critical world (Twigg 2013).

The focus on dress also reflected a third strand in my earlier work. This relates to a long-term interest in the sociology of the everyday, the mundane, the quotidian. This was reflected in my earlier work on washing and bathing, and on food and eating (my doctoral work was on vegetarianism) (Twigg 1983, 2000, 2006). All these represent everyday activities that structure the day, that express individuality and identity, and that offer elements of ontological security – or unease – at a habitual, embodied level. Dress is part of this. As Entwistle (2000) argues, dress needs to be seen

as “situated body practice”; not solely the preserve of the fashionable, but part of what we all do, on an everyday basis. This applies as much to older people as to the young, who are typically the focus of fashion talk. Work by Sophie Woodward (2007), Weber and Mitchell (2004) and Guy et al. (2001) has taken forward our understandings of how dress fits into everyday life, and in my work I have applied their insights to the day-to-day practices of older people also (Buse & Twigg 2014a; Twigg 2013).

Historical and Aesthetic Influences

The second set of influences has come from a long-term interest in the history of dress. My first degree was in history and in many ways it remains my first love, certainly at the level of reading for pleasure. My interests have always been most strongly in social and cultural history, areas that burgeoned under the impact of the social sciences and the wider social and cultural shifts of the 1970s. And it was these impulses that in the same period took me in a reverse direction into sociology, which I studied for my master’s and doctoral work at the London School of Economics.

Changes within dress history parallel these intellectual shifts. Dress history has its origins in the museum tradition of object-based scholarship. Empirical and practical in character, it focused on the details of cut, fabric and manufacture (Taylor 2002, 2004). From a different direction has come work by economic historians addressing the history of textiles which across Europe and North America formed the basis for industrial development and trade, one of the drivers of the industrial revolution, supporting national and international trade, and providing a key source of mechanical innovation (Harte 1991; Lemire & Riello 2008). Together with the garment industry, this remains an important sector today, particularly in the emergent economies of the Far East; and these more recent developments, as we shall see, are part of the story of the changing cultural expression available to older people in the West. A third strand in dress history comes from cultural studies (Barnard 2014; Craik 1994; Crane 2000; Kaiser 2012). Here, the focus has been more on dress in the constitution of particular subgroups, especially youth cultures, though extending to other – mainly transgressive – subgroups. Mainstream, particularly middle aged or older styles, have received little attention in

this literature, reflecting the wider neglect of age as a dimension of identity. My work has aimed to redress this lack of attention.

Part of my interest has been in developing these traditions of analysis in relation to age. Clothes lie on the boundary between the body and its social presentation; and as such, they reflect ideas and norms about later years and its cultural estimation. As Breward (2000) and others argue, dress is one of the means whereby social difference is made manifest and visible. We are familiar with this in terms of the master identities such as gender and class. Indeed, gender differentiation in dress is one of the most common features of dress codes cross culturally, and social differentiation of dress in terms of class has been at the heart of sociological analysis of clothing since the time of Simmel (1904) and Veblen (1899). But such analyses apply also of age. Dress practices encode and reflect meanings about age, and in doing so help constitute age – like class and gender – as a social category. Such analyses thus allow us to explore the ways social categories operate, making their cultural constitution and expression through material objects more visible.

One of the clearest ways we can see this is in terms of the long established phenomenon of age ordering in dress. By this, I mean systematic patterning of cultural expectations according to an ordered and hierarchically arranged concept of age. There is a persistent normative pattern with regard to what clothes are appropriate for people as they get older – or more significant, inappropriate as they get older, for these norms are largely expressed in negative form: what should be avoided. Though, of course, subject to historical specificity, there is a persistent pattern to such avoidances (Twigg 2013). This pattern of age ordering is long established historically. And it was clear from the empirical work I undertook that it still operates in the UK in the early twenty-first century. But there is also evidence of change. Dress norms are shifting, and older women – or at least *some* older women – are being drawn into the sphere of fashion. There are assumptions across the media that older women increasingly want to engage with this area and that it offers them new freedoms and pleasures. Though as the many articles addressing the perils of clothing choice in middle age show, it also offers new anxieties.

