

Book Reviews

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Peculiar Institution: America's Death Penalty in an Age of Abolition

David Garland

Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010, \$35 hbk, ISBN: 9780674057234, 417 pp.

Reviewed by: Jeffrey S. Adler, University of Florida, USA

The United States stands alone among Western nations in its embrace of capital punishment. While virtually every other industrialised nation abolished the death penalty during the late twentieth century, American politicians and prosecutors seized on capital punishment as a weapon in their war on crime. In an impressively interdisciplinary analysis, the sociologist David Garland explores the death penalty in the United States, making an original and significant contribution that blends legal, historical, and sociological perspectives, while placing American capital punishment in cross-national perspective.

The book's title underscores three ways in which American capital punishment is 'peculiar'. First, the United States rediscovered the death penalty just as peer nations abolished it. Second, American capital punishment is peculiar, according to Garland, because it fails to serve its intended purpose. Although the nation's death-row population is enormous, executions are rare, robbing capital punishment of any deterrent effect, didactic impact, or influence on crime. And third, the book's title refers to America's 'peculiar institution' of race-based slavery and links the modern death penalty to regional and racial divisions. Garland frames his analysis in comparative terms, focusing on Western democracies and their historical embrace, revision, and eventual abolition of capital punishment, except, of course, in the United States. Far from affirming American exceptionalism, the author uses this cross-national framework to identify how, for much of its history, the United States conformed to Western trends. Most important, Garland's comparative perspective enables him to identify how and why the United States has diverged.

Drawing on Norbert Elias's theory of a 'civilising process', Garland analyses the death penalty from the perspective of state formation. He divides the history of capital punishment into three eras. During the 'early modern' period (mainly the eighteenth century), absolutist leaders, attempting to consolidate their authority, used executions to affirm the power of emerging centralised governments and establish a state monopoly on violence. In the second period, from the late eighteenth century until the late twentieth century, nations reduced their use of the death penalty, reflecting the success of the state-building process, the hegemonic power of the elite, the resulting pacification of the population, and the emergence of more humane criminal-justice institutions, such as the prison. Capital punishment became a crime-control sanction. The closing decades of twentieth century marked the start of Garland's 'late-modern period', when European nations abolished capital punishment.

Garland argues that the history of the American death penalty conformed to the European pattern until the late twentieth century. Capital punishment served to demonstrate state power in early America and became more restricted during the 'modern period'. Moreover, American states often spearheaded the reform and even abolition of the death penalty; Michigan, for instance, eliminated capital punishment in 1846. In 1972, when the United States Supreme Court ruled the application of the death penalty unconstitutional, America seemed fully in line with other Western nations. By the late 1970s, however, many states enacted procedural safeguards that enabled capital punishment to pass constitutional muster and quickly re-established the death penalty.

To explain this divergence, Garland suggests that distinctive facets of the state-formation process set the United States apart from peer nations and facilitated the re-imposition of capital punishment. Most important, the historical weakness of the American state institutionalised radical localism, limiting the influence of centralised government and sustaining traditions of popular or communal justice. As a consequence, local politicians, including district attorneys, wield unusual power, as do ordinary citizens who, unlike their European counterparts, often make sentencing decisions. Without a strong central government to establish national policies, regional variations have flowered, as conservative, often demagogic politicians have exploited racial divisions and celebrated capital punishment as an expression of local democracy and a bulwark against dangerous, typically African-American criminals. America's historically high levels of violence reinforced this process, as did a backlash against the Civil Rights Movement, allowing local politicians to channel reactionary populism, racism, and anti-elitism into electoral victory and support for the death penalty.

Garland notes an enduring connection between lynching and capital punishment. Occurring mainly in the South and against African Americans, lynching was defended as a symbol of popular justice and local autonomy. Hence, extra-legal executions resembled legal executions. Ironically, late-modern executions also reflect the legacy of lynching. Modern supporters of capital punishment, in order to shield the death penalty from the taint of sadism and overt racism that discredited lynching, have 'civilised' and bureaucratised executions, relying on lethal injections and creating a spate of procedural rules. The demography of the death penalty, however, has changed little, with Southern states performing the lion's share of executions and African-Americans disproportionately being executed. Thus, capital punishment re-emerged in late-modern America, fuelled by radical localism, anti-statism, and racism – all veiled as a defence of local authority and a response to crime.

