

SHORE, CHRIS, SUSAN WRIGHT & DAVIDE PERÒ (eds). *Policy worlds: anthropology and the analysis of contemporary power*. vi, 343 pp., figs, bibliogr. Oxford, New York: Berghahn, 2011. £55.00 (cloth), £21.00 (paper)

Shore, Wright, and Però critique conventional approaches to policy as produced by rational choice, measured by positivist models and transferred by diffusion. These miss out the inevitable political struggle, contests over meaning, and negotiation that are integral to making sense of policy-making. In contrast, they and their contributors offer even more fine-grained interpretations of how policy processes are messy, socially produced, and embedded in power hierarchies than Shore and Wright's influential first volume (*Anthropology of policy*, 1997). This latest edited volume marks huge shifts in policy over the last decade, including the global obsession with security and risk management, and invites more agency and contestation into various versions of governmentality. And the editors break new ground in offering policy as one lifeline to anthropologists struggling to give shape to multi-sited ethnography. Policy can be another connector – along with a metaphor or a people – that allows us to study events and social relations that stretch across time and space. It is a particularly fruitful way into investigation of governance, power, and politics. There are other aspects of policy-making, such as its rituals, language, and relationship with law, that are left for another day; that is not a criticism but more of an encouragement for further work on policy.

The volume's contributors rise to the challenge. Section I, introduced by Wright, contains ethnographic pieces about methods. For example, Nielsen explores a policy on university fees to show how when you inject people, things, and technologies into a policy story, you can unravel how different subjectivities relate to one another. Reinhold and Wright's study follows how a law – in this case the prohibition on promoting homosexuality in Britain – provoked discussion back and forth between protagonists and between local and national sites, illustrating that policy is disordered and unpredictable rather than a neat, linear sequence from problem definition to policy implementation. Mosse's chapter ranges into the realm of anthropological theory and ethics. The professionals who objected to his *Cultivating*

*development* (2005) were partly angered by the rupture of team-owned, consensus knowledge production. His exploration of how policies and knowledge are produced, institutionalized, and travel goes far beyond methods to the heart of what connects up different political sites.

Shore's introduction to section II lays down policy as a path into elucidating the state. Simplistic models portraying domination of weaker states by global institutions are beautifully countermanded by Schwegler's ethnographic account about pension reform in Mexico. She offers the ingredients required for a good anthropological story: history, institutional background, assumptions, key characters, conversations, and contradictions. The political exigencies of different institutions – Mexican technocrats have to emphasize their autonomy from the World Bank; the World Bank needs to give credit for reform to the Mexicans but demonstrates superior knowledge of regional trends – combine to challenge the idea of simple policy convergence. Nyqvist's chapter depicts reform of the pension system, this time in Sweden, as a reconfiguring of the relationship between citizens and the state. What is a highly politicized and contested issue has the politics extracted out of it by technocrats zoning in on the architecture of the system rather than the consequences for those on the receiving end. The political 'technologies', in the Foucauldian sense, disguise the politics. As Nyqvist interviewed not only technocrats and politicians but also potential pensioners, she found that the state's handing of responsibility for pensions to citizens was not necessarily met with acceptance but merely with a sense of insecurity. Shore's chapter is stimulating, too, in reminding us that anthropology does not have to be based on ethnographic fieldwork. Even public documents about the British government's espionage on their own reveal clear patterns of disjunction, competing narratives, and messy policy-making.

Finally, Però introduces the final batch of chapters, which concern how the subjects of policy negotiate and contest the policies of the powerful. To provide just one example, Müller gives us a rich narrative of participation in biotechnology debates. The way that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) ran and reported the Biotechnology Forum neutralized the politics, including opposing voices, partly by stripping individuals of their collective attachments. But civil society activists changed FAO policy by re-injecting politics into

interaction and getting involved, but not co-opted, in FOA's internal governance, and exposing divisions.

This book achieves what it sets out to do. These accounts show that policy is good to think with, that theories of governmentality should

encompass contestation to be convincing, and that 'policy' deserves further study.

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