Work on the clothing system, thus, feeds into what has been termed the reconstitution of ageing thesis, which argues that a series of social, cultural

and demographic shifts have repositioned older people nearer the mainstream. Öberg and Tornstam (1999, 2001) and others have suggested a new version of the life course in which later years are part of an extended shared plateau of middle life that persists until the disruption of serious ill health. Such ideas are also reflected in arguments put forward by Gilleard and Higgs (2000) about the emergence of the Third Age as a new cultural space – one marked by leisure and the pursuit of enjoyment post retirement. Such ideas are often associated with the baby boomers as a distinctive cohort. In statistically based work with an economic historian, I have explored whether expenditure patterns in areas of appearance by older women do indeed support the baby boomer analysis (Twigg & Majima 2014). In general, our conclusion was that they do not. Data from the Family Expenditure Survey in the UK for the period from the 1960s suggest that it is period rather than cohort effects that are more significant in relation to the changing spending patterns of older women. The most significant development has been the arrival of cheap fast fashion from the 2000s, and this has been experienced across the age range. This does, however, support an argument for greater cultural integration.

As we have noted, textile and museum-based scholarship rests on a recognition of the materiality of dress. One of the gains of working in this area has been the opportunity to bring such a material analysis into age studies. This has applied in particular to the work I undertook with Christina Buse (Buse & Twigg 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b; Twigg 2010; Twigg & Buse 2013) on dementia and dress, where we focussed on the ways in which dress could operate at a directly material level in supporting embodied personhood. Clothes are the “environment closest in”: they directly surround the individuals, are immediate to hand and touch. Their material properties and capacity to transmit memories at a directly physical level can be of special significance in circumstances of dementia. Certain objects can take on additional meanings, as we explored in our analysis the role of handbags in the lives of women with dementia living in care homes (Buse & Twigg 2014a).

Lastly, a focus on dress has brought an aesthetic dimension to my work that was previously absent, but that reflects my enduring interest in the visual arts, painting, sculpture and especially architecture. These are central to my life and occupy much of my spare time. Turning to dress in

the final stages of my career has, thus, brought an element of visual pleasure to my work, enabling me to link up these different areas of my life, creating a space in which I can, perhaps, develop work beyond the immediate demands of an academic career. It has certainly placed me in an aesthetically more joyful area than my previous work on frailty often did. And as I get older, this is something I am grateful for.

Becoming an Older Woman

The last of my three influences is directly personal and relates to the experience of becoming an older woman. I too have faced the “changing room moment” when I have looked in the glass and realised that a style that once suited no longer does. I too have puzzled over what to wear as I get older. And this has fed into my work, helping to shape my current interest in dress and age. When I started studying older people in the 1980s, I was in my 40s. I hope that, like others in social gerontology, I was concerned with the difficulties and prejudices older people faced, and concerned to advocate their interests. But I did so – inevitably – at a distance from actual experience. Now that is increasingly no longer the case, and this has affected what I want to explore and write about in relation to age.

As a result, my work has shifted more directly to the experiences of older people, and to a focus on their – or rather increasingly for me, *our* – ordinary lives. Social gerontology has tended to foreground problematic old age, seeing it through the lens of social welfare and public policy, in which objectifying discourses often predominate, and it has tended to neglect the subjectivity of older people, missing much of the way in which they live, evaluate and experience their lives. Under the impact of the new Cultural Gerontology, however, these concerns have moved centre stage, assisted in particular by the work in the arts and humanities which has, through the exploration of literature, theatre, art and music, placed subjectivity at the hearts of its analysis, and in doing so refreshed and immeasurably widened the context in which age is discussed.

It is also significant that I write as a woman. Though gender is now properly recognised as relevant to all scholars – women and men – the realisation of its significance arose out of the feminism of the second wave: and