Based on the alchemy of recent political trends, long-standing cultural divisions, and the historical weakness of the American state, this argument is insightful and persuasive. Garland emphasises contingency and recognises local variation. Nonetheless, some pieces of this complicated tapestry fit together imperfectly. The temporal rhythms of twentieth-century capital punishment, for example, do not conform precisely to Garland's state-formation framework. When executions peaked, in 1935, the American state was expanding, violent crime was plummeting, and localism was receding. Furthermore, the American abolition movement achieved brief success in the early 1970s, which coincided with a backlash against centralised government, a resurgence in localism, and an explosion in crime. Similarly, Garland's lynching framework, though an effective heuristic device, is not entirely convincing. While the imposition of capital punishment became increasingly rule-bound and mired in complex legal procedures, this may not have been a response to the legacy of lynching, for the same process occurred in other areas of the criminal law and in states without the death penalty and without a history of lynching. These quibbles aside, *Peculiar Institution* is a superb book, exemplary for its well-informed, interdisciplinary, and cross-national analysis.

The Problem of Harm in World Politics: Theoretical Investigations

Andrew Linklater

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, £18 pbk, ISBN: 9780521179843, 320 pp.

Reviewed by: Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands

The primary source of harm in human societies has been war. The terrible harm which the First World War produced is still made visible in the Belgian town of Ypres, for years a battlefield site. That is but one example of the suffering caused by war. The whole of recorded history demonstrates that independent political units such as states have competed and waged war with each other. Why? There is broad agreement about the answer. Because they could not rely on a higher authority to solve their conflicts and provide their security, survival units were forced to help themselves and, if perceived as unavoidable or necessary, resort to war. They formed an 'anarchical society'.

At all times war made some survival units more powerful, while others declined or disappeared. This monopolisation process occurred first in relatively small areas. In a later stage it led in Europe to state formation and simultaneously to the development of great powers and overseas empires. In some periods great powers balanced each other out, but the European 'Balance of Power' could not cope with large shifts in power distribution and proved unstable. The uncontrolled dynamic of elimination contests between great powers repeatedly led to small and large wars, such as the Napoleonic and the two World Wars. At present we now consider as an end of this long road, as a last elimination struggle, that between the Soviet Union and the United States, with global hegemony as its stake. But in the end nuclear war confined the two rivals to no more than continual preparation for war by arms development, alliances and intensive mutual spying. No great war anymore, but plenty of small wars.

How will world politics develop? The global rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States has been the end of a very long line of violent elimination contests between great powers? Will this struggle for hegemony at the global level be revived (for example between the United States and China)? Or can a multipolar global order be gradually forged, on the basis for example of the requirements and benefits of interdependence, the shared threats contained in global warming, and wider acceptance of cosmopolitan perspectives and norms? It appears to be unlikely that the peaceful conclusion of the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States will in the long run not lead again to hegemonic rivalry between great powers. They may continue to be restrained by the enormously destructive consequences of nuclear war. But a global authority regulating the relations between smaller states and solving their conflicts is not in sight. Wars between smaller states and civil wars remain. Tried remedies such as international law and organisations (the UN) have not been successful, though cosmopolitan devices such as international protection of human rights and recently the International Criminal Court should not be written off.

About the discussion between 'realist' and 'idealist' (or utopian) perspectives (E.H. Carr) nothing new is to be said. A new angle on international or world politics is therefore most welcome. In *The Problem of Harm in World Politics*, Andrew Linklater argues that an analysis of the implications of 'harm' may provide a promising new perspective on an old question. The book is preliminary, concerned not with forwarding a theory of harm but with 'theoretical investigations', intended as a 'ground clearing exercise' to make way for two more volumes to be written, respectively on the relations between violence and civilisation in the Western state-systems, and on the problem of harm from the vantage point of world history. This first volume

attempts to do justice to all or most possible relevant perspectives. This makes the line of his argument not always easy to follow.

Linklater's sources of inspiration are the work of Martin Wight on the sociology of state systems and Norbert Elias's study of civilising processes. Before dealing with the structure of long term processes, and especially of Elias' work on civilising processes, he discusses the ways harm in international and global politics have been studied. Linklater first discusses the concept of harm. He puts forward the fruitful idea that no society can survive unless most people internalise the principle that they should not inflict unnecessary harm on other members. 'Unnecessary': what kind of harm is necessary? How can this be determined? Still, Linklater's characterisation supplements Elias's concept of 'survival units' as in all times being the primary source of identification whether in tribes, in dynastic states or in nation-states.

