AGING, GLOBALIZATION AND INEQUALITY

The New Critical Gerontology

Edited by
Jan Baars, Dale Dannefer,
Chris Phillipson,
and Alan Walker

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To
the Memory of

Matilda W. Riley
and
John W. Riley, Jr.

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We are honored to dedicate this volume to Matilda and Jack Riley, who inspired us, as they did so many others, on multiple levels. The story of this project began at the meeting of the International Sociological Association, in Bielefeld in 1994. In the session "Explorations in Critical Gerontology," the Rileys' comments provided special encouragement to all of us. It was at this meeting that the International Sociological Association Research Committee on Ageing (RC11) awarded them life membership for their huge contribution to gerontology and to the work of the Committee in particular.

Matilda Riley's formulation of the multitiered relation of aging and society provides some important elements of the conceptual foundation on which this work is based. Her last book, *Age and Structural Lag,* is subtitled *Society's Failure to Provide Meaningful Roles in Education, Work and Leisure.* Indeed, Matilda was a leader and a role model in seeking to challenge what she termed "society's failures," as a scholar, as mentor, and in developing research and policy agendas nationally and internationally. This is not to say, of course, that Matilda and

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Jack agreed with all of the premises or central assumptions of critical theory, or that they would have endorsed all of the arguments set forth in this volume. Yet they understood and modeled an intellectual energy and openness grounded in the recognition that the advance of a subject matter is dialectical, involving not the reproduction of agreement so much as the struggle of ideas in context. Matilda and Jack also provided important encouragement and support to each of us individually, as they did to so many others. And, until the very end of their long lives, they were exemplary models of how to grow into the end of life productively and gracefully. They were pioneers of aging not only as students of age, but also existentially and personally.

Finally, we express our deepest thanks to our families and especially our wives, Carolina Baars, Elaine Dannefer, Jane Phillipson, and Carol Walker, for their immense help over the years and their own commitment to the ideas and themes developed in this volume.

Jan Baars, Dale Dannefer,
Chris Phillipson, and Alan Walker

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Critical Perspectives in Social Gerontology

Jan Baars, Dale Dannefer,
Chris Phillipson, and Alan Walker

This book is the product of our shared conviction that mainstream social gerontology has paid insufficient attention to the degree to which age and aging are socially constituted (Baars, 1991) and to the ways in which both age and aging are currently being transformed as a result of the set of social forces surrounding processes of globalization. The neglect of critical analysis has weakened attempts to understand the social processes involved in shaping age and the life course and, consequently, the creation of alternative conceptions and visions about the future of old age. This failure must itself be linked to general inadequacies of theory building within gerontology, a deficiency shared across both European and North American studies of aging (Bengtson & Schaie, 1999; Biggs, Lowenstein, & Hendricks, 2003; Birren & Bengtson, 1988; Lynott & Lynott, 1996).

   Despite its explosive development over the last half-century, social gerontology has been characterized by an imbalance between the accumulation of data and the development of theory (Bengtson, Rice, & Johnson, 1999; Hendricks & Achenbaum, 1999; Riley & Riley, 1994). Researchers interested in aging have relentlessly collected mountains of data, often driven by narrowly defined, problem-based questions and with little attention to basic assumptions or larger theoretical issues. An absence of theoretical development is surely not surprising for a fairly young enterprise that seeks to capture a complex empirical reality; especially one that draws from many disciplines, and that is preoccupied with urgent practical problems (Hagestad & Dannefer, 2001). Yet the lack of attention to theory has meant that research questions have often been informed by an uncritical reliance on images and assumptions about aging drawn from popular culture or from traditions and paradigms of theory that are considered outdated

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within the broader discourses of behavioral and social theory. When such assumptions are used to guide the formulation of research questions and research designs, the result can be what has been termed "dust-bowl empiricism" (Birren, 1988), unintended reductionisms or other fallacies that misspecify the level of analysis and, therefore, missed opportunities to pursue the most revealing aspects of the subject matter in question (Hendricks, 1999).

Yet without question, several major gerontological paradigms of the late 20th century have contributed fundamental insights to inform theoretical development. These include, for example, the principles underlying cohort analysis and the interplay of demographic and economic forces, which in turn reflect the importance of history and social structure. These paradigms have included age stratification (Riley, Johnson, & Foner, 1972), life-course theory (Elder, 1974), life-span development (Baltes, 1987), and the first paradigmatic source of critical gerontology, political economy (Estes, 1979; Minkler & Estes, 1999; Phillipson, 1982; Walker, 1980, 1981).