that is the generation of feminism to which I belong. That movement was central in opening up the academic agenda to subjects such as emotion, subjectivity, embodiment, sexuality and care. But in these early stages, feminism neglected age, reflecting the ageist prejudices found elsewhere in academic and cultural life. Slowly, however, feminist scholars of the second wave, as they have themselves aged, have expanded its boundaries, writing age into gender (Gullette 1997, 1999; Holstein 2006; Oakley 2007; Segal 2013). Many of the subjects that I have written about are inflected with gender: the body, care, appearance and dress. And many of them raise issues for gender politics. I am thinking in particular here of the double standards that apply to appearance and age, the processes that sideline women as they age, the differential judgements and valuations that are applied (Arber & Ginn 1991; Calasanti 2008; Calasanti & Slevin 2001; Gullette 2011; Holstein 2015; Hurd Clarke 2011; Hurd Clarke & Bennett 2015; Sontag 1972; Woodward 1991, 1999, 2006). Work by feminists on gender has made these visible. Paradoxically, in doing so, it has exposed how they can also operate in relation to men, albeit mediated by different expectations and meanings. Dress is an example of this, revealing the ways in which cultural assumptions around dress and age are distinctly gendered, and yet can share common features. And in pursuit of these common features and differences, I am about to embark on a third and final stage of the clothing project in the form of a study of men and dress.

Conclusion

Academic life – for those who enjoy it – is a wonderful career. It offers an opportunity to combine personal interests, intellectual curiosity and – ideally – the chance to contribute to the wider society through the growth of knowledge and the application of it to common problems. I am immensely grateful to the university system in the UK for giving me this. I nearly missed out. I started life as a historian, moved across into sociology, particularly the sociology of religion in pursuit of more theoretical engagement and a wider intellectual agenda, but the cold winds of the 1980s and the crisis in the UK university system of that time blew me off course. I managed, however, to steer myself back via an period in the health service that turned me into a social policy analyst,

and in doing so I discovered the field of social gerontology. Since then I have worked, with the greatest enjoyment, in that field. What dress has given to me, in this context, is a chance to draw together many of the earlier stands of my work, and to unite them with personal interests and experiences in a way that has greatly enriched my life.

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REVIEWED by JESSICA FINLAY*

In gerontology and broader academic circles, the ageing body remains largely under-theorized. *Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment* addresses this critical lacuna in the literature by proposing an intervention into how we think about the ageing body and understand embodied everyday experiences of later life. Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs craft a nuanced argument drawing upon the corporeality of later life as well as embodiment of the social. Two overarching concepts structure their discussion: embodied identities (e.g. gender, race, disability and sexuality) and embodied practices (e.g. sex, cosmetics/fashion, fitness/exercise and aspirational medicine). Gilleard and Higgs frame the ageing body as a site of embodied and contested difference, which generates alternative understandings of how the body is performed, challenged and negotiated. This book represents a long-overdue step advancing our knowledge of the complex and multifaceted relationship between the body and ageing.

Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment draws on historical impacts of the 1960s: a key period that cultivated advances in the sociology of the body. The rise of counter-cultures and politics of representation in this time period

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motivated new forms of self-care and self-representation that led to diverse experiences and expectations of ageing. Gilleard and Higgs portray the resulting “new ageing” as moving beyond traditional notions of “not becoming old” to “becoming old” differently. Many of the struggles to generate different identities and practices of ageing revolve around the body. The body represents a critical axis of orientation offering both possibility and constraint. The ageing body is a key site where traditional fears of old age mix with new hopes: “for ageing differently, for not having to become old on other people’s terms” (p. 29).

Older people are gendered, raced, disabled and sexed in unique ways. Chapters following the introduction explore embodied identities of older adults: “identities and lifestyles based around some collectively shared set of bodily distinctions: distinctions of how particular bodies act, look or both” (p. ix). Gilleard and Higgs connect the embodiment of ageing to the 1960s sexual revolution, which rejected biological determinism of the sexed body. This led to questioning of divided understandings of bodies as corporeal units versus social identities. The authors explore this through the gendered nature of ageing, as men and women become embodied actors engaging in gendered performances (e.g. anti-ageing consumerism, exercise and fitness, appearance and sexual practice). The 1960s privileging of youthfulness and consumerism are no longer ideals for younger generations; rather, they have become models for all regardless of age, gender, class and other markers of difference.

The authors further observe that the majority of gerontological research involves a de-gendered and de-racialized corporeal lens. Gender and race are predominantly considered supplemental categories of structural disadvantage (p. 52). The authors argue for creating alternative narratives of ageing that counter dominant white and male accounts of ageing. Through this alternative approach, the ageing body is a site to contest not only ageism, but racism and sexism as well.

