

INTRODUCTION

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The issue of order and how it is generated and maintained is one to which considerable sociological attention has been directed over the decades. Many early ethnographic studies were concerned with the question of how order was produced in small-scale, acephalous societies, those beyond the control of any state. More recently, however, anthropologists have tended to turn their attention away from the issue of how order is maintained in isolated communities to relations of power and domination in more complex societies – the effects of colonialization, domination and resistance, inter-state relations and globalization. Forms of hierarchy, hegemony and the unequal access to resources have received more attention than structures of order. At the same time, anthropological analyses of conflict and violence have proliferated.¹ The focus has been on the violent, the illegitimate and the immoral while order, it seems, has almost disappeared from the anthropological picture.

The question that arises, then, is whether the issue of order is still relevant as an object of anthropological enquiry. Can questions about order still lead to valuable insights? The analytic value of the concepts of both order and disorder, we suggest, needs to be reconsidered, along with the theories elaborated during the first decades of sociological and anthropological thinking and the extent to which they are still relevant. To consider such questions the contributors to this volume were invited to a workshop hosted by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in November 2004. The papers that resulted, reproduced here, all take a fresh look at the question of order. They do so in the context of wider configurations of power and politics, including commercial competition, and recent anthropological analyses of the state and political relations. They suggest, among other things, that the notion of order can have different meanings in different contexts. The term may refer to the absence or containment of violence, to the existence of a shared set of norms, but also to a sense of predictability and feeling of security. It can, thus, be used in both an objec-

tive and subjective way. Several chapters indicate that the existence of disorder, in the sense of a lack of peace and security, does not necessarily imply a lack of shared norms or sense of predictability for those caught up in it. Indeed, most chapters address the issue of how order emerges out of disorderly contexts and discuss the creative ways in which people create small spaces of order in situations of disorder and disruption.

The role of the state emerges as a central theme in the volume. It is shown to be a source of disorder as much as a guarantor of order, especially where it is weak or retreating. Where it does assert the primary role of creating and maintaining order, as in the case of the nation states of the developed world, it may do so through elaborate symbolism and ritual, while local spheres of order are simultaneously established in ways that have little to do with the state's legal system. In this introduction we highlight some of the ways in which this is done, picking up the threads that run through the individual chapters. We then turn to consider some of the themes that emerged when anthropologists were more explicitly concerned with the principles according to which societies do and should function and reassess these in the light of the case studies.

The Role of the State

Many anthropological discussions have concerned the maintenance of order apart from the state. They have examined the processes and structures found in small-scale, acephalous societies, those which had hardly, or very lightly, been touched by the controlling hand of the state or the administration of a colonial power. In the present volume the emphasis is, by contrast, on order despite the state, that is on the order that is created by those whose social worlds are deeply affected by a state, but one that does not guarantee them peace and stability. Indeed, in many of the case studies the state is portrayed as a cause of disorder. It is described as a source of instability or, at the very least, as failing to guarantee order. The chapter by Meeker develops such an analysis by portraying the state as an inherently disorderly institution. His case study concerns the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth century which, he argues, prefigured processes by which the nation state developed in Europe. He suggests that the Ottoman regime can only be understood as a disorderly conjunction between the order of the state and that of society. The nature of that conjunction changed over time, but it remained a source of tension and conflict, an inherent disorder in the power structures of the Empire. In Meeker's analysis this illustrates the order of the state and that of society acting upon one another. Some states overwhelm their subject societies, transforming them to their own order, while some societies have the potential to penetrate the colonizing officers, classes and institutions, undermining

and corrupting them. However, the relationship between state and society is, in principle, 'touched by instability', precisely because states operate through rationalized and codified institutions designed for supervizing a subject population. The order that the Ottoman rulers attempted to create bore the very seeds of its own instability.

Spencer, in his chapter, addresses the assumption found in much political anthropology that we can look to the realm of the political as the location of social order. Like Meeker, he examines the disorderly relations between state and society, here as they play themselves out in the political realm in Sri Lanka. This field, he suggests, simply cannot be understood without paying attention to processes of disorder. The state itself can be regarded as just one amongst several warring parties. Politics is identified with divisions and trouble by his informants in Sri Lanka. It is regarded as a kind of 'collective moral disorder', an agonistic space of disorderly activity. Spencer thus dissociates the issue of order from that of politics. Ideologies and images of order and nationality are constructed within the practices and discourses of the political, but they are also ideologically distanced from it. As he puts it, the political in Sri Lanka contains within it both order and disorder.

