
Book Reviews

Jennifer Balint, Editor

Provisional Authority. Police, Order, and Security in India. By Beatrice Jauregui. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016.

Reviewed by Mark Brown, School of Law, The University of Sheffield

For many among us the idea of police authority being anything but secure would be novel. Shored up on the one hand by the state's monopoly of force and on the other by unwavering commitment from democratically elected governments, the notion that police authority may be in some way provisional barely merits thought. Indeed, the very firmness of this presumption is reinforced and made manifest by its occasional disruption, such as in the case of the violent protests against police brutality in the United States in recent years and the concomitant rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The exception confirms the rule.

My first experience of the provisionality of police authority — its contingency and conditionality — took place on a very cold and bleak afternoon in January 2005 in the city of Srinagar, Kashmir, a disputed region of Northern India. As I stood in a city street an armored police vehicle rounded the corner and came upon a car double-parked, the driver at the wheel but the car blocking the way. The scene that followed undid my understanding and presumptions about policing. First, the driver of the police vehicle honked and honked, while the car driver studiously ignored the implicit demand to move on. Second, the policeman at the wheel exited the vehicle, *lathi* (long baton) in hand, smashed the offending driver's window, dragged him from the car and began to beat him on the ground. Third, thinking that my presence as a westerner might in some way temper the exercise of police violence I stepped forward, making myself clearly visible on the pavement. The police officer looked up at me, then got back down to the job of beating the errant driver. As the bloodied driver was shoved back behind the wheel to clear his obstruction I walked away, chastened yet powerless.

Beatrice Jauregui's *Provisional Authority: Police, Order, and Security in India* considers each of these phenomena as well as a host of

others based on more than two years' ethnographic fieldwork with police in India's largest and in many ways most complex state, Uttar Pradesh (pop. 200 million in 2011; were it a nation state, it would be the sixth largest by population in the world). Though a relatively short book, at just 158 pages, it is remarkably dense both with ideas — reframing in important ways the way we might think about police authority — and data. On the latter, the book provides what might become a textbook example of fine ethnographic work. Jauregui is a Hindi speaker and seems also to get the rough drift of a number of minor vernacular languages. Without these skills it is difficult to imagine a work of such depth and sensitivity being achievable. Reading this book as a criminologist engaged in a project to envision a new criminology unhooked from metropolitan master discourses, I felt I was seeing unfold before me new ways of thinking and new practices of research suitable for work in the global South.

Jauregui's argument concerning the provisionality of police authority in India is far too complex and multidimensional to be summarized into a nutshell here (see pp. 142–44 for her own effort to achieve such a distillation). I will instead attempt to trace the broad contours of her approach. This begins with the relationship of police to the state and a vision of police authority that is “less about a Weberian probability of obedience to command, or a routinized belief in its legitimacy, and more about shifting capabilities and evaluations of the provision of ‘the good’ and ‘the goods’.” (p. 16). Though she seems at pains at a number of points to distinguish her conclusions from broad Foucauldian claims regarding power, what stuck me most here was her subtle and skilful approach to the study of police authority as a constantly shifting game in motion. Her repeated returns to the field, providing examples from her notes of the ways police, from a new recruit posted to a small *thana* (local station) to senior officers, as well as citizens who alternately cry for police assistance and damn their mendacity, and the politicians who valorize officers' sacrifices while playing them like chess pieces (see pp. 134–35 for a fascinating use of this metaphor), are all nodes in complex relays of power. The very nuanced Foucauldian vision of power gives grounded and meaningful example to what can often seem abstruse high theory.

This points to the main contribution of Beatrice Jauregui's book. It both expands our understanding and theorization of policing, and underpins those advances with an intricately wrought picture of everyday policing in India. The authority of police, Jauregui argues, is provisional precisely because it is so deeply caught within networks of power that at once create demand for “the good” and “the goods” of policing while simultaneously and in myriad ways

undercutting police capacity to deliver: police, she argues, are forever caught in a series of binds, the solution to which involves activation of circuits within the network that will deliver resources or outcomes but which in doing so fundamentally undermine grander visions to which all at least partially subscribe, such as rule of law norms. The book's six chapters work through different dimensions of this problematic, including the very Indian notion of doing *Jugaad*, or piecing together in creative ways resources not otherwise normally available/combinable so as to achieve a valued good; the development of an ethics of practice that balances systemic constraints against perceived virtuous higher goals, such that corruption, cronyism or sheer law breaking are drawn into the service of "good" or virtue; the role of coercion and violence where police are at once violence workers (to borrow the phrase of Martha Huggins and colleagues) and victims of a violence that is at once fast and slow, leaving the police officers risking either death or just a precarious and abandoned forfeiture of the "good life"; the way bureaucracy and the practice of transfers renders police life unstable and unpredictable and policing far too often ineffective due to the constant and seemingly interminable shifting of personnel; and finally the combination of these factors to leave police in a constant state of insecurity, where those who in liberal state theory supposedly form the vanguard of state power are themselves so often powerless, endlessly engaged in manoeuvres if not to secure a public good — to catch a thief — then to hold on to this coveted yet in so many ways deeply unsatisfactory job.

The book closes with Jauregui attempting to mark out the challenges her work presents to received understandings of policing and related ideas, like bureaucracy. If there is one criticism I could raise of this otherwise very fine work it is that the study's deeply postcolonial context is not met with an equally postcolonial vision of knowledge and theory. Perhaps this is an unreasonable demand, since clearly the purpose of the book was to present the ethnography. But I do feel we are left with the data and new understandings of life in the Indian postcolony, but have not shifted the ground in Policing more broadly. In this respect I am minded of Chakrabarty's (2000) description in his book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* of his aim to "write some very particular ways of being in the world . . . into some of the universal, abstract, and European categories of capitalist/political modernity" (p. 255). His work was based on experiences of the Bengali *bhadralok* (middle and upper classes, very roughly) and sought to pluralize universal metropolitan concepts, such as citizenship or civil society. Beatrice Jauregui's fine book doesn't go quite that far, but it does

take a first step in what might prove to be a whole new way of thinking about policing, power and authority.

Reference

Chakrabarty, D. (2000) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.

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Contesting Immigration Policy in Court. Legal Activism and Its Radiating Effects in the United States and France. By Leila Kavar. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015*.

Reviewed by Stephen Meili, University of Minnesota Law School

Leila Kavar has published a thoughtful, well-researched and at times provocative comparison of immigration-related litigation in France and the United States. She analyzes the radiating effects of such litigation on immigration policy in both countries, and thus critiques the litigation efforts of lawyers who try to shape such policy. Such an approach is particularly welcome now, as executive orders and other policy pronouncements limiting immigrant and refugee rights in the United States, as well as the resurgence of nationalist sentiment in numerous countries, will likely lead to an increase in immigration-related litigation and other forms of legal advocacy for the foreseeable future.

Lawyers and other immigration advocates typically—and out of necessity—focus exclusively on the here and now, and on the country in which they operate. Kavar’s book places their work in historical and comparative perspective, and in doing so sheds light on the question of how we got here. It will help lawyers, as well as socio-legal scholars, understand why the everyday battles over immigration policy are often about seemingly trivial details related to one’s immigration status. This might provide some comfort, or at least an explanation, to those cause lawyers who pursue immigration advocacy because they want to help bring about significant social change and feel frustrated by the minutia of much immigration law practice.

Kavar’s book covers a range of important issues, including the interaction between rights-based litigation and social movements,

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