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IS IT ALL ABOUT THE STATE?

Review of Willem Schinkel (eds.) (2009) *Globalization and the state. Sociological perspectives on the state of the state*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 256 pp. hardcover.

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The contributors to this collection constitute a mix of high-profile international authors and Dutch social scientists, most of whom are nationally well-known. The first category consists of Zygmunt Bauman, Saskia Sassen, Loïc Wacquant en Craig Calhoun; the second of Mirko Noordegraaf together with Liesbeth Noordegraaf-Eelens, Dennis Broeders, Godfried Engbersen, Romke van der Veen, and Rudi Laermans (who is actually Flemish). The Dutch contingent is largely Rotterdam-based (at the sociology department of Erasmus University), including editor Willem Schinkel, whose doctoral dissertation *Aspects of violence* has also recently come out with Palgrave Macmillan. Roughly, one could say that the international authors (here including Laermans) provide the broad theoretical analysis, while the Dutch focus more on empirical data and case studies.

The exception here is editor Schinkel himself, who provides a highly theoretical introductory chapter, mostly inspired by Foucault and Luhmann. In a few words, his answer to the key question as to 'the state of the state' is: the state is falling short. The state, we quickly gather, is not what it used to be; it can no longer easily identify itself through territory or nationality. It is a form created by the Westphalian treaty, a form now rapidly and thoroughly being de-formed by the emergence of 'post-Cold War superpowers' on the one hand, and a globalizing economy on the other. Following Luhmann, Schinkel claims that the contemporary state cannot control the factors of its own success. The main factors can be summarized under the headings deterritorialization, pluralization, and differentiation. This means that the state is caught between globalization and localization, that there is no longer an unproblematic nation, and that the state loses its grip on social and economic issues, focusing on control and monitoring activities instead. Attempts by the state to regain control over such developments create more problems, which the state ever more frantically tries to control, and so on. The state is in a way already lost, gone, 'dead', only it doesn't realize it. In fact, it can only 'redefine and reinvigorate' itself by embracing new 'chances'. That is to say, it can recreate itself by undertaking two new missions, the 'management of insecurity' and the 'control of identity'. Along Foucaultian lines, Schinkel characterizes this renewed creature as a Hobbesian state in a neo-liberal guise. In terminology borrowed from Agamben, it is a 'state of exception': it attempts to solve the problems of uncertainty and insecurity by gaining control over processes of in- and exclusion. But in this 'frantic monitoring of itself in an effort to control and identify corrupting outside forces', the state is bound to fall short once more. It tries to exclude that which exceeds or defeats its control, and thus becomes ever more distrustful of society, its 'social body'. As Schinkel elects to call it, the state suffers from 'social hypochondria'.

Most of the international authors brought together here do in some way share Schinkel's critical view on the state of the state – a view that is competently argued and incisively presented. But Schinkel's quite strongly interpretive introduction does risk setting a tone that is not quite followed, or joined, by the other contributors. Including Zygmunt Bauman in the team of authors is understandable, as he is one of the most prolific

writers on issues related to modernity and the state, such as safety and security. I wonder, however, how many readers will still be excited to read yet another piece – in this volume, actually even two pieces – by Bauman, whose pervasively pessimist cultural critique may be well founded, but tends to evoke a feeling of ‘déjà vu’ in his readers. Still, it has to be said that Bauman provides a compelling – one might say Weberian – image of how progress has become more of a threat than a promise: the threat, or dread, of ‘being left behind’, a threat well captured in the unforgiving television show *The Weakest Link*.

Saskia Sassen is always worthy of attention, both academically and politically, although I do not find her way of writing particularly enticing. She sets out what we might call a dialectic of globalization, showing that this is very much a process of differentiation in which some issues and powers are indeed shifted to a global level, but others instead lead to a strengthening, or at least a reconfiguring, of institutional and power relations on the national and subnational level. Globalization does not make the national state disappear, if only because global powers and processes need authorities and institutions at the national, and subnational, level. The powers of the state are thus not so much diminished as redistributed, often in favor of the executive and to the detriment of the legislative level. National agendas are reoriented towards global ones. Also, private agendas are dressed as public policy inside national states, leading to the privatization of norm-making capacities and the enactment of private norms in the public domain.

Sassen’s chapter seems more programmatic than argumentative, frequently announcing, and repeating, insights that are developed not here but elsewhere. It also seems to have suffered from editing deemed necessary to adapt it from its original, slightly shorter version as a 2005 lecture at the WRR, the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy. Frequent repetitions that may be helpful in a lecture but unnecessary or even annoying in a written text have been retained, while some section titles have been changed without apparent reason, often becoming less rather than more informative (for instance, ‘Towards a new type of state authority’ was changed to ‘The partial denationalizing of state work’). Finally, the article mysteriously kicks off by addressing remarks by Gøsta

Esping-Andersen and Anton Hemerijck. These remarks were made in presentations at the 2005 WRR meeting, but neither this provenance nor the substance of the remarks is revealed to the reader.

More problematically, it is not easy to see whether, and in which way, Sassen’s analysis fits with the theoretical framework set out by Schinkel. Indeed this is true for most of the (theoretical) contributions, a feeling that is confirmed by Schinkel’s rather short 6 page concluding chapter, only 2½ pages of which actually attempt some synthesis of the other authors’ views. Sassen is mentioned there only as an illustration of the very general claim that ‘the flows of capital pose ambiguous challenges to the state’ (244). But Wacquant and Calhoun also fit uncomfortably with Schinkel’s Foucaultian and Luhmannian type of post-critical functionalism.

