

Is The Welfare State Worth Saving?

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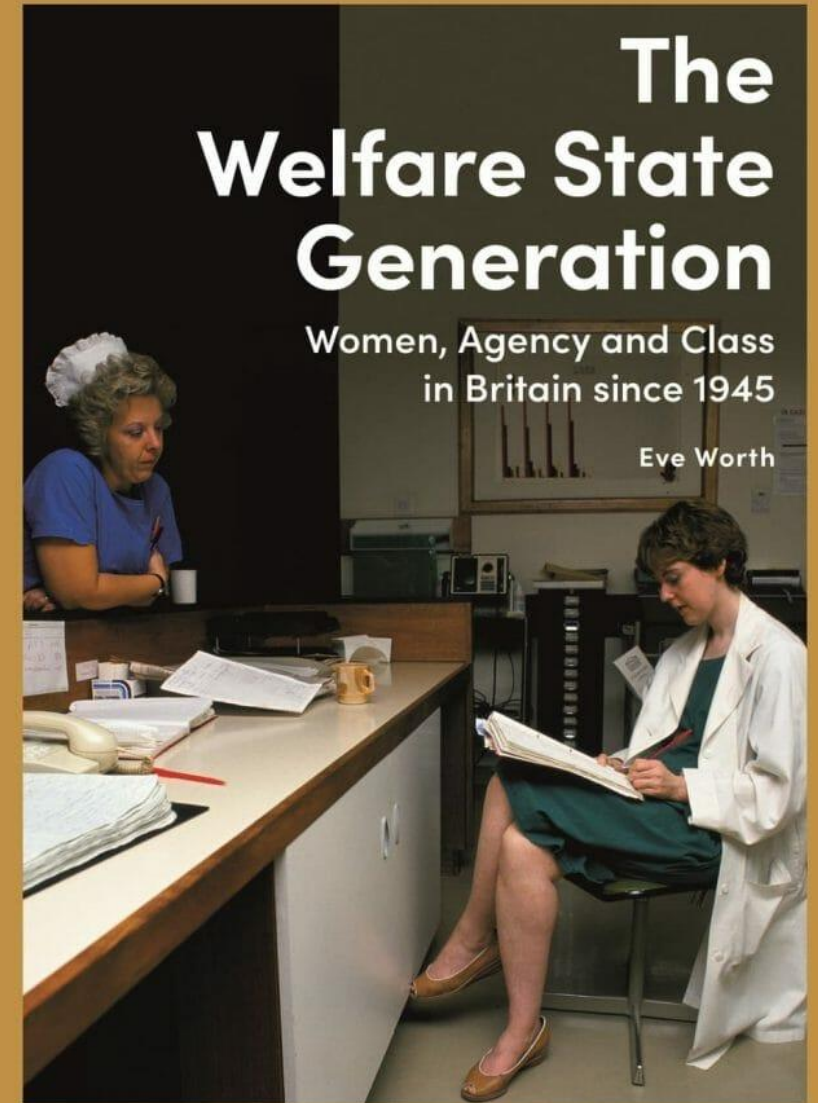
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University
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The Welfare State Generation

- The welfare state has been so central to the lives of women born in Britain between the late 1930s and early 1950s that they are the 'welfare state generation'.
- We know little about welfare state development in practice nor its long-term impact on those who grew up within it.
- The welfare state had wide-ranging effects on these women's experience across the life course- and they were agents of change within the state



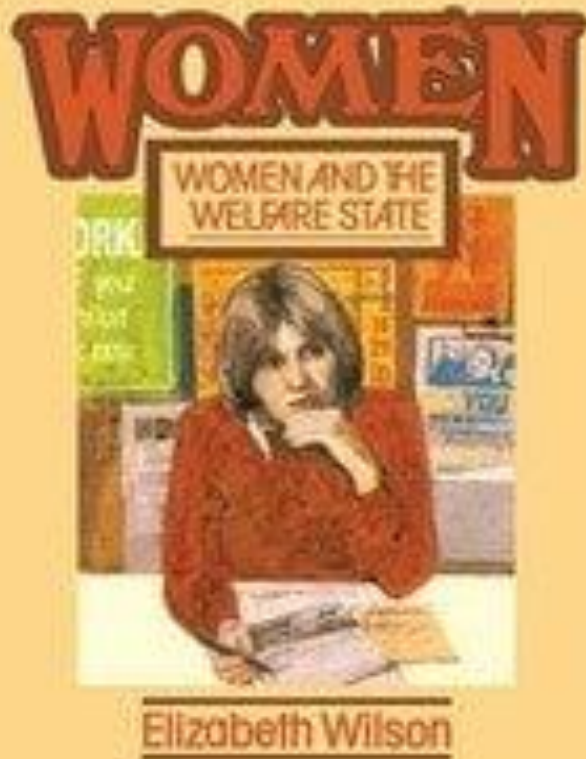
NEW DIRECTIONS IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY

BLOOMSBURY

Oral History Method

- Based primarily on 36 life history interviews- from birth to present day- made a deliberate choice to analyse the interviews right through to retirement.
- Did not set out to have the welfare state as a primary way to understand these women's lives- it emerged organically in the interviews.
- Using women's lives to rethink major aspects of modern British history.

Defining the Welfare State



‘...the welfare state is not just a set of services, it is also a set of ideas about society, about the family, and – not least important – about women who have a centrally important role within the family as lynchpin’

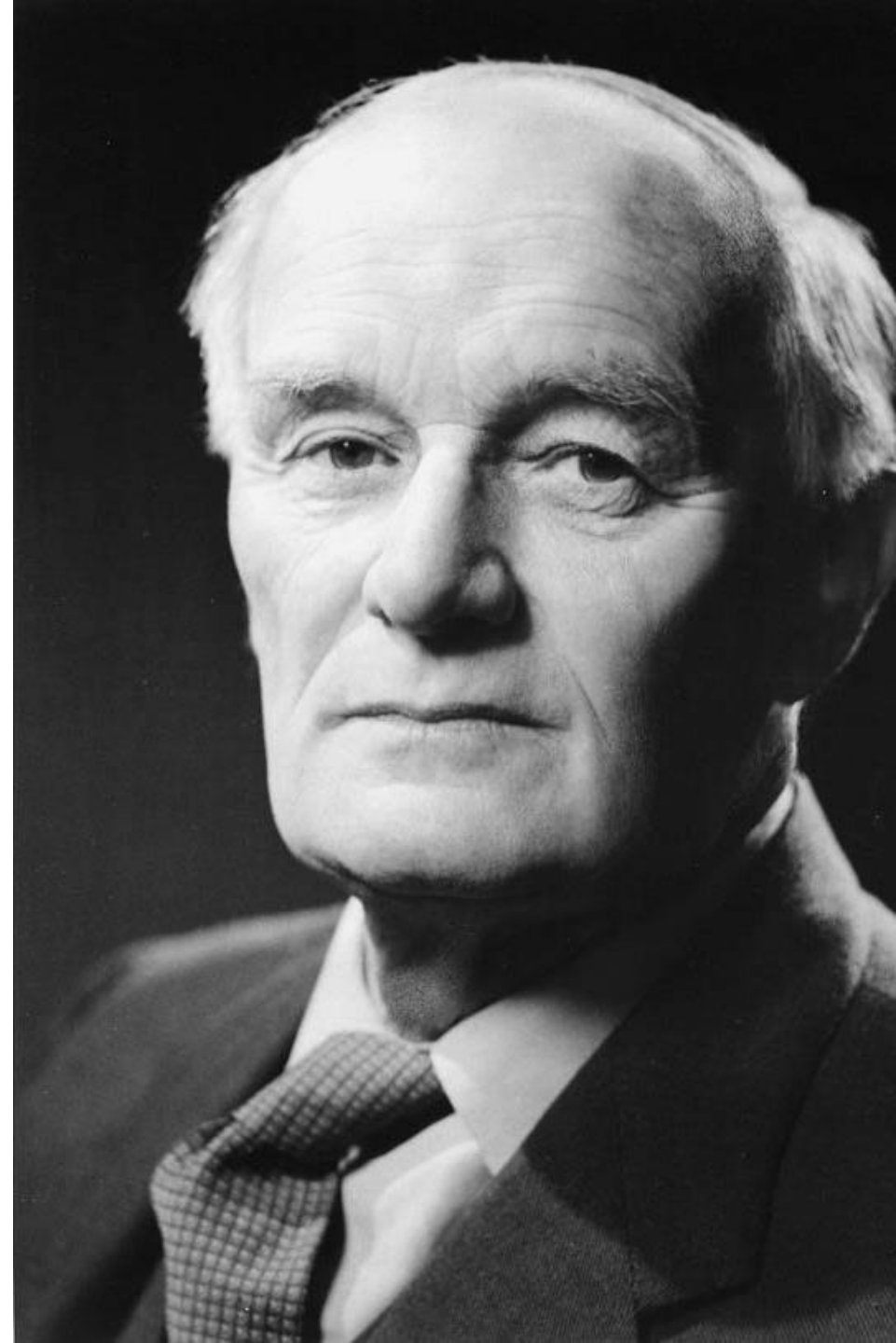
Wilson, 1977

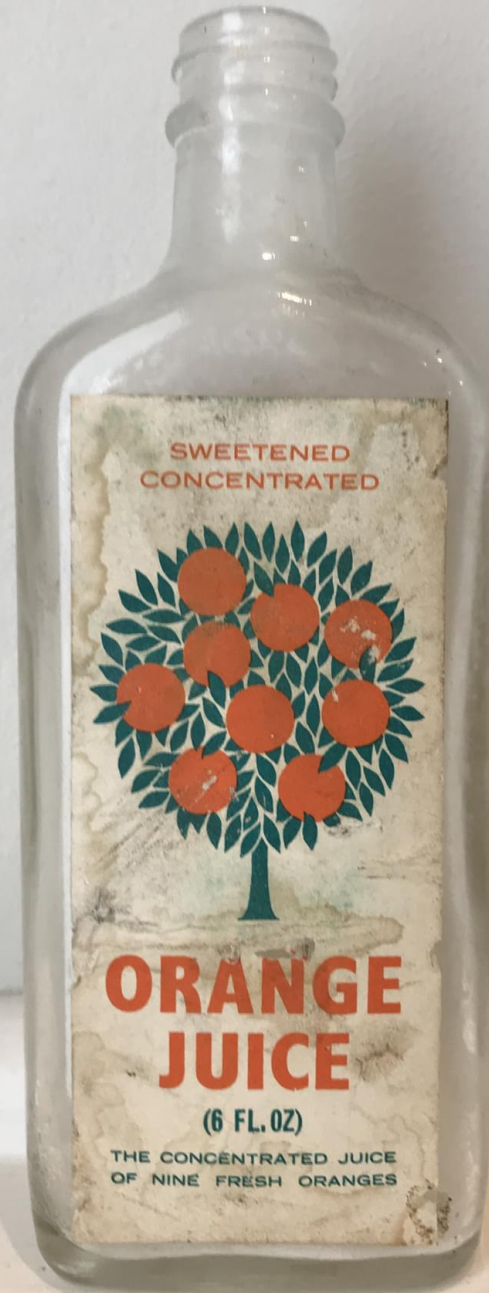
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Welfare and the Social Contract

‘...from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society...’

T.H Marshall, 1950





Girlhood in the Welfare State

'I think I would be a very different person now if orange juice and milk and dinners at school hadn't told me, in a covert way, that I had a right to exist, was worth something...'

(Steedman, 1986)

The Spectre of the Interwar Period

'...tales of not going to the doctors because you couldn't afford to go. My mother had two siblings that died because of diphtheria...[we were] always made aware of how fortunate we were to have the NHS ... that you didn't have to worry, if you were ill you were going to get cared for'

Jean b.1950

Sisters and the 11+ Exam