The following chapter in *Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment* tackles the embodied identities of disabled older people. Adults often become disabled in later life in unique ways not addressed by existing disability scholarship. Disability studies tend to marginalize issues of age and ageing by presuming that disabled people have a static identity. This chapter also addresses disability studies’ historic turn to citizenship and civic rights

instead of subjective embodiments. Critical scholarship displaced the corporeality of bodily impairment in favour of the social model of disability which investigates how institutions and social structures disable citizens. This is complicated, because disability often involves very real corporeal experiences. Gilleard and Higgs attempt to bridge the social/corporeal divide in their integration of age and disability studies. They use the ageing body as a key site to consider what disability really means to older people, such as what experiences of disability they negotiate, and bodily and social struggles they face.

In the subsequent chapters on sex and sexuality (Chapters 6 and 7), the authors transition the discussion to embodied practices. They describe these as “practices of self-care and self-expression that are mediated by society in, and through, the autonomous body” (p. ix). Practices include sex; cosmetics, clothing and fashion; fitness and exercise; and aspirational medicine. The chapter on fitness and exercise includes an intriguing critical discussion on the associations between physical activity and virtuous public citizenship. Health and fitness are virtues that citizens are expected to cultivate at all ages, and the “new ageing” ethic embedded within successful and productive ageing paradigms includes the pursuit of fitness. The authors provide examples of older people’s individual efforts to integrate exercise, active leisure and consumption in later life. They allude to underlying neoliberal models of health policy, in which citizens engage in active ageing practices to maintain virtuous citizenship under Foucauldian governmentality.

In summary, *Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment* represents a critical intervention in ageing scholarship. It contests traditional notions of the ageing body and considers how the body represents a mediating force between individuals and society. Gilleard and Higgs challenge how the body is “read” and offer alternative frameworks for how people “become old” differently. The contestations over alternative embodiments in this book focus on discourses, practices and identities of the third age. It is important to note that the fourth age, generally demarcated by experiences of illness and frailty in the final stage of life, is absent from this book. As the authors acknowledge, addressing themes of the fourth age would involve a different perspective and project altogether. Yet the experiences of the oldest old are inescapably intertwined with embodied identities and

practices of later life, and further complicate the relationship between the body and society. I look forward to ensuing discussions of alternative ageing embodiments that this book will stimulate. Gilleard and Higgs continue to transform how we understand later life, and this perceptive book generates compelling queries that need investigating.

Garimella Giridhar, K. M. Sathyanarayana,
Sanjay Kumar, K. S. James and Moneer Alam
(eds.) (2014). *Population Ageing in India*. Delhi:
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1 1070 7332 6 (hardback)

*REVIEWED by VALERIE LIPMAN**

As a consequence of a falling birth rate and improved health care, more people in India are both reaching old age and living a longer old age. According to the 2011 India census, 104 million people living in India (8.6% of the population) are over 60 years of age. By 2050, this is expected to reach nearly 20% of the population. Life expectancy in India is now 78 years for women and 76 years for men. Such increases pose huge challenges in a country where there is no universal old age pension, where nearly 80% of the population subsist on or below two dollars a day, where the public health system is extremely limited, and where 75% of the population live in rural areas with an inadequate infrastructure.

Awareness of the rising numbers of older people in India and their implications have been subject to government interest since the 1990s, but as this collection of papers shows over and over again, there is little evidence that planners, policy makers, and practitioners have grasped the enormity of the changes coming their way.

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Population Ageing in India presents the results of the first phase of a large research study "Building Knowledge Base on Ageing in India" (BKBAI). The purpose of the book is to inform local, national, and international planners and policymakers in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors of the implications of India's ageing population, and to encourage them to develop policies and take action that will benefit both older people and India's ageing society as a whole. With the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) India, new research was undertaken in seven Indian states across the country. This has been combined with existing datasets about life in India, to create a systematic knowledge base that is exclusively about India's older population and ageing society. Seven working papers were commissioned, each of which provides the basis of a separate chapter in this book. While this results in some overlap and factual inconsistencies, it provides a useful means for reinforcing what are essential messages for all those working in India.

