Policy and Critique

A critical and public anthropology should not just *serve* policymakers, it should *study* them.

Cris Shore and Susan Wright

Conceptualising Policy: Technologies of Governance and the Politics of Visibility

Policy implies social control and classification

The importance of policy as a subject of anthropological analysis arises from the fact that policies are major instruments through which governments, companies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), public agencies and international bodies classify and regulate the spaces and subjects they seek to govern. Policy is a fundamental 'organising principle' of society which, like 'family', 'nation', 'class' or 'citizenship', provides a way of conceptualising and symbolising social relations, and around which people live their lives and structure their realities. (2)

In other words

→ Policy classifies people and spaces

→ Policy regulates people and spaces

→ People (can) get used to living in a world "run by policy."

Policies are political stories

→ They can support or undermine a social order

→ They provide narratives that people can live out ("refugee policy")

Policy research as "public anthropology"

→ One can study policy as a form of intervention in a public space.

→ Yet it turns out that studying professionals can create opposition...

What happens when people get unhappy with being studied?

David Mosse

Anti-social anthropology? Objectivity, objection, and the ethnography of public policy and professional communities

The scenario:

→ Mosse participated in a major development project in western India under the auspices of Britain's Department for International Development.

→ He then wrote a book about the process.

→ He argued that development was as much about *controlling interpretations* as it was about *providing actual aid.*

→ His informants complained loudly.

Anthropological research according to Mosse

What I want to suggest in this article is that [my] scenario in fact arises from **the fundamental structure of the ethnographic method** that Malinowski innovated nearly a century ago. **That structure is the relationship between fieldwork and writing** – between, for Malinowski, the empirical work of observation (of the actualities of Trobriand life) and the 'constructive work' of tabulation, inference, and theory.

Anthropologists traditionally expected that they would first do research (with other people) and then go home and write (in solitude).

But these days, that barrier is breaking down.

How can one respond?

One response -- the more "publicly oriented" one -- would be to reshape one's research according to local demands.

Another response would be to treat the complaints as data.

Meanwhile...
Test Prep!

How to read in anthropology

→ You do need to read from beginning to end.

→ You don't always need to understand all the details.

→ You do need to know the major outline of the argument.

→ You should try to learn the key concepts.

What to expect from the course

→ The lectures complement the readings, not repeat them.

→ If you don't do the readings as we go along, you will get overwhelmed.

→ The more you ask questions, the more you will learn.

Reading case study: Dubbeld and Gillespie

What is Dubbeld and Gillespie's view about public anthropology after Apartheid?

→ It should be directly relevant to public problems.

→ It should reconnect critical analysis to political action.

→ It should forge alliances across the Global South.

→ It should model new forms of nonracialized citizenship.

Reading case study 2: Nyamnjoh and Jua

In Nyamnjoh and Jua's analysis, when is learning alienating?

→ When it focuses only on distant foreign cultures.

→ When it focuses only on local practical needs.

→ When it values service to local governments.

Nyamnjoh and Jua:

When one can read or hear in abstraction only, about places and peoples one has seldom seen or met, learning can becomes a tedious, mystifying, intimidating, alienating, and debasing process. (13)

Nyamnjoh and Jua:

Education in Africa has been and mostly remains a journey fueled by an exogenously induced and internalized sense of inadequacy in Africans, and endowed with the mission of devaluation or annihilation of African creativity, agency, and value systems. Such "cultural estrangement" has served to reinforce in Africans self-devaluation and self-hatred and a profound sense of inferiority that in turn compels them to "lighten their darkness," both physically and metaphorically, for Western gratification. (8)

Nyamnjoh and Jua:

Nyang has captured this predicament as "apathological case of xenophilia," whereby Africans are brought to value things Western "not for their efficacy but simply because of their foreignness", thereby consuming to death their creativity and dignity, their very own humanity. (8)

Nyamnjoh and Jua:

In the long run, neither the children of the lowly and poor, who in effect cannot afford the same chance to excel in this type of xenophilia, nor the children of the well-off schooled in such appetites, are in a position to contribute toward solving Africa's pressing problems in a way meaningful to the bulk of the population. (9)

Nyamnjoh and Jua:

The university's position and reality of bridging state and civil society account for its own internal politics, contradictions, ambiguities, and predicaments. (3)

How to read

→ Look for key moments.

→ Look up the terminology if it's commonly used and clearly important.

→ Ignore parts you can't understand if they seem less important.

→ In this case... Read for answers to the assigned questions.