Also discussing the role of the state, Just, in his chapter, points out that the nation state is the paradigm of 'legitimate' governmental control and its order is symbolized in the grandeur, the ritual and the moral symbolism of the parliament chamber and the court room. We might add to this the elaborate ceremonies and regimentation of military parades. These symbols of an abstract, all-encompassing order present to the public the need for a functioning nation state as the necessary condition for the possibility of social life. However, they also celebrate the fact that the state is the source of organized violence, the chaos of war and the agonism of adversarial politics and judicial processes. Such activities are legitimated by explicitly equating them with order and justice. Their disorderly consequences are transformed into symbols of the legitimate order of the state. The state here is simultaneously a guarantor of order and a source of disruption and disorder.

Roberts, in his chapter, considers not so much the state as the workings of the free market and the commercial struggles that are supported and encouraged by it. He likens the interwoven processes of competition and rule breach found in the commercial world to the struggles for political ascendancy described by Victor Turner in his studies of chieftainship in Central Africa (Turner 1957, 1967). His study suggests that if we look beyond the state, we find commercial manufacturers appealing to consumers by creating a sense of a locally-rooted order, using images of local history and interweaving them with more widely-shared cultural images and idioms. All these studies indicate that the state itself is often responsible for conditions of social or political disorder and they highlight the different ways in which

this can occur and with what consequences. As Meeker's case study most graphically illustrates, it is the disorderly conjunctions between state and society that create the framework, or the arena, in which processes of order can and must be creatively established by its citizens.

Order Despite the State

We must, therefore, look beyond the state for sources of order, but without ignoring the defining role it plays. The papers in the volume edited by Ferguson and Whitehead (1992) concern patterns of disorder, in particular the disruption of warfare, that are brought about by the proximity or intrusion of an expanding state. In the current volume, by contrast, several papers are concerned with conditions of disorder brought about by a weak or retreating state. Subtle shifts and balances then characterize the construction of order, especially amongst unstable social groups.

Grätz, in his chapter in this volume, discusses the gold-mining communities that have been established in West Africa, whose actions the state is unable or unwilling fully to control. The rapid growth of these new communities has disrupted patterns of social and economic life for resident populations, while also giving rise to problems of order and stability for the incomers. This has, in part, been due to the new mixture of established residents and recent arrivals in and around the mining camps. The consequent problems were answered by the establishment of vigilante groups who initially provided a welcome and more deliberate measure of regularity and predictability for both residents and incomers. Grätz describes how they acquired legitimacy in the eyes of the local population by upholding and enforcing their norms of retributive punishment.

This study demonstrates that the establishment of legitimacy is crucial to the ability of local institutions to guarantee regimes of order, particularly when these are alternatives to the order of the state. Such legitimacy has to be established in the context of local notions concerning social order. As Grätz describes, when one of the vigilante groups in West Africa began to use excessive violence, its activities became not only unpredictable and arbitrary but also illegitimate in the eyes of the local population. At the same time, having been tolerated by state authorities in the interests of stability, this group came to be perceived as a threat to the sovereignty of the state. The authorities then branded it as illegitimate and took steps to curtail its activities.

The authority of those who seek to maintain order in a society can also be undermined if their actions infringe the norms of a moral or religious order, which likewise renders them illegitimate in the eyes of the local population. As described by Bertram Turner in this volume, Islamist Salafiyya groups were able to introduce new forms of control into small

communities in south-west Morocco because they claimed to be promoting the law of Islam to legitimate their form of social order. Such claims were initially accepted and allowed these groups to impose new controlling elements. However, their subsequent recourse to violence infringed local notions of order, rendering their activities unacceptable to the local population. They were seen to have transgressed local ideas concerning descent and social relations and to have generated unacceptable levels of conflict within the community. In this way, local notions of order became more reflected and contested, and at the same time they became the basis for a challenge to the legitimacy of the external actors who were seeking to establish a position of dominant control.