The first four chapters address the major socio-economic factors facing India's ageing population. Starting with a solid baseline chapter on the huge demographic shifts taking place, Chapter 1, "Demographics of Population in Ageing," provides substantial tables and diagrams illustrating population changes nationally and by state. Chapter 2 addresses both the economic value of and the continuing need for older people's participation in the workforce, in the absence of universal benefits, pensions and low family income. As the author notes, the increasing numbers of the very old who will be unable to work, will require other means of support. It is in Chapter 3, "Living Arrangements of Elderly in India: Policy and Programmatic Implications," that some of the very practical difficulties facing India are confronted. Sathyanarayana et al. expose the myth of the "traditional" familial support mechanisms supporting the older population: not only are these breaking down, but they would be insufficient for providing adequate support to an increasingly, physically and mentally frail segment of the elderly population. On average around 20% of elderly live alone or with a spouse only. In some areas this is as high as 45%. "A combination of declining fertility, migration and nuclearization (sic) of families are three possible reasons for . . . ensuring appropriate systems to address the declining support base" (p. 86). As the writers state,

further research is required to understand the impact of this on the lives of older people living alone.

Chapter 4 addresses the health status of the older population. It presents an interesting sweep of the main illnesses experienced by ageing Indians and discusses the socio-economic and life-course approach to ageing. While acknowledging how the accumulation of socio-economic deprivations, intense poverty, high levels of illiteracy, gender and caste inequalities contribute to health outcomes, it reinforces the inadequacy of the current health care system to face these challenges. It is welcome that the authors note the paucity of studies on disability. And yet, in the section about "Planning for Old Age Health Care Services in India" (p. 122), they fail to mention the rising incidence of dementia. A study in 2010 noted there were 3.7 million Indians with dementia, a number expected to double by 2030 (Shaji et al. 2010). The study further notes that the costs to and for the community and family affected by dementia will rise exponentially.

The last three chapters focus on policy and practice initiatives in both India and a selection of Asian countries, for comparative and learning purposes, and offer a review of the status of research on population ageing in India. Together, these chapters provide more of an on-the-ground feel of how the issues need to be addressed for the individual, as distinct from the "what needs to be addressed" for society as a whole, provided in the earlier part of the book. The last chapter in particular gives an almost whistle stop tour of anything and everything that might concern an older person, offering an assemblage of policy and practice areas for further exploration on such topics as spirituality, how older people will manage, palliative care, elder abuse and dementia. These "nudges" are interesting but insufficient to be of use to planners and provider of services for older people who will, for example, need to consider how and who is going to care for frail older people. There is little here about formal care structures and community support, or about the need to train more social workers and support staff. Raju touches on this in the last chapter and the big unanswered question of how a country with the low per capita GDP of India will manage to provide adequate care and support to this fast ageing population.

The information contained in this short book nonetheless provides a good starting point for anyone wanting to know about India's changing demographics and the broader implications for an ageing society. It exposes some common myths about older people in general, such as they all need help, to those imagining an India in which older people do not have support needs because they can rely on their kin. It further succeeds in conveying two very important cross-cutting themes. First, it gives special attention to gender issues, recognising that women live longer and in India are more likely to be living on their own in old age and dependent on others for basic maintenance. And second, it furthers the position that older people are contributors to the family and economy, and should be included in formulating programmes that concern them rather than their being framed as dependents and passive recipients of care.

For the international bodies working in India, the UNFPA has provided much stimulus and concomitant resources for new research (2012). It is a little curious though that UNDP, the largest global agency working in development, is not mentioned in the book as a player in India's future. This is disappointing as the book presents many of the points from the 2002 World Assembly on Ageing conferences and how these are being taken forward in other regions of the globe (UNDAF 2012).

As the preface states, this first stage of BKBAI draws solely on secondary research. Phase two will include primary research. This will hopefully flesh out the issues raised in the final chapter and will seek to identify from older people what they want, in the likely absence of extensive state support. Hopefully, it will also provide insights beyond the health and care fields, such as public infrastructure programmes whose activities impact on the lives of older people too. The World Health Organisation (WHO) provides an exemplar of this with its Age Friendly Cities programme. In the absence of blueprints and theories on ageing and international development, I would recommend this book as a taster, particularly for those sceptical about the size and scale of the current and growing ageing population. Basic statistics are always useful to have and will at least address the ubiquitous "we don't know enough" excuse for doing nothing.

