Series editor's preface

Ethnography reaches the parts of politics that other methods cannot reach. It captures the lived experience of politics; the everyday life of political elites and street-level bureaucrats. It identifies what we fail to learn, and what we fail to understand, from other approaches. Specifically:

1. It is a source of data not available elsewhere.
2. It is often the only way to identify key individuals and core processes.
3. It identifies “voices” all too often ignored.
4. By disaggregating organizations, it leads to an understanding of “the black box” or the internal processes of groups and organizations.
5. It recovers the beliefs and practices of actors.
6. It gets below and behind the surface of official accounts by providing texture, depth and nuance, so our stories have richness as well as context.
7. It lets interviewees explain the meaning of their actions, providing an authenticity that can come only from the main characters involved in the story.
8. It allows us to frame (and reframe, and reframe) research questions in a way that recognizes our understandings about how things work around here evolve during the fieldwork.
9. It admits of surprises – of moments of epiphany, serendipity and happenstance – that can open new research agendas.
10. It helps us to see and analyze the symbolic, performative aspects of political action.

Despite this distinct and distinctive contribution, ethnography's potential is realized rarely in political science and related disciplines. It is considered an endangered species or at best a minority sport. This series seeks to promote the use of ethnography in political science, public administration and public policy.

The series has two key aims:

1. To establish an outlet for ethnographic research into politics, public administration and public policy.

2. To build an interdisciplinary platform for a readership interested in qualitative research into politics and administration. We expect such work to cut across the traditional scholarly boundaries of political science, public administration, anthropology, organization studies, social policy and development studies.

Christian Lo's book obeys a key injunction of this series that small facts should speak to big issues. The small facts are cases of policy-making in two Norwegian municipalities. The big issue is the transition from government to governance; from policies determined, top-down, by the state to policies that emerge from the interactions of networks of organizations drawn from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Lo's ethnographic account of policy criticizes this distinction, arguing that "the hierarchal relations of government and the networked relations of governance are inextricably intertwined during policy processes."

Lo employs a multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork strategy involving two months of participant observation (one month in each municipality). He had his own office at each municipality and observed the elite administrative and political personnel in their everyday municipal lives. He conducted twenty lengthy interviews with key informants. He followed the elite to external meetings and events with other governments and private organizations and to public meetings. He collected many documents including the minutes of meetings, case proceedings and policy documents. He bases his stories on the three sources of observed practice, talk (both formal interviews and informal conversation) and considered writing.

For this reader, the book has three great virtues. First, the author refuses to accept easy dichotomies. He uses the ethnographic fieldwork to unpack notions such as governance, or the distinction between bureaucrats and politicians, to show the complex interplay of people and events. He argues convincingly that "a mix of hierarchy and networks, as well as the interdependence between governmental and non-governmental actors, is axiomatic to any system of governing." Second, his analysis is consistent with more recent decentred accounts of governance that stress there can be no "comprehensive account of the diversity of practices, actions and strategies making up the role of the state." Finally, he revisits F. G. Bailey's classic *Stratagems and Spoils* (1969) to demonstrate the continuing relevance of his analysis of politics as a game in which there are alternative rulebooks guiding the game. Rules and procedures are important, but they are not fixed. They are subject to "constant interpretation, negotiation and, occasionally, outright cheating." As a good ethnographer, Lo unearths the several organizations in one by providing texture, depth and nuance.

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