
Book Reviews

Jinee Lokaneeta, Editor

Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing. By Didier Fassin. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013. 320 pp. \$69.95 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Reviewed by Charles R. Epp, School of Public Affairs and Administration, University of Kansas

This fascinating book examines the punitive French police practices that triggered widespread rioting in French cities in 2005. Based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted at the time of those rebellions, the analysis reveals how police officers justified their practices and why the people subjected to these practices so deeply resented them. The analysis has wide relevance beyond the French context.

The author focuses on particular “situations,” a concept similar in some ways to the police-civilian “encounter” that is the subject of many U.S. studies, but with special attention to participants’ understanding of “what is it that’s going on here?” (p. 148, quoting Goffman). What is going on is intense, ongoing stopping, identity checking, and frisking. Fassin shows that the meaning of these practices amounts to deliberate humiliation of young racial minority men that is justified by an understanding of these targets as a foreign and dangerous element. This ongoing humiliation serves to enforce these youths’ subordination in a hierarchical social order.

The police studied by Fassin are mainly young working class white men from small towns assigned to the poor racial minority banlieues (suburbs). From politicians’ rhetoric and police training they learn that they must use extraordinary measures to bring order to an alien “jungle” rife with violent crime. Their official insignias express this targeting: one is a rifle-scope cross-hairs centered on a high-rise public housing project. Ironically, rates of violent crime are down in France as in other industrialized countries, and so the French anticrime squads patrol in boredom, waiting long hours for the rare emergency call. Lacking the need to respond to crime, they make “proactive” stops ostensibly aimed at preventing it. They target young men, singly or in groups, demand identity papers and make frisks. Needing to make arrests to show

that they are doing their job, they arrest for trivial offenses. Often these arrests seem remarkably perverse: the adolescent boy sitting with friends on his apartment's stoop, arrested for failing to bring his identity papers that he says he can retrieve from his apartment if only allowed to do this, or the young man arrested for responding to a provocation deliberately aimed at achieving this result.

Although the police occasionally beat people, Fassin observes that the meaning of violence extends deeper and beyond the physical act. It takes the form of what he calls "moral violence," or the deliberate, almost sadistic humiliation, both of those physically beaten and those who, while not touched, are cruelly degraded. In nearly every stop the police cast insults, often pushing the point painfully and deeply, "to institute a relationship of abasement and mortification" (p. 132). Thus, an officer, 1 holding an African immigrant, asks whether he is employed or married and, hearing that the answer is no, declares with contempt, "Don't you get it? You're 28, at your age you should have a job, a family, a house, go on holiday, have a normal life, you know? Look what you're doing with your life. It's a mess!" (p. 133). As Fassin observes, knowing that these things are almost surely desired but out of reach, the insults compound injustice with deliberate moral degradation.

The larger purpose of Fassin's ethnography is to understand what he calls "the enabling conditions of this violence" (p. 137). These are specific elements of the larger economic, institutional, and political context: the growth of immigration, the failure of the French government to develop a policy for integrating immigrants into the mainstream society and economy, the growing right-wing political effort to treat the problem as a matter of policing and virtually military security, and pervasive racism in officers' attitudes toward poor, young racial minorities. The increasing police surveillance and punitive stopping of racial minorities is, of course, not limited to France. Fassin places his analysis in this larger context and builds his analysis on observations from the classic studies of street policing elsewhere. In fact, what is striking is how seemingly universal these patterns are, and how much of what Fassin describes in France is found elsewhere, too. Compared to past ethnographies of U.S. policing, however, Fassin's analysis goes considerably deeper into the sources of growing resentment against the police.

It is past time to study the police in the United States in this way again. The U.S. police have changed considerably since the past ethnographies of them. Organizationally, they are now (ostensibly) subject to systems of internal oversight to regulate the use of force. Demographically, they are now in most places considerably more diverse by race, ethnicity, and gender. In each of these ways the U.S. police seem rather different from the remarkably unregulated, white, and openly racist French model described by Fassin. And yet

several excellent ethnographies of minority youths' experiences with the police mirror Fassin's observations from the other side of the badge, especially in emphasizing the experience of humiliation. We stand to learn much from a similar ethnography of U.S. police.

Enforcing Order is brilliant. As Fassin observes, a previous era's rampant physical brutality has been replaced by moral violence, imposed in routine stops day in and day out. How the police understand and justify their role in this regime of pervasive stops and ongoing humiliation is a subject needing more study, and this book shows the way.

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Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution. By Wendy Brown. New York: Zone Books, 2015. 296 pp. \$29.95 paper.

Reviewed by Keally McBride, Department of Politics, University of San Francisco

Wendy Brown has produced a diagnosis of our times; *Undoing the Demos* offers a synthetic analysis all too rare in contemporary publishing—a book that aims for the big picture without losing meticulous care for the details and nuanced argument. Brown's strategy in the book is to focus on Michel Foucault's 1978–1979 College de France lectures that, as Brown points out, travel under the misleading title “The Birth of Biopolitics.” The subject of these 12 lectures is Foucault's articulation of an emerging form of governance or rationality—that which he calls neoliberalism. Brown begins with these lectures, and then seeks to extend them into a diagnosis of our times asserting that, “[T]he norms and principles of neoliberal rationality do not dictate precise economic policy, but rather set out novel ways of conceiving and relating state, society, economy, and subject and also inaugurate a new ‘economization’ of heretofore noneconomic spheres and endeavors” (p. 50). Foucault labeled neoliberalism a form of rationality as opposed to mere market orientation, even before its existence as an economic doctrine was clearly established. Brown builds on Foucault's lectures and paints a picture of neoliberalism in broad strokes in the first half of the book. The second half of the book takes three different areas—law, higher education, and modes of governance—and demonstrates how neoliberal rationality has been articulated in these areas and to what impact.