

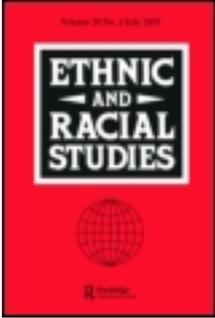
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### POLICY WORLDS. ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY POWER

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## BOOK REVIEW

Chris Shore, Susan Wright and Davide Però (eds), **POLICY WORLDS. ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY POWER**, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011 (EASA series), vi + 343 pp., £55 (hard)

After having gone through all the latitudes of these ‘worlds’, one might well feel pleasantly jetlagged. The reason is that this edited volume, which is about ‘how and why anthropology opens up new perspectives on the study of policy’ (p. 1), bounds highly dissimilar ethnographic encounters in equally disparate social contexts, proposing innovative insights and tools for the anthropological study of power.

The book’s broad aim is to do what Chris Shore and Susan Wright had introduced for the first time in their *Anthropology of Policy* (London, Routledge, 1997), namely ‘to develop the theoretical and methodological contours of an anthropology of policy as a distinctive disciplinary field’ (pp. 169–70). Yet, beyond that, its specific aim is to identify and analyse how ‘policy [...] creates new social and semantic spaces, new sets of relations, new political subjects and new webs of meaning’ (p. 1). In doing so, *Policy Worlds* brings the two authors’ previous reflections on the premises, mechanisms and implications of policy processes to a degree which is theoretically richer, methodologically better systematized and broader in terms of covered policy areas. The co-editing work by Davide Però, which focuses on the role of the governed in producing policy change, can be viewed as one of the most evident signs of this development.

In Chapter 2, Gregory Feldman introduces ‘non-local ethnography’, an innovative methodology that is ‘not built on the ‘locale’ as such but on the indirect connections between locales, [and which] reveals how a non-localisable apparatus [Foucault’s *dispositif*] emerges as a device of population management’ (pp. 45, 46). The case study is the set of policies carried out by different European authorities regulating, controlling and disciplining migration. Those measures cannot clearly be circumscribed to one single domain, neither to one single research setting. Chapter 3, by David Mosse, discusses the validity of encountering objections about the ethnographer’s account by his informants, who happen to be professionals. Those objections, while enriching the anthropological understanding of informants’ cultural worlds, may raise ethical questions about the relationships between ethnographers and informants.

In Chapter 4, by discussing the fee-changing policy of Danish university system, Gritt B. Nielsen proposes to go beyond the classic policy dichotomy ‘implementation’ (by policy makers) and ‘appropriation’ (by the governed). Instead, what the author argues through his ethnography among a group of Chinese students is to see the policy process as a contingent set of assemblages, simultaneously shaping subjectivities, rationality and technology. Chapter 5 by Susan Wright and Sue Reinhold discuss another innovative methodology, namely the ‘studying through’ (p. 86), analytically discerning its three methodological strengths. Firstly, tracing continuous connections between institutional scales; secondly, living through events accounting for the unpredictability of the future; finally, continuously keeping awareness of the wider historical and political context. In Chapter 6, Susan Britt Hyatt traces the continuity between neoliberalism and Keynesian Social policies, arguing that they are currently changing towards a relatively new assemblage that she calls ‘Law-and-order, or security state’ (p. 105). From state-based support the current shift is towards

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community-oriented, market-based and individualized programmes, having security as their main goal.

Chapter 7 opens the second section, and Tara Schwegler puts forward a critique to the concept of policy convergence, by arguing that it masks active negotiations and political interests of the actors involved in the policy-making process. The author outlines the case of a contestation between the World Bank and the Mexican government on the primacy of having 'intimate knowledge' (p. 130), namely on who first detected the flows in the Mexican social security system. Chapter 8, by Janine Wedel, analyses the role of 'flex nets' (p. 151) in shaping the Bush administration. The author outlines the contours and the *modus operandi* of these 'exclusive informal networks', underlining their elusiveness and concomitant pervasiveness in what she names 'representational juggling' (p. 158).

In Chapter 9, Chris Shore discusses three conceptual tools for the study of policy, namely political technology; statecraft and method. In the conclusion the author outlines four analytical themes through which to study policy, namely governmentality; governance; cultural intimacy and informal structures. The case study informing the whole discussion is the eavesdropping of UN by British security services before a crucial decision on the Iraq war.

Randeira and Grunder in Chapter 10 discuss the links between law and policy in the case of a resettlement project in Mumbai led by the World Bank. The authors underline on the one hand the power of 'soft law', and on the other hand the underlining power of 'the cunning state' (p. 187) in disregarding World Bank policy directions. In Chapter 11, Annette Nyqvist unveils the nature of political technology of the recent Swedish national system reform. She shows how the reform, by technocratically shifting from fixed pensions and adjustable payments to fixed payments and adjustable pensions, aimed at making citizens responsible and how they internalized such imperative.

Però's main standpoint in presenting the third section is that the Anthropology of policy so far has grown 'in terms of studying the powerful actors at the top of the policy chain and less in terms of the powerless, especially with regard to the policy change they produce' (p. 244). This approach informs all four case studies, which have different foci, such as a rebellion against the construction of a nuclear waste storage facility in southern Italy (Dorothy Louise Zinn); migrants' practices of citizenship in Spain, Italy and the UK (Davide Però); the agency of ethnic minority associations in Sweden (Clarissa Kugelberg); and the FAO's strategies of neutralizing antagonism through dialogue (Birgit Müller). These contributions underline an approach to policy change that anthropology has not often considered. Indeed, James Scott's *Weapons of the weak* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987) have almost always been the discipline's privileged focus. However, what the four authors of the last section demonstrate is that those *Weapons* can not only subvert constituted powers; they can also slowly erode specific actions of those powers. And this opens a new window onto the contexts in which the power does not enact openly violent performances, but it rather dissimulates its dominant effects behind benevolent rhetoric and inclusionary discourses.

Here it emerges what seems to me to be the main *atout* of the book. The value of the very idea of focusing on policy processes rather than on politics lays in that it is at the level of policy that a more comprehensive light can be shed on the always less 'local' and always more multifarious, subtle, flexible and dissimulating ways in which contemporary power shape our worlds. This is why, after reading this book, notwithstanding a jetlagged feeling, one recognizes the bounded coherence of its highly dissimilar contexts and ethnographic stories.

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