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At the Heart of the State: The Moral World of Institutions. *Didier Fassin*, ed. Patrick Brown and Didier Fassin, trans. London: Pluto, 2015. 312 pp.

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In the manner in which eyes are windows to the soul, institutions illuminate the workings of the political state. Here Didier Fassin edits a volume that uses this premise as the touchstone for examining how state policies are carried out, in a literal fashion, by contemporary incarnations of Michael Lipsky's street-level bureaucrats. What results is a tour of different institutions in the French judicial, penal, and youth services systems that deal with "the administration of marginal populations and spaces" (3) via a collection of ethnographies of the micropolitical processes that occur at these sites.

Reviewing this book, which is translated from French and features nine authors who take the reader through as many institutional systems in as many chapters, lends itself to tourist metaphors. The feeling this book gives is a bit of a whirlwind, yet its foreign setting provides a vantage point from which US readers can consider more familiar landscapes. The governmental structures may be different, but the services are present in all Western countries. Banlieues will be exotic to readers used to cities in the United States rather than Europe, but the underlying inequalities will not be. And the common thread underlying these institutions is very recognizable. These institutions are marked by the uncertain duality of providing assistance to and asserting control over what Fassin calls precarious populations—"those who fear the state as well as implore it" (3). It is just like home. For the US reader, perhaps no chapter more so than Fassin's ethnography of a police station in the Paris region and his accounts of routine instances of brutality and racism.

However, with this book Fassin looks to provide something more substantial than the superficial similarities of such things as police behavior. The contributors all examine how agents of the state interact with their constituencies but also seek to identify the structures that circumscribe this agency. The moral dilemmas that arise amid the constrained choices created by this relationship between the individual and the institution become the thresholds from which the authors look into these institutions and, ultimately, the workings of the state. This process of fitting structure with agency is made uniform across chapters through a common framework that Fassin introduces. Each chapter first lays out a structural "moral economy" that represents "the production, circulation, and appropriation of values and affects regarding a given social issue" (9). The authors provide a historical deconstruction of a relevant issue, creating a genealogy that sets up the ensuing ethnography. For example, Carolina Kobelinsky's account of asylum courts is nested in a social history of asylum and represents a tenuous balance between immigration restrictions and human rights. Sébastien Roux's descent into the juvenile justice system is predicated on the contradictions inherent in the historical function of this system to mete out both discipline and education to a set of youth who are regarded as both troubled and threatening.

The dilemmas inherent in these moral economies (and the often tenuous and tentative compromises that emerge to resolve them) then become the bases of specific policies that frame the particular chapter settings. How the actors carry out these policies is at the heart of each ethnography, illustrating Fassin's concept of "moral subjectivities" in which "individuals develop ethical practices in their relationships with themselves or others" (9). The lofty moral economies get bogged down in mundane institutional practices as officials preoccupied with creating pragmatic, routinized processes try to maintain a sense of order in settings of both urgency and uncertainty. Individual agents must reconcile these circumstances with their personal values, as we see in Yasmine Bouagga's account of probation officers who are trained as helpers but find themselves acting as agents of control over their clientele. Alternately, Nicolas Fischer shows how the legal trappings of immigration law legitimize the moral evaluations of the judges who adjudicate deportation proceedings.

Taken together (and reviving the tourist metaphors), for the US reader the ethnographies in this volume have a Continental feel. I imagine a US take on this subject would be more personal and humanizing, where here the reports from the field tend to be as rational as the bureaucracies in which they are embedded. This exemplifies Loïc Wacquant's call to eschew closeness to subjects in favor of linking their points of view "to the broader system of material and symbolic relations that give it meaning and significance" (2002, 1523). Alternately, the micropolitical observations fit what Vincent Dubois, in a study of welfare bureaucracy, terms critical policy ethnography. And Fassin himself links the connection between the micro and the macro in these studies to Michel Foucault's concept of a critical morality that captures the tensions that lie at the heart of the state.

With this book, Fassin and his coauthors have created a compelling volume of street-level perspectives into the functioning of institutions. Different settings show different manners in which moral and hierarchical tensions manifest themselves, manners that transcend particular institutions and nationalities. Fassin sums this up with two conclusions with mixed effect. On the one hand, he argues that these studies provide evidence of a more general shift from welfare state to penal state—an assertion that in the absence of support from the book's empirical studies overreaches and crosses into the ideological. On the other hand, he finds evidence here for the rise of a liberal state, where individuals have come to bear increased levels of rights and responsibilities. Such a conclusion is more consistent with the portrait presented in this book of an institutional world shaped by often conflicted agents carrying out often ambivalent policies. I leave this book with fresh insights and a resolve to apply them to more familiar contexts.

Reference

Wacquant, Loïc. 2002. "Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality, and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography." *American Journal of Sociology* 107 (6): 1468–1532.