In his exposition on ‘the new missions of the prison in the neo-liberal age’, Wacquant argues that this mission is primarily a way to criminalize poverty, and as such part of the neo-liberal project. On the one hand, the contemporary prison system – especially in the USA – is ‘the indispensable complement to the imposition of precarious and underpaid wage labour as civic obligation for those trapped at the bottom of the class and caste structure’ (197). On the other hand, it shamelessly and perversely helps depressing the official unemployment rate: those imprisoned do not count as unemployed, while many potentially unemployed now have a job as janitor. Incredibly, prisons are now the third largest employers in the USA, behind only the employment agency Manpower Incorporated and department store giant Wal-Mart. Although prisons are profitable, this is not their main objective or purpose. First and foremost, they respond to ‘a political logic and project, namely, the construction of a post-Keynesian, “liberal-paternalistic” state fit to institute desocialized wage labour and propagate the renewed ethic of work and “individual responsibility” that buttress it’ (203).

Calhoun’s contribution is one of the best in the volume. Its primary subject is not the state, however, but rather the relation between cosmopolitanism, the nation, and ethnicity. Somewhat in line with Sassen, Calhoun warns against undue enthusiasm for cosmopolitanism as transcending

parochial or particularist limitations and thus expressing a higher kind of freedom. All too often it is an elitist affair, misunderstood by the presumed cosmopolitans themselves. In true anthropological fashion, Calhoun stresses that cosmopolitans also, and necessarily, ‘belong’: ‘cosmopolitanism is not universalism: it is belonging to a social class able to identify itself with the universal’ (232). Moreover, as Michael Walzer has also noted, cosmopolitanism is parasitical upon the (continued) existence of local, particularist and non-universal lifestyles; how else could the cosmopolitan visit those colorful, interesting, ‘authentic’ places all over the world, or even enjoy a typical Thai meal in a New York restaurant?

Although Sassen, Wacquant, and Calhoun are all what we might call critical sociologists, none of them quite fits Schinkel’s theoretical mold. Calhoun and Wacquant are ‘synthesized’ in Schinkel’s conclusion merely by positing that their combined arguments illustrate ‘how the cosmopolitan elite escapes new forms of state violence’ (245). The only theoretical essay that does accord with Schinkel’s sociological parameters is that by Laermans, qualitatively on a par with Calhoun. Although he makes some quite pertinent observations about the modern state, this is not really Laermans’s subject; his aim is to analyze and explain how the rise of populism has transformed democratic politics. In fact, Laermans announces that he will ‘take for granted that states still have a vast capacity to enforce collectively binding decisions within their territorial borders’ (83). In line with Argentine philosopher Ernesto Laclau and Belgian political scientist Cas Mudde, Laermans views populism not as exceptional or threatening, it is the form that all politics – or perhaps better, popular sovereignty – must take today, at least to some extent. The transformation of a ‘volonté de tous’ into a ‘volonté générale’ is bound to fail, because ‘the variety [produced by democratic politics] shows the contingency of political programmes, including populist ones, and the electoral or purely numerical reduction of possible decision premises deconstructs every substantial claim regarding the will of the people”.’ (100).

But Laermans’s thoughtful analysis also remains under-synthesized, so to speak, in Schinkel’s concluding remarks, where it is noted only in passing, as ammunition for the thesis that the contemporary state ‘continually runs the risk of populism, heightening its social hypochondriac reflexes of

repressive control and monitoring’ (245). Now perhaps we should not worry too much about the lack of continuity or congruity between editor and contributors. It is notoriously difficult to make authors, especially well-established ones, adapt to a common theme or framework, and Schinkel has at least made an effort. Still, the sketch of a ‘sociological theory of the state’ that the title of the concluding chapter promises, shows very much the family traits of Schinkel’s own views, rather than those of his authors.

Of course I should not draw this conclusion just yet, as I have so far neglected the contributions by the Dutch authors. Two considerations may account for this neglect. First, as already mentioned, the Dutch contributions are more empirical; they use case-studies to illustrate some of the general claims proposed by, or implied in, the theoretical accounts. A short overview: Noordegraaf and Noordegraaf-Eelens analyze the monitoring of the Dutch financial system by the national bank (DMB) and the supervisor AFM; Dennis Broeders takes a critical look at the Europeanization of justice and ‘home affairs’ (‘binnenlandse zaken’); Godfried Engbersen studies the criminalizing effects of Dutch asylum policy; and Romke van der Veen discusses the effect of ‘new welfarism’ and the ‘enabling state’ on public responsibility. The authors generally come to nuanced and worthwhile conclusions, but it is hard to connect these observations theoretically to the general topic of ‘the state of the state’. Again, Schinkel himself does not seem able to find this connection either, as his concluding chapter literally makes no use of these findings at all.

The division between international, theoretically oriented scholars and a Dutch contingent that focuses on case studies and empirical data is not coincidental, and this is my second consideration. Of late, mainstream Dutch sociology has become the object of criticism that it has allied itself too closely with government and public administration. Ironically, while a generation ago its research fell into disrepute because of its presumed societal irrelevance, it is now conversely perceived as forsaking sociology’s mission as independent scrutinizer of social forces. Dutch sociology is thus taken to task for trading away its theoretical legacy – a criticism prominently voiced by Willem Schinkel himself, a rising star in national (and international) sociology. Authors like Broeders, Engbersen, and Van der

Veen represent the generation, or school, of sociology that such criticism is aimed at, the type of sociology that – one might say – attempted to help implement the progressive project of a social-democratic welfare state. Thus, even if this collection of essays does not really live up to its promise to reflect the current ‘state of the state’, it does in an interesting way reflect the current state of Dutch sociology. The political implications of this ‘paradigm shift’ are as yet unclear, and in that sense the state of Dutch sociology might be said to reflect the state of Dutch politics.

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