Linklater elaborates his analysis of harm with the concept of harm conventions. These identify the forms of harm that are permitted and forbidden within a community as well as what is tolerable or prohibited in relations with other groups. In the latter, levels of violence are tolerated which are strictly forbidden within communities – or rather within survival units. Linklater distinguishes between international and cosmopolitan harm conventions. International harm conventions take the form of 'collective efforts to promote respect for sovereignty and the principle of non intervention'. They may also place constraints on the means and use of violence. Cosmopolitan harm conventions are human rights agreements and practices; humanitarian rules of war; international criminal law, including the creation of the International Criminal Court. They also recently deal with harm to the species and to future generations resulting from increasingly high levels of human interdependences (a more adequate concept than Linklater's 'interconnectedness').

So far, so good. Linklater's argument continues with a classification of harms and their application to international politics. I found this difficult to follow, because Linklater does not provide a principle of classification, only an enumeration of different examples. This may not be possible in the pioneering effort of developing theoretical perspectives relevant to the study of the meaning of harm for world politics. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines harm as 'evil (physical or otherwise) as done to or suffered by some person or thing' (the same as my Dutch dictionary). It is a normative and involved definition, and 'notoriously complex' as Linklater admits. It makes me wonder whether 'harms' are not too diverse to develop a single theoretical perspective. Even as an ethical problem, harm seems not easily defined.

For Linklater, however, generalising harm may not be the main purpose of his analysis. His discussion of harm is the starting point for an examination of the question whether global civilising processes will further develop, and mitigate the competition between states and especially great powers, and perhaps bring it to an end. Linklater takes care not to fall into the trap of using increasing global interdependence to argue that international relations will become durably peaceful, because it will make them redefine their interests and feel forced to restrain themselves. That argument was made already before the First World War and refuted by it. For E.H. Carr it constituted 'utopianism'. Linklater takes another road. He attaches himself to Norbert Elias's perspective on civilising processes. And he then tries to connect that with the English School's perspective on the practice of 'civility' in the society of states. His conclusion is careful: '... a sociology of global civilizing processes can analyse how far a cosmopolitan harm principle was embedded in the normative structure of different states systems'.

Linklater aims at synthesis, which is all too rare. The two volumes to follow may demonstrate the fruitfulness of this first attempt to investigate the relevance of theoretical perspectives on the role of harm in international relations and world politics.

La Tentation du Corps: Corporéité et Sciences Sociales

Dominique Memmi, Dominique Guillo, Olivier Martin (eds)

Paris: Editions de l'EHESS, 2009, €15 pbk, ISBN: 9782713222245, 276 pp.

Reviewed by: Charlotte Pezeril, Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, Brussels, Belgium

After her fascinating investigations on biopolitics and contemporary law regarding decisions concerning life, death, and the body, Dominique Memmi continues, with her colleagues, her analysis of the body. The authors aim at tracing the history of 'body' as an object for the French-speaking Social Sciences, exploring the main issues it gave birth to. Built on the reading of major authors (Mauss, Foucault, Bourdieu, Héritier), the book secondly deals on how disciplines (sociology, history, anthropology, law) have addressed this issue. The goal is fully reached, since several arguments are suggested in order to understand the legitimisation of 'body' in the scientific field from the 1960s to 1970s, and, at the same time, its persistence as an undefined object that still arouses a strong epistemological suspicion in France.

If the first part of the book is quite interesting, this short review will focus on the key reasons why the scientific treatment of 'body' has changed. However, we should notice the excellent chapter on Bourdieu by D. Memmi and the one devoted to Foucault by F. Boullant. They cleverly show how the body becomes the vector of social mechanisms, respectively through the incorporation and reproduction of patterns of domination and through the corporeality of politics. In contrast, the article about Mauss and his crucial text on "body techniques" (1936) by O. Martin and D. Memmi is quite disappointing in focusing on the subsequent interpretations of this article in France instead of analysing Mauss's approach itself.