Like Grätz's and Turner's chapters, Ventsel's case study from Siberia indicates the importance of a shared set of norms when it comes to establishing order in a community in which state institutions are weak. The population of a Siberian village, established by a strong (Soviet) administration, found itself having to adapt to conditions of weak central control left by a retreating state. Like Grätz, Ventsel illustrates the way some sections of society, in this case elder men and former prison inmates, had brought a certain structure to the local community by establishing the authority to control violence. Among adolescents and young men status and honour were defined by displays of physical aggression. Although this behaviour was in principle tolerated, people were aware of the threat that unrestrained violence posed to the precarious social order. The elder men had to invest considerable effort in containing the violent behaviour of the youth through practices of restraint and disapproval. Although different views were often expressed about the justification of violence in this community, the success of these practices depended upon certain influential members deciding that a fine line had been crossed between acceptable forms of violence and that which threatened to undermine the local order. Their efforts in limiting excessive or disruptive violence were only successful because they actively established and maintained such standards of acceptability.

While Turner's chapter, thus, demonstrates the force of underlying, unreflected notions of order, Ventsel illustrates the deliberate establishment of normative standards. In the Siberian village members of a certain age group claimed that much of the violence in which they engaged was justified as a way of 'proving themselves'. The enforcement of social norms was thus the prerogative of particular members of the community and a certain amount of rule breaking was expected on the part of the young men. It seems that it is not so much that the youth did not share the norms enforced by the elders, but rather that they gained social capital by defying and discursively rejecting them. As Ventsel notes, these young men were expected to accept the punishment that they knew would follow from their behaviour. By accepting punishment they indicated their acceptance of the norms they had violated.

This case study also demonstrates the need for the anthropologist to dissociate the issue of order from that of violence. As Ventsel illustrates, people can develop a range of responses to deal with the perceived threat that the violence of certain sections of society, here the 'kids', poses to their social order. Order is not so much found in the absence of violence in such societies, as in the appropriate nature of the response to violence and in the ongoing processes of containment and adjustment by which people react to and limit its effects.

Among the nomads of Amdo, in north-eastern Tibet, Pirie also found that certain individuals were expected to breach the norms. She describes, in her chapter, the way in which the nomads simultaneously invoked a set of shared norms in order to resolve blood feuds, while granting a grudging respect to those who defied the imposition of such norms. In her analysis it is not so much that the members of the group did not share and enact a common set of norms, as that there was an inherent tension between the norms of order and the norms which applied to individual male behaviour. These incorporated a certain valorization of rule breaking and defiance. This case study indicates that while certain forms of violence were obligatory, according to the norms of feuding and reciprocity, elaborate methods of conflict resolution were also undertaken in order to resolve the blood feuds that escalated to dangerous proportions or threatened to do so. A certain form of order was thus reimposed within these groups by means of established responses to anticipated and predictable forms of disruptive behaviour. Nevertheless, the outbreak of violence remained a constant source of concern. Violence, therefore, can be normatively sanctioned, it can even be obligatory as a matter of individual or group action; however, it may also be negatively evaluated and feared for its socially disruptive consequences.

All these studies illustrate the very fine line that is drawn between acceptable and unacceptable forms of violence. The new, localized power regimes described by Grätz gained acceptance, despite being disadvantageous or even oppressive for some, because they were predictable and people felt able to adapt to them. However, when the vigilantes' use of violence came to be perceived as arbitrary and terror-like it created fear instead of peace and security and the vigilantes lost the trust of the local population. A thin line between acceptable and unacceptable violence and coercion had been crossed. In this case, as in many others, it was also a line between predictability and uncertainty. This is just one indication of the close connection between the issue of order and that of predictability, which recurs in other chapters. Ventsel's and Pirie's studies, for example, both show communities adapting to and developing methods to control a certain amount of predictable violence.

These studies also illustrate the imposition of shared norms, both reflected and unreflected. While Grätz and Turner's chapters describe the

regimes of order established as alternatives to that of the state, relying on a certain amount of violence or coercion, they also demonstrate that new power holders have to draw upon established norms to maintain their positions. Conditions of disorder can also be created from within. While the importance of shared norms in creating the conditions for order has been highlighted, several case studies indicate that such norms may simultaneously be challenged from within. Ventsel and Pirie, for example, both describe societies in which a certain amount of rule breaking is both feared and expected. Bertram Turner, in his chapter, explicitly considers the competing normative systems that characterize relations between territorial and kin-based groups in south-west Morocco. As he describes it, more than one set of ideas about order, law, justice and morality can be found among local groups in the region. Numerous notions of order, based on descent, territory, agricultural activities, religion and local and state laws, interact and intersect, each with its own mode of argumentation and standards for the evaluation of behaviour. He suggests that instead of searching for one fundamental way in which the order of a society is established, it is more fruitful to assume that societies may have several different notions of order, which may be invoked alternately or even at the same time.

