
Book Reviews

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1 Artists of the Possible. Governing Networks and American Policy Change since 1945

by: Matt Grossmann

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In the history, empires awaken love and hate. Admired by their sophisticated style of life which is one-sided imposed to periphery, but at the same time neglected by the unilateral decisions made in international affairs, empires centralise the steps to fill the political vacuum delineating the international agenda (Revel, 2003; Korstanje, 2015). In this respect, it is important not to lose the sight that *American democracy* has been questioned and praised during decades, but aside from this few studies have explained with clarity how policies and decisions are made as *The Artists of the Possible*, the recent book of Matt Grossmann professor at Michigan State University, USA. In this polemic but not for that less fascinating project, he explores adamantly the insularity of US policy makers which are not permeated by public opinion, nor elections. In six chapters only, Grossmann carefully places the concept of democracy under the lens of scrutiny. As it has been envisaged by the founding parents of the USA, democracy was based on a process of political decentralisation which was legitimised by autonomy of powers. This smooth functioning pressed political actors and their respective institutions to negotiate with others parts of the same system. As a result of this, executive branch has faced serious problems to promote radical changes in the ways popular demands and claims are addressed. The fact is that neither individuals nor groups of pressure gravitate in how laws are passed or vetoed.

“The book challenges Americans’ view of democratic government. Despite Abraham Lincoln’s vision that our government is of the people, by the people and for people, there is little evidence that the most important outcomes of the policy process follow uniformly from the opinion of American public of their expressions in elections. Instead, these inputs matter for policymaking only alongside factors like research and interest group lobbying, each under a limited set of circumstances. Policymakers can and do collectively ignore public opinion and the direction of elections result, sometimes by enacting contrary policy but most often by making no change at all.” (p.9)

Based on the needs of protecting the interests of status-quo, this decentralised system, which was consolidated after 1945, leads elected officials to dialogue with other agents, institutions and actors. The preliminary chapters discuss the conceptual background and the methodological instruments to obtain the information. The problem of the specialised

literature in political science to understand how achieving policy works in the USA is been critically debated. Defying four of the most-used theories in political science, US policymaking follows its own dynamic, as Grossmann observed. The question whether *agenda setting* a model oriented to focus on media and information processing as a valid mechanism to prioritise some issues over others, does not work, this happens because there are serious doubts US agreement seems not to be a necessary step in policymaking process. By the way, *macro politics* which is a second family of theories emphasises on the ideological control of the government to pose not only its interests but policies. The input of factors as election results, ideologies and public opinion plays a vital role by enacting some policies while others are simply ignored. The third position is for those studies that form the family of *issue typologies*. Social change is possible whenever agreement is reached in some area of common interest while others should be re-considered. Negotiations and majorities play a crucial role at this stage. Finally, *actor success* is viewed as a conceptual corpus which considers the influence of some actors in the lapse of time evaluating not only the already-accomplished attempts but the probabilities of success to know what of these attempts led to efficient policy change. One by one, Grossmann enumerates the limitations these theories exhibits for US politics.

Centring his content on analysis in almost 790 policy enactment since 1945, Grossmann combines an accurate diagnosis of policymaking process with other sources which ranges from social network analysis to the comparison with public laws and other secondary sort of documents. The main thesis of this work is that entrepreneurs and proponent of change face serious barriers for accessing to rights local voices are asking for. The different institutions and actors not only prevent but also are for little policy change to be granted. In a decentralised system where checks and balances cause disadvantaging effects, not surprisingly, governments should overcome many obstacles to echo popular demand. This is the reason why agenda setting theory does not suffice to explain local claimers or discontent does not affect financial elite. This point is widely addressed through chapter 3. Nonetheless, from 1961–1976, the federal government enacted numerous policies in its favour not only to strength their power before the other legislative powers, but a new governing network that faced serious political instability resulting from the advance of uncontrolled changes. Rather than achieving a sensible system to popular claims, it becomes in what specialists called ‘long great society’ (chapter 4). This period was characterised not only by a prolific policymaking enactments, but by the convergence of presidents, group interests and entrepreneurs to legislate for peoples. Influenced by liberal spirit, the long great society was a result of the convergence of political coalitions, which beyond any ideology, embraced a point of agreement. Neither media nor ideology exerts influence in the Long Great Society’s inception. Five and six sections review the disparity of actors as well as the orchestration of interests sometimes leads towards the failures in policy change. Of course, this was the dilemma of academic and conceptual models to explain the typologies of actor success. Though at the micro level, American democracy encourages individual entrepreneurship, at macro-level it goes in the opposite direction. The current theory of US policymaking shows some limitations to precise the impacts of media in real politics. And this happens because it was constructed on a status quo bias, Grossmann concludes. Though the Madisonian model is successful in limiting social change instilled by governmental policymaking, which benefits the balance among powers, but it runs the costs of limiting popular expression. Not only fascinating but pungent in the argument, *Artists of the Possible* exhibits a solid argument to the ebbs and flows of US administrations as well as

sheds the light on understanding how governing elites have monopolised the political stability by the adoption of a decentralised system.