Although these important traditions of thought have contributed organizing principles that have become classic in their influence upon both theoretical and methodological questions, with the exception of political economy approaches they do not claim to provide specific theoretical guidance. Instead, they provide some bedrock elements that must be included in any adequate theory, such as the importance of cohort flow and cohort succession, the tension between agency and structure, and the complexities involved in the articulation of individual and social change.

Moreover, almost all of these approaches have been appropriately criticized for their lack of attention to the actual experience of aging. By definition, such approaches give little attention to interpretive phenomena, such as the rich and complex fields of experience, consciousness, and action (Gubrium, 1993). As human phenomena, both age and aging are, by definition, experiences that are laden with meaning, and it is now understood that the dynamics surrounding the interpretation of events can have powerful effects on health and physiology (Ryff & Marshall, 1999). Yet many research traditions focused at the individual level are also problematic. First, some popular conventional approaches, such as exchange theory (Bernheim, Schleifer, & Summers, 1985; see Bengtson, Parrott, & Burgess, 1997), rational choice theory (Cromwell, Olson, & Avary, 1991), or socioemotional selectivity theory (e.g., Carstensen, Fung, & Charles, 2003), deal with meaning only in within narrowly formulated terms.

Second is research in the psychodynamic and psychoanalytic traditions. Much of this work deals more directly with experience and meaning, psychodynamic and psychoanalytic traditions. Much of this work deals with experience and meaning, but with a universalizing impulse that forces data into prefigured categories and patterns. Such approaches include Tornstam's (1996) exploration of gerotrans-cendence as a form of personal integration and Levinson's (1994) theories of adult development. Such approaches do justice neither to the complexities of data on the

one side nor to the range of outcomes found under diverse social conditions on the other (Dannefer, 1984; Morss, 1995).

In response to such approaches, a third set of analyses have sought to make the diversity of experience and the contingency and uncertainty of meaning—phenomena that are closely allied with the theme of social change—into integral parts of theory. These include narrative approaches (Gubrium, 1993), work in the "risk society" tradition (Beck, 1992; O'Rand, 2000) and the related "postmodern" or "poststructural" accounts (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). These approaches seek to draw on humanistic and critical elements in social theory that have rightly been viewed as missing from the mainstream contemporary discourse in social gerontology (Cole, 1993).

Thus, in contrast to the traditional lament of a dearth of theory, social gerontology is now courted by numerous theoretical suitors. Despite the valuable and often provocative insights generated by each of these perspectives, our shared conviction is that none of these approaches, taken alone, provides an adequate paradigm or conceptual basis for theorizing aging.

This is the case, even though some of these approaches have effectively identified the limitations of others. For example, the discovery of cohort analysis (Riley et al., 1972; Ryder, 1965; Schaie, 1965) and cross-cultural studies of physiological, psychological, and social aspects of development and aging (e.g., Fry, 1999; Rogoff, 2003) revealed that individuals who live under different conditions develop and "age differently" (e.g., Maddox, 1987; Rowe & Kahn 1998). More than that, however, "age stratification" (Riley & Riley, 1994) and related traditions made clear that age is a feature not just of individuals, but of social organization. Age is used politically and bureaucratically as a principle of social organization and social control. Age is also a feature of culture, carrying the force of meaning and power back into the minds and bodies of citizens. When such forces are recognized, it becomes clear that age-related outcomes are, thus, not mere consequences of organismic aging, but of complex interrelations that combine social structural, cultural, and interactional processes.

In this situation, it becomes clear that it is indeed a premature closure of inquiry to accept the widely popular assumption that chronological age reflects natural, organismic changes that can therefore be the basis for the search for a general theory of human aging (Baars, 1997, 2000). This is a form of naturalization and, as with most instances of naturalization, it is also ideological because it hides from view the role of political power in structuring age-related outcomes. As a familiar example, consider the reasoning used by those working in the tradition of disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961). It is a curious logic that discovers that individuals post-65 are socially disengaged and decides that this is indicative of human nature, while ignoring the fact that their study population lived under a social regime in which age-graded retirement was a social institution. Such analyses always, and necessarily, eclipse the role of institutional power, assuming that it is nothing but an accommodation to the natural inclinations of

the body. Because it deflects attention away from the importance of social and political forces, naturalization can serve as a form of *legitimation* of a social order. Indeed, it can be a particularly strong form of legitimation since it renders social forces and their explanatory potentials completely invisible. One notable feature of such models is the absence of attention to the importance of power in social relationships, or power differentials between individual and society. In this model, individuals are assumed to be largely predetermined and fixed in their nature, characteristics, and developmental possibilities; the roles of power, private interest, and ideology are eclipsed or sidelined (Dannefer, 1984, 1999).

