

*Global Youth Unemployment: History, Governance and Policy* by Ross Fergusson and Nicola Yeates is a remarkable book: conceptually rich and empirically epic, it deserves to have a major impact on the study of social policy, and indeed across the social sciences more generally.

Its most important contribution is perhaps the contention that youth unemployment is a global or transnational phenomena. As the authors acknowledge, they are not the first to study youth unemployment as a global issue – but there have been few, if any, books which detail so convincingly and originally the cross-border determinants of youth unemployment. Transnational processes of accumulation are identified as the key drivers behind endemic youth unemployment, which is found in ‘all continents, most regions, and a great many countries, state-types and political and economic welfare system types’ (p3). Methodological nationalism is definitively rejected in favour of ‘a transnationalist social policy analytics’ (p13).

Fergusson and Yeates rather courageously problematise their own central, organising concept in the book’s introduction. They acknowledge that ‘unemployment’ can be conceived in quite narrow terms, directing attention away from the array of experiences of employment insecurity across the world. However, they insist upon a broad definition of unemployment, capturing both the key risk to young people worldwide – lack of formal employment – and the precarious forms of employment which characterise many young people’s experience. Some readers might question this approach, yet Fergusson and Yeates are correct: to refuse to name the problem as ‘unemployment’ would be to risk downplaying its significance.

Furthermore, the term ‘endemic’ is carrying an important conceptual load in this regard. It denotes a set of conditions for young workers which prevail and persist across different national contexts, which may not always manifest as formal unemployment – but unemployment is an ever-present risk.

The data presented in the book’s empirical chapter is comprehensive, indeed almost exhaustive. It arrives from a vast array of sources. Readers hoping for empirical parsimony may therefore be disappointed. Fergusson and Yeates’ approach is one of using all of the information available to them to tell a complex, historical and multi-layered story about endemic youth unemployment. In the hands of some researchers, discrepancies in coverage, and data compatibility concerns, might undermine the validity of the conclusions drawn. This is certainly not the case here (and data limitations are acknowledged throughout). The authors fit the pieces of the puzzle together masterfully, demonstrating among other things that youth unemployment arising from global restructuring processes has been with us for rather longer than the recent literature tends to suggest.

*Global Youth Unemployment* is full of rich and innovative argumentation. Its most lasting contribution may lie in its third and fourth chapters, focused on an account of ‘the global youth labour force’, and specifically a persuasive attempt to quantify the ‘active’ and ‘reserve’ armies of young workers which have facilitated the transformation of global production. Young people – more flexible, absorptive, and exploitable – are not simply left behind by globalisation, they are its enablers. The book discovers an important paradox in which transnationally-oriented employers express a preference for young workers, even as employers’ attitudes towards and treatment of young people entrenches the prospect and actuality of youth unemployment. In short, the possibility of mass employment of young people ‘comes at a price’ (p78).

The book is also based on an extensive review of policy documents related to youth unemployment – with policy shown as complicit in the intensification of endemic youth unemployment, and as

failing to mitigate its impact. This is one aspect of the book's analysis where the worldwide scope becomes a disadvantage. A smaller-*n* approach might have allowed the particular role of nationally-constituted politics in this story to have been explicated in greater depth. On the other hand, Fergusson and Yeates would surely retort that an excessive focus on national nuances has for too long served to obscure the global nature of youth unemployment, and the role of global governance institutions in embedding in within national economies.

J2fnfqz890890891