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Pamela Gravagne (2013). *The Becoming of Age. Cinematic Visions of Mind, Body and Identity in Later Life*. Jefferson, North Carolina & London: MacFarland, 216 pp. ISBN 978 0 7864 7260 4 (paperback)

REVIEWED by ANNE LEONORA BLAAKILDE*

Movies about later life that present old people as protagonists are not common, although in the last decades an increasing number of this kind of film has been seen on cinema screens. Therefore, it is no wonder there are few cinematic studies with interpretations of later life in movies. This book with interpretations of later life on screen is a welcome contribution to cultural gerontology, not least because its fresh interpretations are inspired by a rich theoretical insight from perspectives not yet widely incorporated within cultural gerontology.

Gravagne's book contains four chapters, each representing interpretations of cinematic visions related to the topics: Masculinities, Older women, Intimacy and desire, and Alzheimer's. These chapters are "wrapped" in two theoretical chapters with loads of inspiring thoughts. In the first theoretical chapter, it is declared and shown that a dominant narrative of decline in later life exists, and it is stated that when we watch films about aging and old age, we need to critically examine how categories of aging are materially and discursively constituted. In order to do so, we need to

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understand different philosophical and theoretical foundations for our perceptions of aging. For this purpose, Pamela Gravagne presents four different epistemologies of aging: an essentialist, a constructivist, a combination of essentialism and constructivism, and, finally a collapse between essentialism and constructivism. It is in the fourth spectrum that we are presented with fairly new thinking within cultural gerontology, with the integration of Karen Barad's *agential realism*, indicating that discourses and material matter are entangled and mutually interfluent upon each other in what Barad calls *intra-actions*. Drawing also upon Donna Haraway's thinking about entanglement between the natural and the social which leads to fluidity, transformations, and a permanent state of becoming with, Pamela Gravagne fetches the title of her book by pointing to the idea that aging is an entangled web of becoming, which, according to Gravagne, indicates "constantly becoming different" (p. 12).

Chapter 2 is an investigation of masculinities and aging as they are represented in, for example, *Gran Torino* and *Up*. The study is incepted with an introduction about ageism, and the author discusses how images of masculine normativity are centered around physical strength and rationality. Deriving from the industrial age, the male role is also expected to be a breadwinning worker. These images may be a challenge for the aging male protagonists in the films interpreted here, who have retired from the working force, have lost strength (or become unemployed), and maybe also have lost mental capacity or full sensation. Gravagne focuses here primarily on the aging male. However, these ideals of masculinity can of course challenge men in all other ages, though we tend to connect these kinds of frailties to aging. Gravagne's intention is to find perspectives in these movies where protagonists challenge the given norms, especially the narrative of decline. Such a subversive representation is demonstrated to some degree, when the protagonists counteract expectations to their role. On the other hand, Gravagne also shows how they concurrently seem to adapt to other images, that is, the choice of death in order not to be a burden to someone, or choosing the value of grandparenthood as a helper, legitimizing the existence of an old person.

In chapter 3, old women in movies are analyzed, and the author shows the double dilemma of being old and female on screen. These women are culturally inscribed to perform body work and present themselves as if

they do, yet they are simultaneously seen as being narcissistic for doing so. By applying feminist and ageist theorists like Martha Nussbaum, Margaret Gullette, and Kathleen Woodward, Gravagne emphasizes that older women are subject to being silenced and made invisible. Like in the analysis of male rebellions by the older men in movies, the author concludes that even though older female protagonists in movies may represent new and surprising ways of acting in later life, the movies represent traditional "happy endings." Thus, the movies also subscribe to cultural expectations of older people as being controlled, devalued, and silenced.

The fourth chapter concerns intimacy and sexuality in later life, where the author discusses movies like *Something's Gotta Give*, *The Mother*, and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* with characters in romantic and sexual situations. Here, Gravagne presents an interesting short historical explanation on why romance and sexuality has been disconnected from later life. She also touches upon constricting expectations to people in later life, demonstrated for instance by older people's adult children. Gravagne challenges these interpretations by means of perspectives from haptic and sensuous theory, suggesting that when intimacy and sexuality in later life is on stage, emphasis on embodied touch and sensation may be valued as much as the current, primary focus on the visible. Such a perspective, argues Gravagne, could be a relief for the fear of decline connected to growing old in our culture. After all, Gravagne states, the tangible physical and emotional connections through touch with others actuate a meaningful social existence. Also, an important issue raised in this chapter is the idea and acceptance of changes and *becoming*.