While the importance of social forces in the constitution of aging can be glimpsed through cohort and cross-cultural studies, these approaches by themselves do not provide an analysis of the actual face-to-face processes through which both individual selves and cultural meanings are constituted and sustained. Such mechanisms have been described by work in the interactionist (Kuypers & Bengtson, 1984) and constructivist (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Gubrium & Wallace, 1990) traditions of sociology. In addition, the related meaning-focused analyses of other scholars from several disciplines (e.g., Cole, 1993; Kenyon, Birren, & Schroots, 1991; Marshall & Tindale, 1978; Moody, 1996). Some of this work demonstrated the potentials of analyzing micro-interaction and self-processes, and in so doing offered an implicit and occasionally explicit critique of quantitatively based approaches. Some would claim that such perspectives are, paradoxically, the most rigorous in their methodology and in their approach to empirical data, even though they are typically nonquantitative. The first task of science, Herbert Blumer proposed, is "to respect the nature of its subject matter" (1969, p. 44).

Such approaches thus stand as powerful critics of both the psychologistic and the conventional quantitatively oriented social science. Yet these approaches themselves are characterized by at least two important problems. The highly descriptive microfocus, welcome as it is, entails a risk of microfication (Hagestad & Dannefer, 2001). This has two sources. First, work in the constructivist and humanistic traditions typically *substitutes* microsocial or narrative analysis for macroanalysis, rather than seeking to conjoin the micro and macro. This practice ignores the degree to which microprocesses are shaped by macrolevel forces that are beyond the control and often beyond the sphere of knowledge of the experienced realities of everyday life. Second, related to the first, is the neglect of the centrally important reality of power. Key to understanding both individual aging and the development of age, as a property of social systems is a recognition of the centrality of power. Power is at work in determining, for example, which ideologies of age become accepted within popular or scientific discourse and which individuals have the best odds to "age successfully."

An adequate understanding of human aging requires the contributions of all the various approaches described above, despite their limitations. It requires a recognition of the importance of cohort analysis, cross-cultural and historical

analysis, and it requires serious attention to processes of meaning construction and self-constitution at the microlevel of face-to-face interaction.

We share the conviction that it also requires more. It requires a recognition of how social forces operate at the macrolevel to shape the microlevel of everyday experience; of how legitimating ideologies are enacted at that microlevel to reproduce the larger institutional patterns or are occasionally resisted in ways that challenge and transform the larger institutional patterns. Such analyses make explicit the need to attend to connections between micro and macro and to the reality that power is always at play in those interrelationships and in the ongoing processes that occur at both micro- and macrolevels. These assertions represent some of the key insights of critical theory, the second paradigmatic source of critical gerontology. They are built upon contributions of other theoretical efforts in social gerontology, but go significantly beyond them.

DEVELOPING CRITICAL GERONTOLOGY

These key principles of critical gerontology are informed and enriched by foundational work in the related fields of the sociology of aging (e.g., Riley et al., 1972), the demography (Ryder, 1965; Uhlenberg, 1978), anthropology (Fry, 1999; Keith, 1982; Sokolovsky, 1990), and political economy of aging (Minkler & Estes, 1984; Phillipson & Walker, 1986). Taken together, these bodies of work have made unmistakable the fundamental importance of the social in understanding human aging. As result of this work, an opening was created for analyses that begin to comprehend aging in terms that include power, ideology, and stratification, and the expanding global reach of such forces. This book is devoted to a detailed assessment of work in this tradition. Its development can be traced to symposia exploring aspects of critical gerontology, organized at conferences in Europe and the United States in the late 1990s. The editors have brought together a range of papers first presented at these events, as well as commissioning new contributions to provide a detailed overview of current work in the broad area of critical gerontology.

This book is divided into three sections, each of which deals with key issues and concerns behind the development of critical gerontology. Each section reflects a number of forces driving debates within the discipline. First, from the mid-1990s onwards, social and political science started to analyze the impact of globalization, notably in terms of the changing role of the nation-state, the accelerated movement of people across the globe, and the rise of transnational organizations and agencies (Urry, 2000). In general terms, debates about global-ization have focused on issues such as the ecological crisis, the power of multi-national corporations, problems of debt repayment, and related concerns. All of these affect the lives of older people to a substantial degree. Yet as a group they have been treated as marginal to critiques of globalization and related forms of structural change. But the paradox for older as well as younger generations is that

the macrolevel has become more rather than less important as a factor influencing daily life. Indeed, one might argue that while social theory in gerontology has retreated from the analysis of social institutions, the phenomenon of globalization (as ideology and process, and struggles around both) has transformed the terms of the debate. Even in the case of political economy perspectives, which continue to focus on structural issues, globalization has re-ordered the concepts typically used by researchers. Ideas associated with society, the state, gender, social class, and ethnicity have retained their importance; but their collective and individual meaning is substantially different in the context of the influence of global actors and institutions (Bauman, 1998). We see it as an important task of this book to take forward the analysis of globalization in the field of aging. All three sections of the book cover this area in different ways and at complementary levels of analysis.

