

*Growing Old with the Welfare State: Eight British lives*, Nick Hubble, Jennie Taylor, Philip Tew, London, Bloomsbury 2019, ISBN 9781350033092, £19.99, pb. 176pp.

Reaching another milestone, chronologically, this year I first reflected that *Growing Old with the Welfare State* was perhaps a book I should be reading for more reasons than purely academic ones! Deliberations on varied experiences of the ways in which the British Welfare State has exerted an impact on individuals and their socio-political attitudes offers much more, however, than the febrile musings of an academic. Hubble, Taylor and Pew have brought together in this volume something from sociological research that is latent yet unacknowledged within social policy studies: a qualitative perspective. Certainly we have seen the development in recent years of lived experiences and relationality within the welfare context but these remain in the minority (Dobson, 2015). Perhaps it is time to ensure that, whilst social policy, as a branch of applied sociology, requires robust quantitative and statistical methods to inform policy directions and changes, it also demands the voice of those people experiencing it if it is to continue to speak to the many in our complex, fluid and rapidly changing world.

I am writing this review before the tumultuous end of January 2020, which will see tremendous changes in the UK's relationship with the rest of Europe and internationally. The economic ramifications and what this means for social welfare policy, which remains as Cinderella to her sisters when compared with the National Health Service, are still unclear. However, we can perhaps assume, Cassandra-like, a rocky and challenging road. For those of us who are passionate about the Welfare State, and yet harbour anarchic feelings towards State control over the lives of individuals, we can anticipate increased surveillance, control and normative policies against a reduced expenditure and provision of individualised services. We may also see some diminution in public support for policies supporting older people because of un-critiqued assumptions of recent voting trends of some older people and ageism. It is against this backdrop that this book assumes tremendous importance in showing what can be and what needs to be achieved to maintain a civilised late modern society. It also gives us an insight into how attitudes and values may change or remain constant in before and after terms.

The book stems from a larger study under the New Dynamics of Ageing programme focusing on the changing attitudes, shifts in lives and culture of older people drawing on Mass Observation and University of the Third Age respondents born between 1921 and 1943. The eight pseudonymous diarists are separated by interwar births and war time births. Thus half the group experienced pre-Welfare State culture and the other half have lived with the Welfare State from early childhood.

The interwar respondents appear, in their diaries, to hold more traditional views such as chivalry, fidelity in marriage, restraint in money and conservative in values. However, this was still echoed in those born during the war despite a more liberal attitude to marriage and divorce, gay relationships, work and independence. Whilst the interwar respondents expressed bemusement with the

sexual liberation of the 1960s, and the wartime born respondents lived within this period of change, both groups were characterised by a need for love and companionship in relationships not always found in heterosexual marriage.

Using a concept of the Welfare State as relating to mainstream social policies such as health, education, social security, housing, social services and employment, the authors show both continuities in attitude as well as changing behaviours and views. The period in which both groups lived saw an increase in longevity and a Welfare State that provided for people's needs despite the shift from collective conformity to the acceptance of multiple individual lifestyles. Their experiences provided an identity which allowed a binary opposition with those who were younger, different and likely to have different behavioural attitudes to money, debt, relationships, whilst benefiting from educational opportunities that the wartime born respondents were beginning to enjoy.

This is a remarkable book demonstrating the complex nuances of ageing in context, the search for identity through difference and offers an insight into the continuing needs of people throughout the life course. For sociology and social policy it demands a rethinking of our approach to ageing that sets it within the socio-political and cultural contexts in which it takes place.

### **Reference**

Dobson, R. (2015) Power, Agency, Relationality and Welfare Practice. *Journal of Social Policy*, 44(4), 687-705. doi:10.1017/S0047279415000318

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