Book Review

Rules, Paper, Status: Migrants and Precarious Bureaucracy in Contemporary Italy

Anna Tuckett. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018, ISBN: 9781503606494, 192 pp., Pb. $25

Reviewed by Lisa Marie Borrelli

The ambiguous and often discriminatory bureaucratic practices, laws, and policies created and enacted against migrant subjects are a particularly current topic for analysis, especially since the alleged 'migration crisis' sparked the attention of the broader public. *Rules, Paper, Status* is a timely and relevant contribution to understanding the workings of the state beyond discourses of border enforcement. Anna Tuckett explores how immigration policies are closely linked to broader policy areas and are affected by diverse forces, including the labour market, the economy and discourses on cultural identity and belonging.

Her ethnography of the 'documentation regime' (4) follows migrants, immigration advisors, advocates, officials, and brokers during fieldwork in an Italian advice centre run by a trade union. This documentation regime, defined as a 'nexus of documents, paperwork, and legal and bureaucratic processes that migrants must engage with in their efforts to become and stay "legal"' (4), is both including and excluding towards migrants.

Tuckett follows individual strategies to navigate Italian immigration bureaucracy (Chapters 2 and 3) and explores how migrants become advisors and brokers to build social and economic capital (Chapter 4), but also how the second generation challenges citizenship law while experiencing serious disjunctures (Chapter 5), discrimination, and disappointment about hindered possibilities for social mobility (Chapter 6).

Through this analysis, Tuckett extends previous work on the productivity of the migration industry

(see Gammeltoft-Hansen 2012), while she adds to the study of cultural aspects of inclusion and exclusion and their linkage to migration laws in two major ways.

First, the detailed look at how migrants navigate immigration bureaucracy, followed by an analysis of bureaucratic rules through which the law can be 'bent', offers a new perspective for studies on discretionary decision-making. Rule-bending is strongly linked to a paper trail which must fit the created stories and narratives, even if false. Further, there are essentially two ways to navigate the system – the real and official. This binary adds to the study of discretion and law in practice (Eule et al. 2019). While the official way is based on formal, written 'how to' guides, the 'real' way is through a different mode of behaviour – something which the migrant needs to learn. This real system, argues Tuckett, is characterised by staff's idea of deservingness and their expectations of certain behaviour, social knowledge, and what migrants should ask (and how) in order to be helped. Hence, this work highlights the nuances of how rules are bent.

Second, Tuckett introduces the concept of 'cultural citizen', which is defined by the partaking in cultural practices and beliefs, including knowledge on working the system. By studying how 'being Italian' is defined and connecting it to historically developed laws and policies, this book offers an insightful view on the biopolitics of otherness. The young second generation is culturally embedded but is forced into irregularity due to exclusionary immigration law. At the same time, migrants who are actual citizens are depicted as inauthentic. Here, citizenship becomes a purely legal definition; it excludes migrants from partaking in society and restricts migrant access to housing and work because of their perceived otherness.

Though there is not much discussion on the intertwined relationship between structural influences and individual agency, this book contributes to a deeper understanding of the 'dynamic interplay between forms of cultural belonging and actual judicial

citizenship' (74). The work gives an easily accessible introduction to Italian migration policies and historical developments, underlining the continued restrictive position of policies towards migrants entering or attempting to enter Italy. Most importantly, it highlights how at times 'easy' first entry to Italy is followed by a more difficult path to legally stay there.

The presented findings do not only offer insights into other areas of Italian bureaucracy but they speak as well to other research related to migration regimes. Though Tuckett mentions that Italian immigration law and bureaucracy 'are characterized by a flexibility and manoeuvrability that is unusual in other contexts' (12), we indeed find great similarities to recently published state ethnographies. This book therefore speaks to a broader readership, including academics and state officials, and contributes to contemporary discussions on studying the 'state' at street level (Lipsky 1980).

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Living before Dying: Imagining and Remembering Home
Janette Davies. New York: Berghahn, 2018, ISBN: 978-1-78920-130-7, 158 pp., Pb. $27.95/£19.00.

Reviewed by Cristina Douglas

Janette Davies' monograph, *Living before Dying: Imagining and Remembering Home*, is a richly detailed account of institutional entanglements of living and working in a care home for older people at the end of their life. Davies, a former nurse who now specialises in medical anthropology, has worked for many years in the age care industry and in various hospitals.