Turner contrasts two dominant models of order, one based on the idea of harmony and one based on the principle of retaliation or reciprocity. The norms of retaliation are part of a logic of reciprocity, which is integral to relations between different constellations of territorial and kin-based groups. He describes these relations as generating a permanent state of tension, to which any form of final resolution would be inappropriate and, in practice, illusory. Paradoxically, it is the model of order based on the idea of harmony which is also responsible for generating social tensions. The model that incorporates violent retaliation, on the other hand, can serve more effectively to limit or even prevent the occurrence of violence.

The Location of Order

Almost all the examples given in this volume indicate an awareness on the part of those studied that order cannot be taken for granted. It has to be maintained, restored and reconstituted, or even actively constructed, in the first place. This is especially so when the state is weak and can no longer be relied upon, or has never been relied upon, fully to guarantee order. There may also be variety and inconsistency amongst the ideas about order expressed within what we might view as a single society or community. Its members may not fully agree on what establishes order and they may also disagree about what kinds of behaviour support or undermine it. The behaviour or conditions criticized by some as disorderly, illegitimate or oppressive can be neutrally, or even positively

appraised by others or they may become unacceptable only in changing circumstances. These differences may follow age, class and gender divisions but also more complex cleavages, as Turner's case study demonstrates. This does not mean, however, that local concepts of order do not, at the same time, involve the idea of some absolute and encompassing ideal and a firm sense of the line that exists between order and disorder. In most situations discussed in this volume there is a line that people feel they can and must draw between order and chaos, and between acceptable violence and disorder. There are implicit boundaries beyond which disorder is felt to emerge, behaviour seems to threaten the conditions for social continuity and life ceases to make sense.

A focus on locality, we would suggest, is crucial to the analysis of order. This does not, however, mean seeking out a bounded, homogeneous sphere. Rather, it requires making sense of the disorderly conjunctions of social processes out of which people construct forms of regularity and predictability. Several chapters in this volume describe the ways in which people construct local structures to maintain order within the context of, but often in competition or uneasy alliance with, official structures of the state. The state shapes the arena but does not determine the patterns of order. This creates disorderly tensions which provide the context in the midst of which people have to establish a more localized sense of order. Interesting questions then arise about the interactions between different forms of ordering institutions and their respective authority. Grätz suggests that the political culture of the vigilante groups he observed is shaped by elements stemming from local tradition, but they do not act completely against the state. Nor do they reinvent the juridical process. As Pirie also shows, with her example from north-eastern Tibet, even in the context of a strong and dominant (Chinese) state local groups can maintain their own ordering institutions. On the grasslands of Amdo, tribes of pastoralists look to locally recognized orators or Buddhist lamas in order to resolve their blood feuds. Rather than rejecting the authority of the police and other agents of the state, however, the Tibetans draw, or attempt to draw, state agents into their own locally constructed patterns of order.

Local norms, therefore, shape the way patterns of order are negotiated between state and society. This has some relevance for recent academic discussions of the way in which people establish predictable patterns of social behaviour in complex situations in which they do not know all the individuals they are dealing with. Giddens (1998) has illustrated the importance of trust in such situations, emphasizing the time and space 'distantiation' characteristic of late modernity. He demonstrates the ways in which trust is established among strangers who are bound in relations of distant communication and have to relate to others they may never meet or get to know. While Giddens focuses on long chains of dependence, several of the chapters in this volume, however, demonstrate how a sense of local-

ity is central to the creation of this sense of trust. Roberts, for example, addresses the question of how the political attachment needed to produce order is generated among the increasingly heterogeneous civil society of the developed world. He suggests that longings for a safe and ordered world are met, in part, by representations of culture and heritage. Images of a historical past grounded in a particular locality provide pattern and a sense of order. His case study concerns civil society, and more specifically the marketing of consumer goods, where authenticity is conveyed by creating an image of production methods based on long-established recipes and professional knowledge, enhanced by reference to local artists, and thus suggesting links with a locality that nurtures its valuable culture and heritage. Establishing trust among strangers, the producer and the buyer, may thus involve more than the rational, detached reliance on professionalism that Giddens describes. Rather, the producers can rely on a yearning for an apparently fugitive 'authenticity'. Roberts likens this to the relations between subject and polity or the commitment to norms which anthropologists have described as being central to the creation of order.