Finally, the fifth chapter is about memory, forgetting, and Alzheimer's, which has also been a topic in several movies. These issues touch upon considerations like: what is a self, and how do we relate to changing selves such as changing minds and the perceptions of rationality? As in the previous chapters, interesting philosophers and theorists are incorporated to imprint the analysis with compelling reflections.

In my opinion, the great value of this book is its richness in theoretical inspirations, applied to make interesting interpretations of a variety of movies concerning people in later life. These theoretical inspirations imply that the readings welcome fluent perspectives, porosity, leakiness, and transgressions of borders or binary distinctions, regardless if these are

between reality and fiction, matter and image, object and subject, or other classic inheritances from Descartes and Newton. Gravagne shows how this kind of thinking is implemented in modern movies. She also states with the philosopher Deleuze that "... this stream of images does not *represent* the world, but literally *shapes* us and the world around us" (p. 162). A point taken from Deleuze, Karen Barad, and others is that *representationalism* is a static and restrictive perspective, that tends to ignore the fluidity and temporality of everything in the world. This includes ideas about becoming old. Gravagne further cites these two theorists, indicating that their thinking:

... characterizes matter and meaning, time and space, as neither determinate nor unchanging, but as mutually constituted through dynamic and ongoing intra-actions in which individuals, whether objects or living beings, emerge through specific discursive and material practices (p. 165).

From a critical perspective, this quote is an example of a general impreciseness in reference practice and quoting in this book; that is, here mixing Deleuze and Barad in speaking about "individuals" which is not a word in Karen Barad's vocabulary. Contrarily, Barad opposes the Western idea of individuals which she connects to the representationalist thinking (Barad 2007). Though fluency is a phenomenon which is approved of in these theoretical approaches, readers may want to be able to discern references from each other in order to track them and their inspiring ideas. Also, since the French philosopher Deleuze is mentioned as one of the primary sources of inspiration, it is a shame that his name is sometimes not spelled properly (see p. 174).

The overall suggestion of age as "becoming" is described as a "constantly becoming different" (p. 12), and the chapters with interpretations of masculinities, older women, and intimacies tend to recommend a changing from the present situation – and cultural positions – to new and more flexible ones. The intention is to get rid of the narrative of old age about decline as a restricted position. This is a wonderful idea which many gerontologists would subscribe to. However, is this not another binary representationalism connected to the rather static image of the narrative of decline? How can we be sure that all old people want to set their old age free? Or, with the words of Deleuze (p. 169): "... [Time is] giving us chance after chance to

combine our past with our present in all sorts of new and unexpected ways." Isn't this ideal of living in new and unexpected ways *sui generis* a representation of just another normativity of later life, related to liberal individualism among certain privileged populations among the old – as well as in the younger population?

The book does not explicitly discuss this, but the interpretations of specific themes in movies provide readers with interesting contemplations of the dilemmas and equilibriums between images of decline and practices of life quality in later life. The discussions include very important issues of the complexities related to both images and practices of aging, because a multitude of aspects in life is so intricately interwoven. In a temporal perspective like aging, these conditions become even more pluripotent.

As Gravagne posits, these intricate complexities of life are difficult to grasp for people who are influenced by Western epistemological history, because we are used to thinking in dichotomies. Her book is, however, a very good example of erudite ways to take up the challenge. It is recommendable for all scholars of Cultural and Social Gerontology providing the reader with sagacious inspiration for considerations with a theoretical twist.

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Henry Holstege and Michael A. Faber (eds.)
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Interdisciplinary Approach*. New York: Springer,
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REVIEWED by SHYH POH TEO*

Gerontology is a broad and interdisciplinary subject, covering aspects of psychology, humanities, policy, economics, education, law and medicine. It is no easy feat to represent these multiple perspectives in a concise publication; yet, these authors managed to do so in a simplified manner that is appropriate for an introductory gerontology textbook.