A second influence running throughout the book concerns the various strands connected with the socially constructed nature of later life. This was an early theme in critical gerontology, with a variety of researchers exploring the extent to which social, biomedical, cultural, and economic forms contributed to the identity and status of older people (Minkler & Estes, 1991). In an early development of this approach, Estes (1979) summarized the "social construction of reality perspective" in old age as follows:

> The experience of old age is dependent in large part upon how others react to the aged; that is, social context and cultural meanings are important. Meanings are crucial in influencing how growing old is experienced by the aging in any given society: these meanings are shaped through interaction of the aged with the individuals, organizations, and institutions that comprise the social context. Social context, however, incorporates not only situational events and interactional opportunities but also structural constraints that limit the range of possible interaction and the degree of understanding, reinforcing certain lines of action while barring others. (p. 14)

The idea of aging as a "social construction" is taken forward in a variety of ways in all of the chapters: from the standpoint of political economy on the one side, to that of bio-medicalization on the other. A further concern of many of the contributors (notably in Section 2) is the examination of various discourses associated with the concept of age: first, in ideas about "functional age"; second, in attempts to reverse aging associated with the rise of the anti-aging industry; third, in the dominance of biological models in ordering debates about the nature of disease in later life.

A third major dimension of this book concerns debates about the nature of inequality in later life. This has been an explicit theme of research focusing on the impact of cumulative advantage and disadvantage over the life course, further reinforced by studies on the theme of social and cultural diversity in old age. Biggs and Daatland (2004) summarize this area of work as follows:

> That there are more older adults around than at any time in history is now well known. It is less well understood that, as the population ages, it becomes more diverse. In part, this is because individuals have had time to develop a more integrated and particular sense of self; in other words, who they believe themselves to be. Additionally, we are exposed to many more cultural pathways than preceding generations, making life appear richer and with substantially more options than has traditionally been the case. Diversity is also a consequence, however, of cumulative inequalities that have been accrued across a lifetime and now accentuate difference in later life. Each of these trends contributes to a widening variety of experiences of aging in contemporary societies—for good or bad. (p. 1)

Section 3 of the book explores the issue of inequality in greater depth, with contributors exploring aspects of cumulative advantage/disadvantage at local, national, and global levels, drawing on a mix of quantitative and qualitative data.

SECTION 1:
Dimensions of Critical Gerontology

In Chapter 2, Jan Baars clears the ground for macrolevel theorizing in critical gerontology by dissecting the most common global descriptions of the changes taking place in contemporary society: late modern society, risk society, neo-modernism (neoliberalism), antimodernism, and postmodernism. He proposes instead "reflexive modernization" as a more appropriate term to characterize the present stage of development, which is a form of modernity and is aware both of its own limitations and trying to confront its pressing problems. He distances this idea from that of Beck's (1992) theory of reflexivity chiefly because, like Giddens' (1999) parallel theory, it leads to the individualization of social inequality and its rejection as a primary subject of research and policy. Baars argues for a fundamental reassessment of three key modernist ideas: responsible individual fulfillment, solidarity, and human dignity. The chapter ends with a call for a combination of structural and narrative scientific approaches, each with its unique contribution, into a research agenda focused on the social distribution of risks as life chances across the life course.

In Chapter 3, Chris Phillipson maintains the macrosocial focus by considering the challenges raised by the growth of globalization. He argues that globalization has precluded a distinctive stage in the history of aging by creating tensions between policies promoted by nation-states in response to demographic change and those formulated by global actors and institutions. In effect, the locus of power with regard to welfare is being shifted from local and national arenas to global ones. The chapter examines how globalization has challenged the essentially national accounts of critical gerontology and demanded an increasingly broader compass. Specifically, it considers three ways in which the "radical" view of globalization may be applied to understanding aging and older people:

its ideological influence on the social construction of aging; the particular construction of aging as a new form of risk; and its role as a driver of global inequalities in aging. The chapter concludes by calling for a new politics of old age that attempts to unite diverse networks of power and action, including feminism, black and ethnic minority groups, and transnational movements.