The chapters by Grätz, Turner, Ventsel, Pirie and Roberts, thus build on the discussions of the state found in the chapters of Meeker, Spencer, Just and Roberts by illustrating some of the other ways in which order is generated at the interstices of state and society. They all take a processual approach, discussing the ways in which order is actively generated and maintained. Order, like any other structure, does not simply exist: it becomes, emerges, settles and disappears. The case studies illustrate the disorderly processes of state and society while also revealing the endlessly creative ways in which order is constructed. They describe inherent tensions and competition in social processes which do not, however, negate the possibility that those caught up in them can lead ordered lives. Even within conditions of instability, people can create a sense of regularity and predictability.

The Perception of Order

In most situations there is, therefore, a line that people feel they can and must draw between order and disorder. They have a sense, possibly only implicit, of the boundaries beyond which disorderly behaviour threatens the conditions for social life. This highlights the fact that both order and disorder can be regarded as social constructions. To some extent we must treat them as matters of perception, as understandings as much as processes or states of affairs. A distinction must, therefore, be drawn between order as an objective quality of society, as a state of peace, stability and security, on the one hand, and order as a matter of perception, on the other. As the studies of Ventsel, Pirie and Turner demonstrate, for example, even when rule breaking or violent retaliation is expected of

some sections of society, leading to a continual apprehension of violence and disruption, a sense of order can be created by the established responses by which its effects are contained and limited. These societies would hardly be called peaceful or secure for those liable to be caught up in the recurrent violence, yet they are not without order.

What is also apparent is that ideas of order may not be clearly conceptualized by those we study. As Pirie describes, in a remote Ladakhi village the communal ideal of order is only ever negatively expressed in the moral condemnation of antagonism. The villagers, as a body, make concerted efforts to resolve disputes and suppress conflict and there is considerable consensus about what destabilizes the normal flow of life. There is a strong, albeit implicit, ideal of peaceful cooperation between all members of the community, but there is no local concept translatable as 'order'. In this, and many other cases, the boundaries of order only become apparent when an event appears to threaten them. Ventsel's and Grätz's studies, in this volume, illustrate the very fine line that is drawn between acceptable and unacceptable forms of violence and Turner's example shows how such a boundary is only crossed after a series of incremental steps have created a sense of disorder. In the end, it may be only the most minor event which marks the shift from the acceptable to the unacceptable, or the legitimate to the illegitimate, and which arouses concern and prompts people to take counter-measures. The case studies in this volume thus indicate a pervasive concern with disorder and a firm idea of the existence of boundaries. However, they also illustrate that such ideas may be only implicit and unreflected.

Victor Turner (1957) emphasized the role that ritual can play in symbolizing and re-establishing order when social norms have been challenged. Analysing the social and political order of Central African communities that are driven by periodic struggles for political ascendancy, he showed competition and rule breach to be integral to the negotiation of the political order. As he describes it, ritual can be used to symbolize and reaffirm the social order at times of unrest. Referring to this discussion, however, Roberts's paper in this volume describes the way in which symbolic resources can be employed within such struggles, in this case the competition for commercial ascendancy. He uses this example to highlight what he considers to be an overemphasis in the social sciences on the significance of ritual and cosmological symbolism in upholding political or 'traditional' authority.

The performance of a ritual may, therefore, explicate the order of a society, but rituals can also symbolize order indirectly. Bertram Turner describes the way certain forms of trance dancing undertaken during annual festivals in Morocco represent social chaos or the inversion of the social order. In this way the local order receives supernatural affirmation. It is ritualized chaos, in such a case, that highlights the order of daily life

to the local population. As other anthropologists have noted, the passage of time, normally unmarked, can be indicated in rites of passage that mark the transition to a new year (Leach 1961, Gell 1996). In a similar way, we would suggest, an underlying, normally unrepresented, form of social order may be marked at times of licensed disorder, such as the ritualized disorder of the carnival.