The change in the 1960s to 1970s is not only due to Bourdieu's or Foucault's works, nor to the rediscovery of Mauss. It does also result from the translations of authors such as Elias, Goffman and Douglas into French. The cognitive approach subsequently obtained some success and spread the idea that the body is the matrix and the physical medium where social representations are rooted. Meanwhile, book publishers like Odile Jacob (founded in 1985) contributed to the diffusion of the biological analysis of Social Sciences. Some books in this field even became bestsellers in France (see the chapter by S. Lemerle). As J.-M. Berthelot (who died in 2006) pointed out, this revival is part of broader trends: 'the body becomes invested by naturalist and hedonistic values, rejecting ethics of sacrifice and procrastination of enjoyment; it becomes a way of inclusion in the market economy that plays with appearance (fashion, iconic body); it becomes the object of social struggles and demands' (quoted by O. Martin, p. 131). The law also took the concept into account in the 1970s, through the 'right to freely dispose of one's own body' promoted by feminists. In 1994, the bioethics laws recognised a legal status for the 'body'. According to S. Hennet-Vauchez, physical integrity becomes the 'supreme legal concept', legitimising 'a return to natural law' (p. 211).

After decades of resistance against inclusion of the body in Social Sciences, following a Durkheimian approach, do the French Social Sciences experience nowadays a 'return of the organic'? It is not obvious, regarding two tendencies. First, J.-P. Warnier stresses 'the Magritte effect': if the picture represents a pipe, it is not a pipe. A confusion between the body and its representation does exist in other words. The majority of research focuses indeed on representations of the body and do not tackle the body's materiality, stressing language instead of sensory motor skills. Body analysis usually forgets biological reality and substance. On this point, the French Social Sciences keep their specificity and are extremely reluctant or even hostile to Anglo-Saxon Socio-biology. But the critics are external, emphasising the socio-historical construction of socio-biological arguments, linking them to an ideology that tends to justify inequality, and therefore stressing their political dangerousness (see D. Guillo).

Furthermore, the body as a topic remains a very fuzzy notion, insufficiently theorised (see R. Mandressi). As C. Bynum pointed out: 'Body is the wrong topic. It is no topic, or perhaps, almost all topics.' As a result, the history of the body cannot be summarised, it is a 'kaleidoscope' (p. 145). Even Foucault or Bourdieu do not conceptualise the body and their relationship with this object. According to F. Boullant, 'Foucauldian analysis always and obstinately returns to the body and, ultimately, does not solve it, does not dissolve it' (p. 65). Concerning Bourdieu, Memmi shows that his posture is in tension between constructivism and naturalism. This tension represents a French sociological trend, discovering the embodied social agent while fighting actively against the naturalisation of social phenomena. The recent interest in corporeality is then often focused on body as a representation or object of speech, even if it is not assumed as such by authors. We can hope that this book will encourage French researchers to be more rigorous and to go into 'the body temptation' in greater depth!

The Company of Strangers: A Natural History of Economic Life (Revised Edition)

Paul Seabright

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, \$20 pbk, ISBN: 9780691146461, 368 pp.

Reviewed by: John Connolly, Dublin City University, Ireland

The book is concerned with how individuals and the people who are strangers to them have been brought closer together through the division of labour and the spread and maintenance of trust between people. Drawing from studies of anthropology and biology, Seabright, a professor of economics, maintains that early humans, those living over 10,000 years ago, 'inherited a psychology' – a phrase he uses repeatedly, and which seems to be code for what figurationalists would identify as psychic disposition – that made them extremely suspicious of strangers, capable of considerable violence towards them, but yet able, in time, to benefit from institutional arrangements that made it possible to treat strangers in a more harmonious and trusting way. He contends that it is this virtue of trust that underpins contemporary social life: '...trust is the mortar for most of the encounters between strangers in a modern society' (p.122). He argues, initially at least, that it was the need for group protection – the need to share risks – that was the primary reason for humans to organise themselves in a particular way. It is this process of specialisation that has generated much of the growing complexity of human societies. The scale of specialisation and the division of functions which comes with it (which gradually evolved over the centuries) depends on a specific level of trust between those comprising societies. To that extent, the book raises a rather intriguing question: why are people willing to trust strangers and what happens when such trust weakens and the balance shifts to mistrust?

In seeking to explain the development and expansion of trust as the basis of social life, economic life specifically, he identifies several developments. One was that humans came to tame their 'violent instincts' (p.65) as disputes came to be settled through non-violent means, a situation that implies that individuals' trust of one another, and in particular of strangers, had grown. According to Seabright this occurred for two reasons. First, the intelligence of humans developed, and a by-product of this was an increasing ability for humans to calculate that their long-term interests lay in cooperative agreements, and the fulfilment of agreements, rather than through hostile relations. Second, humans have an instinctive tendency for what he identifies as 'strong reciprocity' – the inclination to do unto others what has already been done unto them (pp. 65–6) – an emotion triggered by the behaviour of others. Here Elias is cited, and a brief interpretation of the civilising process is proffered, though he clearly misconstrues Elias's explanation for both the decline in, and

change in control of, violence. Indeed, he tends to extrapolate from Elias's work the decline in violence rather than the explanation for this. Paradoxically, though, he is more convinced by game theory explanations and he claims that Elias was mistaken in his explanation and changes in the scale of violence 'occurred because reason gradually *replaced* [original emphasis] emotion in the conduct of human life' (p. 72).