The book is based on one-year intensive ethnographic fieldwork period in a care home situated in rural Oxfordshire in what is often described as a picturesque location on the River Thames. However, this location can be seen as contributing to the isolation of its residents and staff. In many instances, especially given the shortage of staff and the work overload that characterise many care institutions for older people, Davies found herself calling upon her previous professional orientation as a nurse and taking on responsibilities in caring and providing various activities for the residents. This deeply participatory form of conducting fieldwork allowed her to effectively immerse herself in the caregiving job, to win the trust of participants, and to understand the many challenges and difficulties involved in caring for a dependent person in a task-oriented culture of care. In this respect, Davies gained inside knowledge that allowed her to criticise management for a bureaucratic, top-down approach that resulted in poor quality of care and poor quality of life for both the residents and employees of the home.

Although the care home appears as the opposite of a home-like care setting or the opposite of what should remind one of home, the grim picture illustrated in sometimes gruesome detail of uncontrollable (and uncontrolled through care) bodily waste is also balanced with accounts of deep enjoyment and authentic feelings of mutual care between residents and staff. In practical terms, this points to the fact that quality of life is, more often than not, directly linked to an enriching environment and engagement with others rather than with issues of dependency and disability that contribute greatly to the institutionalisation of older people. Davies pays particular attention to people with dementia living in the care home as those most 'muted'. This 'mutedness' emerges from practices that infantilise older people, especially during meal times, which range from not being able to voice one's choices (or for that matter not being heard) to not being engaged in meaningful activity to avoid boredom and feelings of uselessness. Similarly, the staff members are muted by a manager who cultivates a culture of blame and ignorance, leading to tensions and decreasing the quality of everyday life, despite mantric repetition of the institution being a 'home [away] from home'.

A key quality of this book is the richness of detail, which unveils the crude reality of what it can mean to live and work in an institution for older people. This

kind of detail, sometimes extremely frank, is often lacking in other accounts in the literature; the reader wonders whether it is rooted in Davies' previous profession as a nurse, which may have allowed her to conduct such observations. However, these details are often recounted without further theoretical commentary, almost in the style of medical notes, and without grasping the subjective experience of those involved. That said, a sense of shared vulnerability between residents and their caregivers is always present; this dimension has usually been obscured by the dominant image, in much of the literature on institutionalised caregiving, of a 'total institution'.

One disconcerting aspect of the book is that it never states exactly when the fieldwork took place, although the author specifies when she came up with the idea (early 1990s) of conducting intensive observations in a care home. The reader could only guess that the research took place in the late 1990s by gathering various clues. However, some other implicit suggestions that the research might have taken place as late as the 2010s (e.g. citing a book from the 1980s and stating that three decades later, 'as seen in the present research', things have not changed; 133) confuse the reader about when the fieldwork actually took place. Although Davies mentions at the very beginning that she decided to publish the book only after all the residents had died, this detail still does not accurately date the research.

The book could have had a higher value if this crucial information had been clearly stated: if it happened in the 1990s, it might serve as a reference for what has changed in the meantime and what might work in adjusting care culture and practice. If what Davies observed happened much more recently, despite so many national and local policies and theoretical approaches in place to give the elderly a better quality of life, then the research raises huge concerns about what goes on behind closed doors and even raises the issue of legality of running such an institution. The research would thereby have added great value to the anthropological endeavour had it signalled these issues. In the absence of this minimal information, though, the reader can only appreciate the minutiae of life observed and transcribed in the book without being certain of how they could be used in future research or practice in order to improve older people's lives before they die.

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Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming

Reviewed by Michele Fontefrancesco

For over 30 years, anthropologists and social scientists have been involved in an animated discussion about the hermeneutic roles, risks, and opportunities opened by ethnographic practice. Ethnography should be considered not just as a synonym of participant observation, but rather as the intellectual process that leads researchers from the experience gained from the field to reflect and build their theoretical arguments. And since the publication of *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), scholars have been aware, sometimes to the point of apparent obsession, of the risk of crystallizing the subjects of research in the eternal present of ethnographic narration. We can count many contributions that attempt to tackle the issue and negotiate safe ground for the discipline to make ethnographic writing a tool for reporting and making sense of the transformative nature of life and experience. *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming* adds a novel voice to this debate, which can intrigue practitioners studying the human experience of social change.