Just, in this volume, describes legal processes among the Dou Donggo of eastern Sumbawa, Indonesia, during which ritual is used to symbolize disorder. A certain type of behaviour that breaches the social norms, in this case obligations towards kin relations, is formalized and expressed in ritual ways. Instead of challenging the offender by claiming that rights have been infringed, the offended party performs a ritual breach of the norms. This ritual serves as a performative alternative to a discursive method of drawing attention to a serious breach of order. It is not that the ritual symbolizes disorder in the way that carnival does as an inversion of the overall order. Rather, the ritual elements symbolize to the community the occurrence of events that threaten the social order and which require redress, as well as the existence of the underlying cosmic and social order which must be restored by the process of resolution. The judicial proceedings themselves are extremely informal. The most minute signs indicate to the local population the fact that judicial authority is being exercised, conflict has been resolved and order has been restored. If we consider order as a social construction or perception, then, it is apparent that important though they are for a sense of security some forms of order are essentially unreflected. It is this taken-for-granted sense of order that is highlighted by Just's case study of the Dou Donggo. As he describes it, the ritualized, but informal, processes among the Dou Donggo are possible because the elders are known to be restoring the underlying cosmic and social order, which is taken for granted by the community.

In the U.S., by contrast, the judges of the higher courts obtain their authority from the status of their office, which is symbolized in the clothes and trappings of grandeur. Here, as Just points out, order is something that has to be created and imposed on a heterogeneous population. There is no assumption of an underlying social order. The rituals and moral symbolism of the parliament chamber and the court room stand for the elaborately-maintained, all-encompassing order that is guaranteed by the state. Symbols of order can also serve to legitimate the state's authority to use force and violence, of course. It is also now well accepted that engendering a fear of disorder in a population – the imminent threat of terrorism, for example – can successfully legitimate an increase in governmental control in the name of security (Nader 1997). What might otherwise appear as political oppression comes to be accepted as legitimate social control.

Theories of Order

As Roberts points out in his chapter in this volume, two models of order recur in sociological theory, that of the leader and the following, often over-simplistically attributed to Weber, and that of the shared, articulated repertoire of norms, generally associated with the theories of Durkheim. Individual chapters affirm the continuing importance of such models. Social norms remain integral to the construction, maintenance and apprehension of social order and so do institutions, such as the state, that set out to guarantee or impose order. Moreover, as Roberts emphasizes, the issue of attachment between subject and polity and of commitment to norms remains important. What many of the chapters in this volume illustrate, however, is not just the ambiguous role frequently played by the state, but also the parallel institutions that arise, flourish and, often as not, disappear having established a more limited sphere of order. As many chapters illustrate, and as Roberts in this volume demonstrates, the issue of legitimacy, extensively analysed by Weber (1980), and his categories of traditional, charismatic and rational forms of legitimation, continue to be central to the analysis of such cases. They can be extended to informal ordering institutions and even to understand relations between consumers and producers in a complex civil society.

As well as the importance of ordering institutions, there is a persistent notion in the social sciences that, as Roberts puts it, commitment to a shared, articulated repertoire of norms is indispensable to stable social arrangements. Many conceptions of society are based on the notion that society cannot exist without law and norms, and that without them there is disorder or a state of anomie (Durkheim 1930). Any society must develop patterns of behaviour that produce a certain level of predictability. Patterns and regularities in behaviour lead to reliance and expectations on the part of others, so that they inevitably acquire a normative character. These norms, then, come to reflect not only what people generally do, but also indicate how people should behave. In their study of the Tswana, for example, Comaroff and Roberts (1981: 47) illustrated the way in which the basic principles for inclusion in and exclusion from a social group are laid out in its normative system, in particular in kinship rules. These rules define the structure of the society and form the constitutive order underlying its socio-cultural system. However, Comaroff and Roberts also emphasized the importance of social processes, in this case the legal, in maintaining a dynamic social order. Many of the case studies in this volume have similarly illustrated the continuities and changes in normative orders as they develop in practice, and the existence of different or even multiple understandings. They highlight the presence of ambiguity and the space this allows for manoeuvring and negotiation. They thus complement a number of studies in legal anthropology (Moore 1978,

Nader and Todd 1978, F. von Benda-Beckmann 1979, K. von Benda-Beckmann 1984) that have also considered the dynamic characteristics of normative systems, focussing on processes as much as on rules. The chapters in this volume do not, therefore, cast doubt on the fact that normative systems, contested and changeable as they are, can provide a sound basis for social order. Indeed, several chapters underline the importance of shared norms in generating a sense of predictability and order even, or especially, in cases where state law is distant and unreliable.