The consistent layout of the book facilitates assimilation of knowledge in gerontology, and provides a good balance between theory and practical information. For those new to gerontology, it provides a useful foundation of principles that can be applied to practice. Chapters start with learning objectives, sometimes supplemented with scenarios and thought-provoking questions on real-life issues that older people face. At the end of each unit is a “Practical Application” section, offering reflective comments on how and why these topics are socially relevant. Interspersed throughout the book are links to video clips offering stories and narratives, illustrating how the concepts described are utilised.

The book covers a very wide range of topics, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of gerontology as a subject. General trends regarding older

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people are described in terms of physical changes, living conditions, retirement and medical care systems. The historical perspectives and social theories presented in the book make fascinating reading. It is interesting to read about the evolution of how we perceive older people and how public policies change over time after deliberate consideration of issues ranging from income, health care, housing, transportation and long-term care.

One highlight of reading this book is the refreshingly positive attitude expressed by the authors regarding ageing. The stereotypical assumptions about older people as being in poor physical and mental health or as living in poverty are challenged with information about older people living happy, active and productive lives. There is a dedicated section in the book about maintaining wellness, providing details of proper nutrition, physical activity and sleep hygiene. Common medical conditions in old age are discussed, with preventative recommendations provided to reduce risk of developing disease, such as appropriate vaccinations and screening. Participation in society is encouraged, and generic advice is given to overcome barriers, for example, difficulties in obtaining or maintaining employment.

There are several themes covered in the book which deserve specific mention, and which I certainly appreciate being included in this book. One of these is the chapter on sexuality. Intimacy and closeness are integral aspects of life and a basic emotional need which continues to old age, yet it is rarely discussed openly with older people. Death, dying and bereavement are described as well, with a section on how to cope from loss of loved ones. Practical tips are provided on caring for a family caregiver and how to deal with resistance of accepting care. The chapter covering elder abuse and scams affecting vulnerable older people included real examples of court cases. This was eye opening and motivates better public awareness about these problems.

The main downside is that some parts of the book are quite specific to the US, which limits generalisability, particularly to developing countries. Specifically, significant detail is provided on Social Security, Medicare, legislation public policies and services available. However, these aspects are still useful to read as they are described in an accessible manner and valuable lessons could also be extrapolated for a comparative perspective. For example, formal support systems such as home-based services, adult

day care, nutrition services and case management are generic approaches which even developing countries could adopt if useful.

Readers should also be aware there is significant diversity between older people and there will be exceptions to the facts presented in the book. For example, older people were sub-classified into the young-old (65–74 years), aged (75–84 years) and the oldest-old (85 years and older), and general descriptive characteristics of each category were given. The assumption that older people all fit nicely into these compartments risks ageism, overlooking the individuality of each person, with unique preferences and wishes.

Overall, this book successfully pulls together diverse concepts and allows readers to see the bigger picture, which is essential to enable a coordinated effort from multiple disciplines when considering the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly ageing population. The book is true to its title, sharing a positive, interdisciplinary approach on ageing with its readers. It is also a very thought-provoking text, being upfront in posing questions or ethical dilemmas to the readers. For advocates of older people, this would be an excellent text to have as an introductory book to navigate the dynamic field of gerontology and as a bridge to further learning.

I J A L

International Journal of Ageing and Later Life

The International Journal of Ageing and Later Life (IJAL) serves an audience interested in social and cultural aspects of ageing and later life development. As such, the journal welcomes contributions that aim at advancing the theoretical and conceptual debate on research on ageing and later life. Contributions based on empirical work are also welcome as are methodologically interested discussions of relevance to the study of ageing and later life.

Being an international journal, IJAL acknowledges the need to understand the cultural diversity and context dependency of ageing and later life. The journal accepts country- or cultural-specific studies that do not necessarily include international comparisons as long as such contributions are interesting and understandable for an international audience.

IJAL publishes articles based on original research and includes a book review section, which ensures that readers are kept in touch with new work and current debate. To assure high scholarly standard IJAL uses a double blind review process. In order to stimulate exchange of ideas on ageing across many parts of the world, IJAL does not charge authors for their submissions and is available free of charge to anyone with Internet access (www.ep.liu.se/ej/ijal).