Departing from an essentialist understanding of society, the book calls attention "to the plethora of existential struggles, improvisations, ideas, and landscapes that shape what life means and how it is experienced and imagined in splintering and pluralizing presents" (5). Considering this dynamic and unpredictable reality, the book highlights the centrality that the concept of 'becoming' should have for anthropology and outlines a new approach resting on three pillars:

> First, [becoming] emphasizes the plastic nature of human–nonhuman interactions and acknowledges that people belong simultaneously to multiple systems that themselves are made up of people, things, and forces with varying degrees of agentive capacity.

[. . . Second, it] has to do with experiences of time, space, and desire [. . . Third, it] involves attentiveness to the unknown, both as a critical feature of people and material worlds and as a productive force in research and conceptual work. (5–6)

Thus, the volume describes society by looking at the dimension of everyday life and brings to the fore the fluid nature of existence. The chapters develop this approach, heavily basing their ethnographic approach on the works and vocabulary of Gilles Deleuze. This theoretical and stylistic choice is instrumental to focusing on the generative aspect of life and to creating the ground for ethnography to explore an existential condition in which 'life is simply immanent and open to new relations . . . and trajectories without predetermined telos or outcome' (42). The contributing authors embrace a hermeneutic perspective according to which an individual's condition is not fixed and determinate but, rather, an open-ended flux in constant change, applying this approach to different fields of anthropology. While much of the book discusses issues concerning medical anthropology, such as trauma and care, 'becoming' is used also to look at the anthropology of the arts (Schwarcz), indigenous anthropology (Bessire), and science and technology studies (Petryna) and, in particular, to reflect on the process of knowledge generation.

Bringing the theme of becoming to the centre of the anthropological debate is particularly timely in a context in which institutions, as well as the public, are discussing and interpreting society in ways that rely heavily on deterministic forms of schematism and simplification. Thus, *Unfinished* could be an intriguing choice for professionals looking for a source of inspiration for new analytical approaches to study the dynamism of social phenomena. However, the book is not a quick read or one that is easy to grasp. Following the example of Deleuze, the contributing authors use terminology and style that are often poetic and evocative but that are at odds with any expectations of linearity that may be held by practitioners or the need of clarity that students may feel. The texture of the prose is marked by a strong reliance on Deleuzian terms, such as 'cartography', 'plateaux', and 'territory', which may be obscure to those who do not have a previous knowledge of the French philosopher's works. Moreover, the strong theoretical emphasis may preclude straightforward application of the contributions that the book offers.

Despite this difficulty, the volume proves particularly useful from an applied perspective, which includes the analysis of social transformations that are not directly touched on by the chapters. The chapters represent an initial platform for reflection on local culture and the socio-cultural meaning of living in a local community. While Purcell, exploring the case of the Turkish city of Urfa, points out that the perception of a place is not fixed in time but evolves and can encapsulate and express 'a range of large-scale religious and political formations into which the city has been drawn over the years' (147), the ethnography of public grieving in the heavily criminalised neighbourhood of Eastwood in Chicago conducted by Ralph shows that the very behaviour and understanding of social acceptability shared by a community is shaped by the very special conditions in which people live every day – conditions that may lead the community to elevate madness 'so that it is not denigrated or devalued but given the same respectability as mourning' (107). This theoretical insight can be expanded to other contexts in which questions concerning how to become a legitimised member of a local community are at stake. This is the case of migration, for example, where the anthropology of becoming helps to avoid the ever-present temptation to describe integration as a linear and univocal process that turns migrants into members of the host society by instilling in them local knowledge. Rather, it points out that there is not such a thing as a local knowledge distinct from the migrants, but rather that the very local knowledge is shared and co-created by all the people who live in the place, which includes the migrants from the very first moment of their arrival. In so doing, it suggests that integration should not be a matter of imposition of some form of knowledge but rather a pragmatic strategy of facilitation aimed at easing the civic participation and involvement of everyone living in the same place.

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