Perhaps the chapter many readers will be drawn to is chapter eight. Here he seeks to explain the financial crisis that began in 2008 and at the time of writing is still dominating the headlines. Drawing upon the central theme of the book, he suggests that it was not panic amongst small investors and depositors that generated the crisis but rather big institutional investors and their distrust of each other and invariably of the banking system they comprised. Unsurprisingly he cites the lack of regulation and provides some illuminating, perhaps depressing anecdotes, such as the one involving an employee of the ratings agency Standard & Poor's who stated in an internal communication relating to a financial product that it 'could be structured by cows and we would still rate it' (p.123). However, he also allocates blame for the financial crisis to the metaphorical 'we' (p.128) – implying 'we' had a choice and were thus complicit – perhaps betraying the belief in rational economic man that is implicit throughout the book. I was particularly taken by the euphemism relating to my own state – 'the Irish were selling each other houses with abandon' (p.129) – which will no doubt grate the large numbers of people compelled to compete with investors just to purchase a family home.

Banks, like markets and money, are trust-creating institutions and while they presuppose a level of trust they also maintain and enhance trust by reducing everyday risks – although, as he outlines, it was the banks' capacity for mistrust which partly generated the financial crisis. Markets are conceived as necessary to the organisation of modern life, and the institutions that underpin modern markets can also be understood as ways to establish the trust that exchange requires. Similarly, modern corporations provide a way for strangers to collaborate on various tasks; here too both the formal and informal institutions underlying modern corporations can also be understood as ways of making trust achievable between strangers. He also makes the observation that trust is not only embodied through these external institutions, but in a rather Eliasian interpretation suggests that 'the most effective policemen' of trust 'are internal' (p.137)

Trust, then, is at the heart of this book and becomes the lens through which society past, present and future is analysed. For instance, what he terms the excluded – the unemployed, the poor, the seriously ill – are in different ways prevented from the contract of trust, while stock market booms and busts are also a manifestation of trust cycles. Similarly, he illustrates how our stock of accumulated knowledge over many generations reflects trust between generations.

Throughout the book the reader's attention is brought to 'scientific' evidence in support of the book's claims, deriving primarily from the disciplines of psychology, biology, economics and history; less so sociology. Although he is keen to stress that he is not implying a narrow biological determinism, the sheer weight of associations throughout the book to genetics tends to undermine this. Equally, the foundation stones of much classical economic thought pervade the study – the rational economic actor, 'externalities'. Despite this, from a distance at least, there are some apparent similarities with figurational theory and the wider orientation of figurationalists generally. He addresses the expanding bonds of interdependence – he uses the related concepts division of labour and specialisation – and the unplanned outcomes associated with this; changes in the scale of violence over the centuries; and the development of more harmonious relations between people (relations of trust). Yet, for all this, figurationalists, at best, will find the book frustrating, first by the interpretation given to Elias's work and, second, to the overarching tendency to eschew the social for the individual actor.

Pursuing Quality of Life: From the Affluent Society to the Consumer Society

Leonard Nevarez

New York and London: Routledge, 2011, £60 hbk, ISBN: 9780415890137, 262 pp.

Reviewed by: Paddy Dolan, Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland

The 'quality of life' (QOL) as both an academic concept and indicator of social progress in political discourse has grown hugely in recent decades, yet its influence in sociology as a discipline has been relatively muted. This is perhaps surprising given that much sociological research is given to critical imperatives to improve the lot of people in our societies. Even for figurational researchers, moral indignation at observed realities sometimes strains at the leash of relative detachment. It seems part of the reason is that QOL issues have been increasingly viewed as a privatised sphere, and so its disciplinary domain is strongest in the psychological sciences, particularly those following a largely static, quantitative approach. This is unfortunate as QOL connects with themes such as poverty reduction, 'the good life', living standards, happiness, and the pursuit of meaningful lives. These are concerns which Norbert Elias addressed, though not always directly. For example, he saw the prospect of continuing and globalising civilising processes as dependent upon a minimum standard of living, and a greater equalisation of such standards throughout the world, though based on an upward convergence rather than some mythical return to basics.