Alan Walker starts Chapter 4 with a retrospective review of the political economy strand of critical gerontology and continues with a focus on the relationship between social policy and aging. Walker charts the changing social construction of the relationship between old age and the welfare state over the second half of the last century. He takes issue with the criticism of a structural myopia in political economy analyses and argues that agency is not neglected. The political economy of aging was developed to rebut the previously simplistic, mainly functionalist, accounts that characterized aging as either an inevitable period of decline or as a stage of human development separate from the rest of the life course. By placing the spotlight on the social structure, it emphasized sources of inequality in old age and that remains a major aspect of its legacy. The chapter uses the "cultures of aging" thesis to illustrate the shortcomings of microsociological perspectives when compared to structural ones and, especially, highlights their acquiescence in the growth of inequality and the individualization of risk. The final part of the chapter draws on recent European theorizing on social quality to show how *both* structure and agency may interact across the life course and to emphasize the crucial role of the welfare state in enabling individual and collective agency.

In Chapter 5, Carroll Estes provides a critical feminist perspective on the issue of women's vulnerability and dependency through the life course. The first part of her chapter explores the role of the state in influencing the life chances of older women, a theme she examines in the context of various feminist theories of state and class relations. The chapter goes on to provide an analysis of the role of ideology in the construction of gender relations, especially in relation to patriarchy and the role of neoconservatism in the struggle to subjugate women. Estes brings these themes together in her discussion of globalization, with a particular focus on the rise of neoliberal, market-based policies, which reduce protection for women in vital health and social policy arenas.

In Chapter 6, Dale Dannefer considers some of the dynamics involved in the application of critical theory to gerontology. He suggests ways in which critical ideas have sometimes been co-opted by gerontology. He also argues that in less obvious ways, the ready application of critical theory to gerontology has been an occasion for those working in the critical tradition to avoid the profound and existential issues of human development, human aging, and human mortality that are ultimately generated by the topic of age—a reciprocal co-optation. The latter, involving coming to terms with morbidity and mortality even after ameliorative

efforts have been applied, is the greater challenge for critical theory, and Dannefer suggests a possible avenue for beginning to confront that challenge.

SECTION 2:
Critical Dimensions of Medicalization:
Aging and Health as Cultural Products

Chapter 7 follows as Stephen Katz builds upon earlier research that has looked at the genealogy of concepts used in the discipline of social gerontology. In this chapter, he asks why the term "functional age" and its correlate, "functional health," have become widespread within studies of aging. He provides a valuable historical survey of this cluster of ideas, highlighting milestones in both theoretical debates and empirical surveys. Katz draws the conclusion that the move from "chronological" to "functional" notions of age may be seen as signaling the need to establish measurable states of being, reinforced through neoliberal health mandates around self-care and independence. He concludes that critical gerontology faces the important task of questioning the extent to which "functionality" has emerged as a dominant way of understanding the aging process.

In Chapter 8, Neil King and Toni Calasanti examine the competing discourses provided by critical gerontology and the anti-aging industry on the theme of empowering older people. The former focuses on reframing dependency in old age as a social construction, underpinned by the social relations of capitalism and the market economy; the latter placing emphasis on activity and consumerism, with the possibility of older people reversing age-related dysfunctions and disorders. The authors observe how both approaches are located in the political economy of the Global North, this often accompanied by a failure to acknowledge the stark inequalities experienced by those in the Global South. In the second half of the chapter, Calasanti and King provide a detailed analysis of debates on the theme of empowerment, noting connections between critical gerontology and the anti-aging model, while pointing to fresh areas of debate in which each will need to engage.

In Chapter 9, Kathryn Douthit picks up the medicalization strand in the social construction debate, applying this to the field of psychiatry and its treatment of dementia of the Alzheimer's type. Her critique focuses on the uncritical acceptance (within and beyond the psychiatric establishment) of biopsychiatry and its privileging of time-efficient, instrumental therapies. Douthit illustrates this through a detailed analysis of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*), confirming the extent to which medical/biological approaches have become embedded within psychiatry. She goes on to consider the impact of biomedicalization on approaches to

Alzheimer's disease, pointing to the failure to acknowledge the loss of self-esteem, the impact of anxiety and depression, and the need for support among such patients.