‘Immediately I felt in a position of advantage over my sister. And in a way I’ve never discussed this properly with my sister because there are issues that she’s quite bitter about, and so it’s quite difficult. And she has flung it at me recently: ‘How do you imagine I felt when you went to grammar school?’

Sylvia b.1945



Tangible vs Intangible Impact

- Most working-class girls left school early with few qualifications and little career advice.
- But the vibrant economy and safety net of the welfare state produced some space for risk taking and trying things out- this could mean spontaneous marriage; engaging in creative endeavours; or going to work abroad.
- Welfare states offer practical possibilities but also create the conditions where experimentation can flourish which is beneficial for wider society

Late 1960s Welfare State Expansion

An under-studied secondary expansion of the welfare state during the Labour Government 1964-70

Put money into schools, further and education, hospitals, social work- all needed employees

Made it easier to return to education as mature student which many women in my sample chose to do



Social Mobility in the Long 1970s

‘going back to education was not necessarily about career plans but instead about wanting something different than the life that seemed mapped out for you’ (Rita, b.1952)



- Not a plan for social mobility but did produce social mobility.
- A different model to the ‘scholarship boy’

Agents of Change in the State

'I wasn't politicised at all really, but I was in my commitment to education...I had young children and I was reading up for work, writing lectures that sort of thing... So, I suppose my political commitment was to education. I believe education is a political act because of its transformative powers'.

