Book review: On hauntology

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Wild policy. Indigeneity and the unruly logics of intervention
by *Lea, T.*
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Framing social policy in ecological terms, that is as "policy ecology", Lea offers a refreshing and bewildering ethnography of efforts to "ameliorate" the livelihoods of the Aborigines in Australia. Her work moves from health and housing, to land, infrastructure and mineral extraction. Lea is also concerned with "policy hauntology", the "deeply saturated effects of past policies, enduring and shaping conditions in the present" (30). New government initiatives take shape against the backdrop of local histories and memories of past interventions. There is no clean slate, no blank piece of paper upon which are written new policies. There is always what was there and what remains. Policies from the past never stop haunting policies of today.

"Policy ecology" is described as "a figurative framing of policy artifacts and policy ambiences" and, therefore, its "everywhereness" (26). "Policy *ambience*" is meant to highlight this omnipresence of policy. It is about relations between organisms and environments, as much as relations between people and institutions, "tracking the shape-shifting trickster that is social policy" (26). The tricksters she tracks this way are SIHIP, the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program, dialysis equipment, mineral extraction and land rights. The policy ecology Lea describes is about Australia, but she tells us that "(t)he sad truth is what it describes could also be anywhere" (28); everywhereness across national borders. We read an ethnography about Australia, but, as an international reader, you are invited to see the insights that Lea presents all around you in your own country and in other contexts.

As a result, and although Lea's work draws on her extensive research in Australia over many years, it is not a parochial book. It has much to say to us as ethnographers. As we read this book, we reflected upon our own (separate) fieldwork where much is indeed recognizable. For instance, Lea does not mention South Africa explicitly in her book, but she could have. The indigenous Khoisan of South Africa are often spoken of in the same breath as Australian Aborigines. South Africa also became a realm of the inherent racial, gender and class inequalities of a settler capitalist system, based on and preoccupied by extractivism. Much as Lea describes, the mining industry actively shaped and was, in turn, protected by the state and the military. This system was resisted, but as "surplus people," the Khoisan did not stand a chance and were violently marginalized. Social policies were, much like in Australia, never meant to cure or set the record straight. They were instrumental as cover-ups and in the softening of inequalities. What Australia and South Africa share is, indeed, familiar to many other countries. What makes them alike and comparable is a "logic" of (social) policy-making through bureaucratic practices and protocols, that willingly and wantonly keep on reproducing injustices and inequalities.

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In the UK, as another fitting example, and other Western nations, urban regeneration programs intended to be a fresh start are superimposed upon the wreckage of previous efforts. Communities affected look on, expecting the same carve-up of meager resources, the same indifference to local expertise. The racial divisions of the colonial past are replicated in our cities in housing policies and policing practices. Policies are always haunted by, and therefore reproducing, the bigger interests at stake, whether it be property development, or plans for transport infrastructure. The small and the human are lost, let alone what is lost in terms of non-human sentience, a hauntology of human exceptionalism that seems axiomatic for all human policymaking and stands firm for its everywhereness.

In one sense, Lea's is a peculiar piece of research, one created almost with hindsight. It is difficult to imagine setting out with the intention of stitching together the disparate interests revealed in this book. Could one secure funds to undertake such a project, sprawling in both time and space? Nevertheless, Lea challenges us to raise our sights from our small acres of field to see connections beyond the immediate horizon. Perhaps, over time, we have undertaken fieldwork in disparate sites that might also be stitched together? Perhaps we might connect with the work of others. In this respect, the book sits alongside other works, here tracing policies instead of mushrooms or objects, that broaden our ethnographic gaze. And the ideas she passes on to us are ones we can use as we reflect on our own research interests. Her well-researched and convincingly critical ethnography is both telling and instructive about social policy in Australia and inspiring for ethnographies elsewhere, geographically and in terms of field of study. Hauntology is to be found everywhere.

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