SECTION 3:
Age and Inequality: Local, National, and Global Dynamics

In Chapter 10, Larry Polivka and Charles F. Longino, Jr. examine what they term as "the emerging postmodern culture of aging." The chapter begins with a discussion of the decline in traditional values and certainties along with the growth of new forms of individual autonomy and reflexivity. Then, among a range of postmodern analyses, they emphasize the significance of the neoliberal version that favors privatization of the welfare state. Polivka and Longino contrast the neoliberal "cultures of aging" thesis—that most older people are now affluent and that an even greater majority will be so in the future—with evidence about the socioeconomic status of retirees in the United States. For example, more than two-thirds of all retirees depend on Social Security for at least 50% of their income, 75% for women and 77% for minority ethnic groups. With regard to the next generation of older people, the evidence suggests that most retirees over the next 30 years will not be substantially better off than their parents. The final section of the chapter considers whether there is an alternative to the neoliberal path toward a viable postmodern old age. The answer, they argue, lies in a new narrative for social policy that stresses empowerment and is designed to create both security and freedom. Reflecting the political economy strand of critical gerontology, the authors reject privatization, given the substantial risks when applied to the field of social welfare.

Chapters 11 and 12 expand on the theme, anticipated in some of the earlier chapters, of cumulative advantage/disadvantage (Crystal & Shea, 2002; Dannefer, 2003). In Chapter 11, Stephen Crystal combines a newly elaborated cumulative advantage model with disablement theory to explore the interaction between health status and economic resources over the life course. He makes the case for the importance of midlife for understanding the precursors to late-life economic and health status. He points out that the consequences of differences in socio-economic status in health become more marked in midlife following decades of exposure to differential stresses and risks. Crystal goes on to provide an analysis of the factors shaping later-life inequality. He concludes by laying out a conceptual model for understanding health inequality, disablement, and cumulate advantage over the life course.

In Chapter 12, Linda M. Burton and Keith E. Whitfield explore another dimension to the cumulative advantage/disadvantage theme, focusing on the health experiences of low-income families. They explore the extent to which lifetime poverty affects a range of social, psychological, and economic domains, with profound consequences for physical and mental health status. The authors report

findings from a pioneering longitudinal, ethnographic study of multigenerational families, exploring two main questions: first, how is "cumulative disadvantage" experienced in daily life? Second, how are these disadvantages evidenced in family comorbidity? They emphasize a number of important findings for future research and policy, drawing out the high incidence of chronic physical and mental health problems experienced by mothers and their children. They note the cumulative effects of the early onset of certain diseases that lead on to chronic morbidity in middle and later life.

In Chapter 13, Sandra Torres returns directly to the theme of globalization, but focuses on its implications for studies of culture, migration, and aging. She is especially concerned with applying some of the concepts from the globalization debate to aging members of minority groups. Torres emphasizes the growth in the number of international migrants and the emergence of what has been termed "transnational communities." The chapter examines the implications of transnationalism for understanding both the nature of the migrant experience and the policies that need to be developed on their behalf. Torres also brings out the contradictory nature of globalization as an economic and social process. Drawing parallels with an earlier debate on gerontology around modernization theory, she highlights both the inequalities and the potential benefits that migration can bring for some groups.

Chapter 14 concludes this book with John A. Vincent's broad overview of demographic change. He employs macrocritical theory in order to understand population movements. The chapter opens with a summary of political-economy theories of population and a critique of their limited macrolevel vision and failure to account for rapid technological change. The main part of the chapter concentrates on pension-fund capitalism as a political economy that, in the last two decades of the 20th century, has become a central component of global capital markets. Drawing on the literature on "grey capitalism," the chapter demonstrates the enormous power wielded by its institutions in a largely private, undemocratic way. Vincent describes the ways that the ideology of pension-fund capitalism are reflected in the policies of a range of global organizations and agencies. He concludes with a detailed assessment of the basis for a political-economy perspective regarding demography and the operation of pension funds.

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SECTION 1

Dimensions of
Critical Gerontology

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Beyond Neomodernism, Antimodernism, and Postmodernism: Basic Categories for Contemporary Critical Gerontology

Jan Baars

Macrotheorizing in studies of aging is quite rare. Although references to an "aging society" are frequent, they are mostly not elaborated theoretically. The "aging society" is, however, not a society composed only of home care, nursing homes, or gerontological laboratories. Nor is it just the abstract world of demographic figures and their extrapolations. The issues that are referred to with the metaphor "aging society" are part of and influenced by a historical reality, which goes through rapid changes at an increasingly interconnected macrolevel. The transition to an "aging society" is, at the same time, a transition to a globalizing world of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) networks and biotechnology. Such changes may, to an important degree, *situate* and *qualify* what happens at a more local or communal level. Although the presence of more older people will change the societies they live in, technical, political, and cultural developments in these societies are equally influential in shaping *their* lives.