De-professionalisation

If I had any say in the matter, (which of course I don't because the government never consults teachers), I'd try to revive the principle of education for education's sake...the government talks about its great achievements in 'improving education' through targets but it's complete nonsense. All that's happened is that teachers have learned to adapt their methods in order to fit the targets and test. (Alice b.1951)

- *devaluation of professional expertise
- *rise of managerialism
- *loss of status for state workers



Neoliberalism as Project of 'Management' of Self

“I want to be out getting on, I want to make change happen. It's hard to know how to do it, so I'm trying to change myself rather than the outside world, but that's not easy”

Anita b.1952

Older Age, and Generational Divides?

Life is good for baby boomers. And Jeremy Hunt plans to make it even better

Phillip Inman

Boomers, you've done OK - but don't expect undying affection from us millennials

Martha Gill



Letters

We privileged baby boomers are the real 'snowflakes'

Millennials are struggling. Is it the fault of the baby boomers?

A political discourse has emerged that frames the post-war generation as having benefitted disproportionately from the welfare state to the detriment of future generations.

Retirement and Welfare Expertise

- Welfare State Generation benefitted from welfare policies into older age- although class differences persisted.
- Women did suffer in their work life from cuts to the welfare state and many were made redundant or had to retire early. Retirement was difficult for many women.
- However, they continued to use the welfare state expertise that they had gained in their professional life to fill vital gaps in welfare provision in voluntary roles, and to advocate for state provision.

Awareness of Role of the State



‘Education is one route that is increasingly shut off to people like me whose families came from different backgrounds – the levels of debt that students have to accept, the transition of universities into businesses. The cuts in health and social welfare, the meteoric rise of housing values and the absence of council housing.’

Claudia, b.1948

Benefits of the Welfare State

- The welfare state provided opportunities for women and a better quality of life materially and socially. Important to remember though, this was always contradictory and fractured across classed and gendered lines.
- Offered a sense of value to individuals and some ability to take risks. There was a social contract that elevated the idea that you were entitled to something from state and society rather than simply responsible to it.
- An expansive welfare state had a benefit to wider society as well as individuals. For example, social mobility is a vital tool for energizing the economy and stimulating creativity rather than a favour to the individual


Expansive State Can Improve Gender Equality

- Notable that the destruction of the welfare state still disproportionately impacts women owing to a variety of mechanisms.
- For example, because cuts to the welfare state leads to more unpaid labour for women, and because, as the process of de-professionalization continues at pace, welfare roles decline in status and conditions.
- Women's Budget Group does excellent work demonstrating the ongoing economic inequality of women and its ties to a weak welfare state.

A New Social Contract?

- The welfare state now operates in a way that is more disciplinary than opportunity
- Beyond simply saving the welfare state we could use this moment of contemporary moment of 'polycrisis' and vast inequality- just like the crisis of 1945- to rethink the current social contract in Britain
- What could a welfare state that operated as part of a more equal social contract look like in the c21st century- and whose knowledge and experiences could we use to explore this?

DAILY EXPRESS
FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 2024



Nicola Sturgeon's husband charged over SNP finances
SEE PAGE 11

SILHOUETTE STATUES PAY EMOTIVE TRIBUTE TO 1,475 D-DAY FALLEN
SEE PAGES 2&3

PM TELLS SICK NOTE BRITAIN: GET A GRIP AND A JOB

By Martyn Brown
Deputy Political Editor

RISHI Sunak is vowing to end Britain's sick note culture, declaring everyday "life worries" are not a medical reason for being unable to work.

In a landmark speech today he will unveil an overhaul of the welfare system to curb the soaring benefits bill.

The PM will demand a switch to a "can-do" attitude where thousands of long-term jobless are helped back to work.

His get-tough approach comes after the total number of people signed off soared to a record 11 million last year; it was 5.3 million in 2015/16.

Mr Sunak is likely to say the focus will be "what work you can do - not what you

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