

## The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology

Kate Nash and Alan Scott (Eds.), Blackwell, Oxford. 2001. xiv 478 pp,  
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Society and politics are interwoven historically. Yet they are rarely being fully addressed by the highly specialized academic discourses in these days. Hence, the studies of the dynamic relationship between, as well as the transformation of, the polity and the social, are increasingly complex but fragmented. Some of them are just too specialized and differentiated to such an extent that they are more or less self-referential, and seemingly, developing another discipline within social science, such as rational choice approaches and the study of institutionalism. Hence, it is increasingly difficult to develop for our students a broad view of the relationship between the state, market and civil society. In this respect, the volume is a very welcome one on a sociology subfield(?) where both theories and well-research empirical cases are abundant but where there is still a dearth of well-defined and articulated synopsis of the state-of-the-art studies. The volume is a result of a joint effort of over 40 prominent scholars in political science and sociology. This companion is a rich source providing a wealth of theories, concepts and analysis on the changing relationship between state and society which goes far beyond the few indications given here.

This work is clearly organized. In the first eight chapters, Part 1 provides a very good overview as well as synthesis of the recent developments of theoretical perspectives on power and politics which includes Marxist theory, pluralist and elite approaches, rational choice, governmentality, Habermasian communicative rationality, Niklas Luhmann's complex societies, postmodern political sociology and the study of power. Despite the succinct and concise exposition of each chapter, perhaps the editors could do a bit more by providing a more synoptic introduction of these theories at the front of this part. Part 2 (eleven chapters) focuses on different aspects of the state and governance, examining the relations between the state and different institutions, organizations, and groups in society. Key conceptual issues with empirical cases are tackled here: state formation and form, political legitimacy, gender, political processes, policy networks, parties and political intermediation, protests and media. In my judgment, this part is very informative but lacks interesting propositions.

Articulating 'the political and the social' in Part 3 (with thirteen articles) examines the very definitions society: civil society and the public sphere, trust and social capital, markets and states, neo-liberalism, the politics of collective identity and action (new social movements, ethnicity, body politics and the imagined communities), and aspects of citizenship and governmentality. Undoubtedly, this part is very stimulating and refreshing to read. The last part (with six chapters) examines the forms and processes of political transformation with specific reference to democratization in Latin America, feminism and democracy, postmodernization, the fragmentation of nationalism, the state(s) restructuring in the midst of Europeanization, and the uniqueness of the Singaporean state governance over society and its implications for future governmentality. I like this part most because of its innovative stimulation and path-breaking articulation for the exploration of the future (new) politics. But its content and elaboration are just too brief – average length of each chapter is 11 pages! With such a short (inadequate?) coverage on so many insightful

propositions, there is obviously the need to extend and elaborate the debates in future works of the contributors. In short, contributions in this part may demonstrate the desire to explore new ways and perspectives of conceptualizing the political transformations and their processes at the polity and the social arena, but, disappointingly, it is unconvincing as to what are the political realities and how will their specific changes shape interactions and relations between the state and society. On the other hand and obviously, more could be expected from such a future oriented volume, for instance, the new form(s) of politics and social mobilization in and beyond cyberspace (as well as territorial spaces) should be included here. Only two chapters indirectly address the effects of the Internet on socio-political development; the potential of the Internet's liberalization and promotion of global and local justice is mostly missed out in this book. More specific, what will be the prospect of civic networking (at various territorial scales) of anti-globalization campaigns at a global level? Recent protests at the venues (the latest one is the G8 in Genoa, Italy, July 2001 and the G-8 Summits in Kananaskis, Canada, June 2002) of the EU, the G8, the IMF, the WTO, and World Bank summits have been forcefully articulating the fundamental contradictions between the haves and have-nots, and visualizing are exposing socio-economic fault-lines between the rich and poor, the developed and underdeveloped worlds. Can political sociology's perspectives offer any insightful view on these events?

Two positive aspects of this companion should be commended. First, this is highly informative and authoritative volume with good literature reference (44 pages) and indexing. And the provision of a list (average: 3 references) for 'further reading' at the end of each chapter is undoubtedly a very useful one, especially for students of sociology. But three obvious, separate yet inter-related caveats of this book should be noted here. First, no figurative, numeric or diagrammatic presentation is found in this companion – all communications are through text, perhaps the figures and diagrams showing the historical lineages and linkages of different concept(s), plus the empirical data (in numeric or statistical terms) available in those empirically oriented case studies, could help us to visualize the relationships between the social and the political. Second, there is inadequate cross-referencing (or in the editors' wording: the chapters 'speak to each other'). Lastly, it is the very brief coverage of each of the articulated concepts and/or observations of the political transformation processes. To address to this weakness, perhaps, a digital (CD-ROM) version of such a companion project in future, with better cross-referencing and (hyper)linkages to the related literatures and studies could be envisaged.

Overall, this less-than-500-page companion is a successful project for articulating the major themes and central puzzles within the (sub)field of political sociology. This book bears evidence to the great merits of the contributors' cooperation and editors' work - its substantive contributions clearly help to advance the frontiers of knowledge. Yet, our focus, the historical specificity of the spatial/territorial aspects of the political and the social is somewhat missing in the companion.

\* This review is derived from the author's publication on *Political Geography* (Pergamon).