So this book by Nevarez is a welcome attempt to bring QOL research into sociology and also to examine it from a long-term perspective. However, the emphasis is more on the changes and conflicts in the concept of QOL in academic discourses than on the changing qualities of life experienced by people over recent generations, though the former is interpreted in terms of the latter to some extent. Nevarez addresses the key conceptual tension between objective and subjective understandings (respectively, the 'Scandinavian' and 'American' approaches) in academia very successfully. For those of a figurational persuasion, this division of course mirrors the *homo clausus* problem in much of social science. Researchers who insist on an objective stance claim that subjective measures cannot account for the process, as people learn to accept their diminished circumstances by lowering expectations and achieving contentment. On the other hand, researchers who emphasise subjective well-being argue that others are not in a position to determine the hierarchy of qualities sought by people in order to make their leaves happy or meaningful.

As Nevarez notes, trying to include every conceivable measure or indicator in relation to QOL would render the concept meaningless. His conceptual solution is to examine QOL in particular contexts; how is it used in specific situations and spheres? However, Nevarez affords considerable space to an 'intellectual history' of the concept, which shifts the field of inquiry away from actual social contexts and processes towards a 'history of ideas' approach. He cites Elias (and Veblen) in relation to a trickle-down effect; the status dynamic of elites pursuing commodities to establish distance from other groups, and the latter attempting to emulate them. Overall, these processes are more ambiguous, ambivalent and contradictory for Elias, though Nevarez reproduces a quote from *The Civilizing Process* (2000: 384) which does indeed imply fairly straightforward mechanisms of emulation and cultural diffusion across classes and countries.

Nevarez identifies the rise of consumer society with mass production and the relative democratisation of commodities, and thus a less unequal QOL. Of course this is part of the story, but he accords too much significance to new technologies, in terms of both production and organisational systems. The usual suspects of the advertising and marketing industries are also invoked to account for the rapid expansion of consumer desires in the twentieth century in particular (though they are presented as meshing with status competition

rather than directly creating it). The increasing ease of access to credit is convincingly presented as a catalyst, and of course credit (or debt, once people avail of its attractions) continues to play its part in the ongoing global financial crisis. With the growing temporary nature of specific jobs, and people's inability to change their working conditions, consumption becomes a sphere of social and personal life offering opportunities for expression and control. Consumer activities acquire the feeling of authenticity. Indeed Nevarez connects the rise of QOL as a subjective, individual pursuit in the context of increasing 'psychological autonomy' with the decline of tradition and the loss of functions from the extended family.

While Nevarez draws well on numerous theoretical resources, he follows Beck and the thesis of reflexive modernisation more closely than any other model. The individualisation process in the face of risk society lies behind the transformation from the affluent society, as a model for the masses, to a consumer society focussed on subjective desire. Nevarez does argue that QOL politics has obscured social relations and mutual dependence, and elevated the centrality of each person's possession (or not) of objects through various markets. Theorists such as Beck, Giddens, Lash, Inglehart and Clark are broadly supported, though they are presented as placing less emphasis on the specific social contexts where individualisation processes unfold. Nevarez addresses this problem by discussing QOL in contexts such as tourism, the family, work, technology and politics, but the concern for spatial specificity obscures somewhat the long-term processes of social change that connect these various contexts over time. Echoing the approach of Beck and Giddens, such processes are included using broad terms such as industrialisation, deindustrialisation, urbanisation, suburbanisation, globalisation, but they are largely taken as read rather than scrutinised empirically in particular nations or indeed globally. In fairness, this is due to the ambitious scope of the book, for example to understand the significance of place for QOL but to go beyond the analysis and synthesis of long-term processes in any one place.

The concluding chapter entitled 'Futures' presents compelling arguments for the need to examine QOL as a relational, context-specific process, and indeed laments the reification of QOL in much research and public policy to the level of individual access to taken-for-granted amenities, values and objects. This is attributed to the ascent of neoliberalism. The alternative need to see QOL as tied to our social interdependence is highlighted. This is an important book precisely because the kind of life we experience, our quality of life, has over recent decades been increasingly framed as an individual, subjective property, and Nevarez rightly insists on its historical, processual and relational character.

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