Book Review/Compte rendu

Satzewich, Vic. *Points of Entry: How Canada's Immigration Officers Decide Who Gets In.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015. 306 pp., $32.95 paper (9780774830256)

In *Points of Entry: How Canada's Immigration Officers Decide Who Gets In*, Vic Satzewich offers a unique and timely contribution to the growing field of immigration and migration studies. *Points of Entry* is the culmination of a 2-year-long ethnography that examined the decision-making practices of Canadian visa officers. In this ambitious project Satzewich interviewed 128 visa officers and observed 42 applicant interviews in 11 overseas visa offices across four continents. In total, Satzewich spent 220 hours of ethnographic observation in a notoriously inaccessible institution. *Points of Entry* addresses a conspicuous gap in immigration policy scholarship, and offers valuable illustration of ethnographic methods put to work.

The first impression one gets upon reading *Points of Entry* is how Satzewich is a gifted and skilled ethnographer. In an introduction that should be required reading for any scholar (student or otherwise) about to undertake a large-scale ethnographic investigation, Satzewich provides a compelling and transparent narrative of his (ultimately successful) "attempts to penetrate the fortress" that is the Canadian immigration system (9). *Points of Entry* is a story about peeling away the layers of an exceptionally risk-averse government institution in order to uncover an account of how day-to-day human interactions interact with and shape state policy. As a scholarly observer (Satzewich aptly refers to himself as a "sociological secret agent"), Satzewich reveals an uncanny dexterity at generating rich ethnographic data (10). Given the size of his sample and the richness of detail he is able to provide throughout the book it is particularly impressive how *Points of Entry* developed out of hand-written field notes, as he was not given permission to use a voice recorder. Overall, *Points of Entry* showcases the distinctive complexity and utility of engaging in an ethnographic investigation within the constraints of a particularly secretive organization.

By employing ethnographic methods, *Points of Entry* is able to examine a particularly difficult to access tier of Canada's immigration system – the meso-level decision-making practices that animate the con-

trol of Canada's borders. This is the scholarly gap that *Points of Entry* addresses. Grounding his analysis in the work of Michael Lipsky (2010), Satzewich focuses on the daily working lives of individual visa officers. In so doing, Satzewich presents a vibrant depiction of the individual officer idiosyncrasies that shape the decision-making processes on the ground, such as how some officers are more facilitative while others are more enforcement minded. However, *Points of Entry* does not stage these individual differences in a political vacuum. Rather, throughout the book Satzewich builds the argument that a highly bureaucratized environment grounded in a complicated array of policies, rules, and risk assessments socially constitutes officer discretion. Satzewich's most important contribution is thus how he manages to pry open this previously unexamined element of Canada's immigration system in order to show how the broader macro political structure imbues officers' performances of agency when deciding "who gets in".

While Satzewich's book is an important contribution to the growing field of immigration studies, there are areas where I felt he could have probed his data more deeply. He makes the important point that Canada's immigration system is no longer grounded in overtly racist ideology. That said, while officers' decisions may not be influenced by overt racism, Satzewich does not go far enough in investigating how political ideology currently plays out in the everyday performances of national borders. First, there has been an increased interest of late in how immigration policies and border practices shape and are shaped by "everyday nationalism" (Helleiner, 2016). Throughout the book, there are many examples of visa officers commenting on their role as "nation builders" or on their desires to "protect" Canada from migrants who pose a potential threat to Canadian society. These perceptions could provide an important basis for investigating more deeply how nationalism is performed at the meso-level of border controls. Second, Satzewich correctly notes that immigration policy in recent years has been shaped by a neoliberal agenda that prioritizes financial independence and entrepreneurialism. His field notes are filled with examples of how economic assumptions and priorities shape visa officers' decision-making processes, yet there is surprisingly little discussion of how these may intersect with other social markers, such as gender and race. *Points of Entry* would have benefited from a more robust analysis of how socio-economic biases inherent to Canada's immigration controls, biases that others have shown tend to disadvantage women migrants and migrants of colour (Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002), may contribute to the broader social constitution of officer discretion.

This criticism notwithstanding, *Points of Entry* is an engaging and well-written depiction of how Canadian visa officers exercise discretion in the context of excessive bureaucratic constraints. His behind-the-scenes observations of such a broad network of overseas visa offices provide an unprecedented portrayal of border practices from the perspective of those charged with their enforcement. In so doing, *Points of Entry* provides an unusually intimate exposé of an institution normally shrouded in secrecy. I recommend this book to scholars and students of immigration and public policy as well as to those sociologists interested in applying ethnographic and qualitative methods in institutional contexts.

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References

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Lipsky, Michael. 2010. *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services.* New York: Russell Sage.

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