References to the macrolevel of society using terms such as "late-modern society, risk society," "neomodernism" ("neoliberalism"), or "postmodernism" are used with increasing frequency in gerontological studies. Typically, this occurs without the necessary elaboration or digestion of the debates that are taking place about these issues. Their relevance for social gerontology is therefore not fully clarified. This chapter presents a systematic effort to analyze these concepts and their implications for social gerontology. In this discussion, a perspective unfolds in which these basic categories or approaches are assessed in a way that does not promise an escape from modernity, but emphasizes the need to readdress and reinterpret basic modernist ideals which have been both fought for and

ideologically misused: *responsible individual fulfillment, solidarity,* and *human dignity.* This perspective makes it possible to point to the crucial contributions of gerontological studies to macrotheorizing, as these may show how important societal structures are in shaping both positive and negative life chances; as gerontologists can show the build-up and full consequences of such structures during long lives.

In the next section, I will review in some detail these contours of contemporary society. This will be followed by two sections that provide a critical analysis of modernity. Finally, I will identify how this analysis of modernity points to the need for a critical gerontology and its implications for gerontology more generally.

DESCRIPTIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

In trying to summarize the most important characteristics that emerge from the efforts of contemporary social theory to get a clear picture of present society, it becomes clear that we can only hope to get hold of contemporary *dynamics.* The self-destructive or self-innovative unrest that is typical for modernity has become a daily reality. Proclaiming change, innovation, and newness has become a normal ingredient of everyday functioning for organizations of all sorts, making it hardly possible to paint a static picture. A theoretical approach can only hope to be adequate if it succeeds in providing a useful characterization of the most important societal dynamics, which can guide further exploration and yet be open enough to be corrected by them or to question ambivalent findings.

Most contemporary societal self-descriptions begin with the theme of *globalization*: a society which is still dominated by the goals of economic and technological progress, but has been revolutionized by new possibilities for the movement of capital and of the means of production, as well as new forms of electronic communication and networking, leading to increasing global interdependencies. As Castells (1996) puts it: "a technological revolution, centered around information technologies, is reshaping, at accelerated pace, the material basis of society" (p. 1ff.). Digitalized information, images, capital, and people move around the world faster and faster. These developments lead to many new problems and questions. Most comments focus on the major challenges facing democratic control in and by nation-states. New global (e.g., ecological) risks, international crime and international mobility of capital undermine the effectiveness of legal regulation and control by nation states, questioning their sovereignty. The present situation is, however, characterized by many important ambivalences.

First, on the one hand, the nation-states appear indeed no longer capable of regulating many important processes that take place within their own territories. On the other hand, they often use this observation in a *pars pro toto* fashion: it is partially true, but also ideologically misused to evade or reduce responsibilities

that should be assumed by the nation-states, such as taking care of intergenerational solidarity (Walker & Deacon, 2003).

Second, to counteract the new weakness of the nation-states, several international configurations are emerging that try to get a grasp of processes that evade national sovereignty. They are as different as bilateral and multilateral connections between nation states, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) notably. An ambivalence that arises here is that most of the dominant nation-states claim to be governed democratically, but operate through the structures of the international configurations that lack democratic legitimacy, as democracy is still based on national structures and traditions. In this undemocratic vacuum, politics are developed that go much further than compensating the nation-states for their weakness as a result of globalization. Not only can they undermine the potential weakness of the nation-state, but they can also offer the national governments an easy excuse to legitimize certain actions or regulations that might be accepted reluctantly or not accepted at all by their own democratic institutions (Walker, 1990, 2004).

Third, international mobility leads to multicultural societies in which people with different backgrounds learn to appreciate each other; but it also leads to a stronger appeal to nationalist sentiments. Democratic institutions are put to the test as they are committed to a discursive solution of conflicts, civil rights, and citizenship, regardless of ethnic origin (Habermas, 1997). Migrating workers or asylum seekers and their families will inevitably age and develop ambivalent patterns of integration and disintegration, both with the new country of residence and their origins. Multicultural aging emerges as a complicated result of international migration (Gardner, 1995, 2002; Phillipson, Ahmed, & Latimer, 2003).

Fourth, there is a rapidly growing worldwide distribution of Western products and images which has many different effects, but does not simply lead to a "McDonaldization" of the world (Appadurai, 1996; Featherstone, Lasch, & Robertson, 1995; Robertson, 1992). Its influences do not merely result in Westernization or Americanization, but lead to dynamic innovative interactions in which local cultures redefine themselves with new language and symbols: "If a global cultural system is emerging, it is filled with ironies and resistances, sometimes camouflaged as passivity and a bottomless appetite in the Asian world for things Western" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 29). In other words, globalization produces "glocalization" (Robertson, 1992). As local cultures have never been grounded in natural (inborn) qualities, there is a continuing *historical* articulation of local cultures, taking place under intensified confrontation with plural global influences. This continuing importance of locality is also relevant for the different directions societies may take in the globalization process.

