

REVIEW

The Aging of Aquarius: The Hippies of the 60s in their 60s and Beyond

Galit Nimrod, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2023, 277 pp., hbk US \$80, ISBN 13: 9781009304078

Feliciano Villar 

Department of Cognition, Development and Educational Psychology, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

(First published online 8 November 2023)

The Israeli researcher Galit Nimrod, a well-known social scientist in the field of ageing studies, embarked on an ethnographic study by living for some weeks in The Farm, a hippie community in Tennessee founded in 1971 and currently populated by around 200 people, 90 of whom are 65 years old and over. The result of her experience is *The Aging of Aquarius*, whose aim is ‘to explore the aging experience of people I initially described as hippies who remained hippies ... to discover how such individuals considered later life, whether and how they preserved the hippie ideology and lifestyle in old age, what changed and why, and to what extent their unique characteristics supported their aging process’ (p. 6). The book presents results and reflections extracted from that study, based on 40 interviews with current and former older residents, as well as participant and online observations.

The book is structured into ten chapters. The three initial chapters provide context for the book, stating its objectives and starting point in Chapter 1, ‘Introduction’, the history of the hippie movement (Chapter 2, ‘The Hippies’) and the history of the specific hippie community studied by Nimrod (Chapter 3, ‘The Farm’). Taking into account such context, the next six chapters delve into different topics that shape the values and lifestyles of the community: how older hippies have managed to maintain a ‘hippie identity’ over the years (Chapter 4, ‘Once a Hippie, Always a Hippie’), how they continue to strive to change the world and contribute to their community (Chapter 5, ‘Still Changing the World’), how the residents derive wellbeing and satisfaction from daily practices (Chapter 6, ‘Sex, Drugs and Rock-n-Roll?’), how they deal with spirituality in different ways (Chapter 7, ‘The Aging of the New Agers’), how they support each other in meaningful relationships developing over time (Chapter 8, ‘Lifelong Community’) and how they manage end-of-life issues (Chapter 9, ‘Alternative End of Life’). Although not highlighted by Nimrod, this central part of the book focuses on every relevant theme of life proposed by Erik Erikson: identity, intimacy, generativity and integrity. Finally, the book concludes with Chapter 10, ‘Aging Differently’.

in which, as well as reviewing the main findings, the author reflects on how individuals who identify as hippies may undergo a distinct ageing process compared to other older adults, potentially experiencing better outcomes.

The book is not restricted to expert audiences with an academic interest in ageing, or to students who would like a good example of an applied study. Nimrod's book is also addressed to a wider public, mainly the baby-boomer generation, who have lived alongside the hippie movement (and perhaps sympathise with it), from its heyday in the late 1960s and early 1970s to its influence on ecological or pacifist movements that continue to be influential. That effort to extract knowledge from academia and to disseminate it to wider publics is always welcoming, but pleasing both audiences simultaneously is not an easy task. Both (experts and lay readers) might find insightful material within its pages, but also shortcomings. From an academic point of view, the book includes interesting conceptual interpretations of certain experiences and lifestyles, and applies updated theoretical proposals on ageing to interpret interviews and observations. Students also find such case study analysis very appealing. However, although the author includes some clear methodological notes in the first chapter, it is clearly not a methodology-guided book, and some experts may miss a more academic content and style. Such decision of 'watering down' scholarship conventions serves to widen the approach to lay audiences, who may find the quantity of literal excerpts of interviews and engaging descriptions of real-life examples appealing. The inclusion of clear messages oriented to how to age well and gain a productive and happy older age suggests an enlightened and data-driven self-help volume.

The interest of the entire endeavour lies in observing how hippies, guided by a youthful and *carpe diem* ideology, have entered late life; how the communes connected with nature in which they choose to live have transformed into ageing communities; and to what extent a particular ideology and lifestyle have helped (or not) these long-life hippies age gracefully. Overall, the book presents a specific case study of the influence of culture, understood as a particular social organisation with practices guided ideologically, on shaping the process and experience of ageing beyond its biological constraints. Thus, through a deep examination of the specific and ideographic, Nimrod is able to extract far-reaching, nomothetic lessons which may interest academics and lay audiences alike.

Nimrod demonstrates a deep sympathy towards hippie culture and establishes personal connections with a majority of the interviewees. This aspect, not uncommon in ethnographic studies, is openly acknowledged by Nimrod and simultaneously serves as a strength and weakness of the book. It adds passion to the narrative and enables the author to identify and argue persuasively for the aspects of hippie life that can contribute to finding meaning and improving the lives of both oneself and others. However, it is important to note that the author also tends to overlook or only superficially address the potential drawbacks of ageing within the hippie lifestyle. For instance, living in a relatively closed community may pose difficulties in resolving conflicts when they arise, and there may be a relative lack of a rich intergenerational social network beyond a few grandchildren living in The Farm. Additionally, issues related to care, dependency and frailty may be particularly problematic in such a context. A deeper, more critically engaging discussion about those risks and their implications would have been welcomed.

In summary, readers of *The Aging of Aquarius* will have the opportunity to reflect on how culture, encompassing both its ideological and practical aspects, influences the ageing process. Moreover, lay readers can contemplate how they can enhance their own ageing experiences by embracing certain elements of the 'hippie way of life', including a strong sense of community, a connection with nature or a focus on spirituality. This is no small accomplishment for an engrossing, easy-to-read book.

doi:10.1017/S0144686X23000727