Georg Simmel (1908) long ago suggested that convergent and divergent currents are inseparably interwoven in all social units. As Roberts points out in this volume, he suggested that an absolutely centripetal and harmonious group could show no real life process. A viable social order cannot exist without a considerable amount of predictability but it also has to allow for a certain amount of indeterminacy and creativity, lest it become suffocatingly rigid (F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 1994: 7). We have already mentioned the competition between social norms that characterizes many societies. In very few social situations are spontaneity, creativity and accident unambiguously condemned and even deliberate rule breaking may be valorized. Such studies are complemented by the chapters of Meeker, Spencer, Just and Roberts, which all analyse dynamics of disorder. These are shown to be inherent features of the societies being studied which deserve an explicit focus of attention.

The models of order attributed to Weber and Durkheim thus continue, as Roberts points out, to inform much modern social theory. They are also inherent in the assumptions and models which underlie the decisions of many policy makers and opinion formers in the modern world (Quarles van Ufford and Roth 2003). The anthropologist should not, therefore, be too quick to abandon their analytic legacy. As Spencer, in this volume, suggests, however, another important, but largely unacknowledged, model of order has arisen in the recent literature on violence and disorder. As he points out, the irreducibility of disorder can be a disturbing and analytically problematic element for the anthropologist, whose task unavoidably involves trying to make sense of another social world. Spencer points out that anthropologists of politics have, since the 1980s, seemingly abandoned their attempts to construct models of political order. The political arenas and processes of the societies they study have, rather, been depicted as sites of instability and contradiction (Taussig 1984, 2003, Nordstrom 1995, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Nevertheless, Spencer suggests, such writers have not abandoned the notion altogether: their analyses do not proceed without any model of order. The structuralist models may have disappeared in their works, but a sense of moral or ethical order has replaced them. Their depictions of violence and oppression, or domination and resistance in particular, set up new dualities and frameworks for analysis. The order of morality may only be implicit but, as Spencer demonstrates, it underlies their depictions of chaos and disorder.

Conclusion

As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, classic paradigms concerning the role of norms, the legitimation of power and the significance of ritual continue to prove their relevance for an understanding of both order and disorder in the modern world. Moreover, order has not disappeared as a matter of concern for those we study. The anthropologist may graphically illustrate the instability and disorder in which his or her informants are struggling to survive, but simultaneously these same informants will be trying to construct spaces of order out of the chaos of their surroundings.

Most of the chapters in this volume reveal the extent to which the state represents a source of disorder as much as of order. However, even in situations of chaos, and even in a social milieu where there are competing sets of social norms and a lack of state control, people can create spaces and processes of order. The case studies reveal the endlessly creative ways in which they do so, through the establishment of relations of trust, by drawing on images of locality, through appeals to 'ancient' tradition and religious norms, by allowing a certain latitude to those who defy the norms, as well as by employing violent and coercive tactics. Processes of order can be found in the interstices between state and society, in the spaces left by a weak or retreating state or in the disorderly dynamics of the political realm. When asking about order, we would suggest, the question of location is all important. Order is not necessarily a quality of society as a whole.

The case studies also demonstrate the fragility of many of these dynamics of order, the thin line that can be drawn between order and disorder and the centrality of the notion of predictability. They also indicate the deep-seated, underlying ideas about order that many social groups share, ideas that may be unreflected until an event occurs to disturb them, possibly the excessive use of force on the part of those who purport to guarantee order. Such notions of order are not necessarily synonymous with a state of peace and security, which explains why in many situations people can live with violence, competition and rule breaking. Order can be analysed as a state, but it can also be approached as a matter of perception, as a social construction. The anthropologist must pay attention to both and it is the relationship between the state of society, viewed objectively, and local perceptions of order that is one of the most fruitful avenues for enquiry.

Notes

1. Five years have produced at least six volumes: Aijmer and Abbink (2000), Schmidt and Schröder (2001), Stewart and Strathern (2002), Eckert (2004), Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) and Whitehead (2004).

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