As for the Western societies, we can speak of "late-modern societies" (not late moder*nism*), to emphasize that they are gradually moving away from their national identities that developed in the context of modern Western history.

They will have to establish new identities in the interfering processes of global-ization and glocalization, during which time a crucial question will be in what way and to what degree they will succeed in realizing some important principles that have been developed during the modernization process, such as human dignity, freedom, and the struggle against gross forms of social inequality or exclusion.

Contemporary Societal Self-Evaluations

Or have we already entered a universe in which these elements or principles have been transcended or have become meaningless? Can we call our world *postmodern;* and what could be meant by that? Luhmann (2000) offers the following comments:

> Were we to care for realities, we would not see any sharp break between a modern and a postmodern society. For centuries we have had a monetary economy and we still have it. We also had, for centuries now, a state-oriented political system, and we still have it. . . . We have positivistic legal systems, unified by constitutions. . . . We do scientific research as before, although now more conscious of risks and other unpleasant consequences. And we send, wherever possible our children to schools, using up the best years of their lives to prepare them for an unknown future. Our whole life depends on technologies, today more than ever, and again we see more problems, but no clear break with the past, no transition from a modern to a postmodern society. (p. 35)

The discussion about modernism and postmodernism is, however, mainly a discussion about how to *evaluate* contemporary developments, especially what to expect from the further development of practical forms of reason (democracy, technology, organization, and so on); the most solid ground that enlightened people have learned to trust in the past centuries (Kunneman, 2002). In the last decades, there have been many contributions to such evaluations at a societal level that can roughly be distinguished in three main positions.

The first could be called neomodernism, which puts all its trust in the innovative furthering of the productive sources of modernity: rationally guided economic and technological growth. Sometimes this position is superficially legitimized by the neoliberal identification of "freedom" and a "free world' with a free *market,* without much doubt about the costs of this equation in terms of inequality or ecological damage.

The second position could be called *antimodernism*, as its diagnosis aims mainly at criticizing modernity for its hopeless illusions and points the way back to a supposedly solid and unquestionable foundation that should be found in a specific tradition. This may vary from traditional Marxism, to Eastern wisdom, conservative Christianity, or the Sharia. Some forms of ecological funda-mentalism also belong to this category.

Finally, the third position could be called (or calls itself) postmodernism. This could be characterized as the disillusioned counterpart of neomodernism. It does not believe in the promises or hopes of the neo-modernists, but cannot be positioned under antimodernism, as it refuses to believe in any unquestionable foundation.

In my opinion, a contemporary critical social theory has more in common with postmodernism than with the other two positions because of its *latent* critical potential. The heterogeneous theoretical configuration of postmodernism (including poststructuralism) gained intellectual momentum in the 1970s and 1980s as a way to reflect on the *débacle* of Marxist revolutionary thought. Most of its leading authors, such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Andre Glucksmann, were active Marxists before they became disillusioned postmodernists. The postmodern reflection of the Marxist critique of society, which was predominant during the 1960s, made it clear that the Marxists tried to criticize capitalist modernity, but held on to one of its most predominant ideas. This is the idea that history has an *immanent* force and direction, which humans can rationally understand and actively partake in so that they can appreciate their actions, not only as a fulfillment of history's meaning, but also as a personal self-realization. This basic idea gave Marxist scholars in the social sciences, philosophy, and history a firm conviction about the way they should take a stand, and evaluate their position and the actual historical situation. It gave them the possibilities for a solid and comprehensive "Diagnosis of our Time," to quote Karl Mannheim's (1943) great title.

The modernist idea that history shows an immanent force and direction that can be rationally understood and implemented in subjective action has been left behind in postmodernism. The fundamental opposition that negatively unites this otherwise rather heterogeneous work of philosophers like Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida is directed against the Hegelian idea that history harbors a meaningful direction or end that can be rationally and systematically understood; an idea which had been turned into a historically grounded political program by Marx. In this respect, the postmodernists repeated the dramatic transition that Theodor Adorno, but especially Max Horkheimer, made toward the end of the 1930s, as they moved away from a Marxist vision of history, under the lasting impression of the Stalinist regime (Baars, 1987). In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written during the Second World War, we find already the typical reactualizing of Nietzschean motives, such as the interdependency of reason and power, which is also characteristic of the postmodernist position. They also emphasized the loss of the unity of rationality, morality, and historical development and were consequently criticized by the more traditional Marxists for not being able to identify, let alone *mobilize,* a "revolutionary subject."

Whereas postmodernism could be seen as a reactualization of Nietzsche, critical theorists like Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas, have also discarded the Hegelian heritage of Marxism and have returned to the more formal position