Personally, as a Latin American social scientist, I found Grossmann's argument particularly helpful in two main senses. Though democracy has been developed in Spanish speaking countries following a direct form of representation, which means that presidents are elected by direct majority in public elections, historically they conducted their administrations echoing popular claims; sometimes even abusing from their affordable resource of policymaking to concentrate more legitimacy, or in others by the introduction of presidential decrees to prevent social discontent. Obviously, populist strategies achieved a more fluid dialogue between government and lay-citizens, but not for that less political instability. The vertical tactic exerted by officials generated certain autonomy for executive branch respecting to senate and legal jurisprudence as well as serious dispute with other leaders. These conflicts surely paved the pathways for the advent of military forces in intervening in public politics. Coups not only were attempts to financial oligarchies to retain the legitimacy, before populist leaders, but an efficient mechanism of social control. However, this does not authorise to confirm Americans are more democratic than Argentinians. At some extent, democracy (as it was designed by the USA) developed a complex networking system where the different involving blocs negotiate with other forces for promoting or preventing social change but this evolves at the back of people. Therefore, we coin the term *Anglo-democracy* to denote political systems where leaders are not elected by direct majority. This begs some pungent questions, to what extent is the USA the cradle of democracy? Is the USA keeping the same republican order which was described by Grossmann even post 9/11? Anyway, these are more than fascinating issues which merit to be discussed in next approaches.

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2 Globalization of American Fear Culture: The Empire in the Twenty-First Century by: Geoffrey R. Skoll Published 2016 by Palgrave Macmillan Flatiron Building, 175 5th Ave, 10010, New York, NY, 226pp ISBN: 978-113757033-8

The idea that capitalist system reproduces by the growth of inequality and poverty is not new since it has been discussed widely by Marxism and post-Marxism in the four corners of the world. However, the intersection of terrorism and capitalism seems be a heated discussion which today retains considerable concern from scholarship. We are told that working is the best project in what we can spend our time whereas terrorism is an act of hatred-filled hearts or maniacs. But to what extent it is true?

In his recent book, *Globalization of American Fear Culture*, Geoff Skoll continues a much deeper discussion instilled by former work, *Social theory of Fear*. At a closer look, the act of governing through fear is used by the USA to create a culture of mistrust. From the onset, the USA was based on the belief that the world as a dangerous place to live. Over recent decades in 20th century, fear was used to enhance the legitimacy of elite, sometimes oriented for the workforce to accept policies otherwise would be rejected. At the time, capital and American Empire expanded to colonise new worlds, a much deeper sentiment of fear accompanied the politics. Therefore, it is safe to say we live in a world characterised by a 'global fear' which is functional to a particular way of making politics. One of the aspects facilitated the expansion of capitalism was the idea that citizens live in the best of the possible worlds. Beyond the boundaries of consuming society, of course, any change represents a threat for popular parlance, a barrier to overcome. In the first chapter, Skoll traces the historical roots of the culture of fear in the USA. In retrospect, the capitalist system and theories of economy showed widely that accumulation only is feasible if we introduce exploitation as a key factor to produce and distribute wealth in few hands. The monopolisation of surplus value, as Marx puts it, resulted not only from human creativity but by the means of elite to commoditise labour into exchangeable goods. The number of rank-and-file workers involved in a process of production affects directly the profits of capital owners. From that moment on, the capital reproduction seems to be always in detriment of workforce. In this mayhem, whenever the conflict rises, fear undermines the possibilities of claimers and protesters to impose their views. Two major instruments were used by privileged classes to keep the control, ideology and repression. While the latter appealed to surveillance to exert violence against the pathological agents, the latter one was enrooted in a process of fear-mongering that limited the negotiation of worker unions. After 9/11, total forms of control were established in private life subordinating individual rights to the collective well-being, which means a more secure society. Leisure industries were witness of obstructive methods of surveillance over lay citizens. It was unfortunate that this trend makes from the USA a fascist state. This is a very interesting introductory section where author combines his erudition pitting historical cases where governments used fear in their favour against US and its Anglo-allies in the war on terror. In the second chapter, Skoll discusses to what extent elite in the USA devoted its resources to forge a culture of fear which passed from communism towards terrorism. The organisation of labour conjoined to profit maximisation is two key factors behind the manipulation of fear. Though actors changed, the dynamic are the same. Doubtless, this is one of the merits place Geoffrey Skoll now as a must-read author in terrorism issues. Chapter 3 explores the model of four wars as it was formulated by Skoll where he confirms a polemic thesis. From its inception, the USA was always an imperialist power which struggled in four major events, *Philippine War*, *Korean War*, *Cold War* and *Vietnam War*. Though the two total world wars involved the USA as well, no less true is that in these events the USA played the role of an empire inspiring a model that situates the USA as the 'administrator' of capitalism. The management of exploitation centres in a genocidal campaign by disciplining communists. In the chapter 4 and 5, the problem of identity and liberal consumerism are placed under the lens of critical scrutiny. The period 1968–1973 not only encouraged a liberalisation of human relationship, it induced substantial changes in economies worldwide. During this age, the spin doctors of capitalism precaritised the power of workers paving the pathways for the rise of neoliberalism during 90s decade. As this backdrop, the expansion of US as the unique imperial power was possible after

the collapse of Soviet Union, but without the legacy of the UK in financial leadership, it would have never taken place. One mantle passed from one power to other as US enthralled as the centre of manufacture and trade. The globalisation of fear is assessed in chapter six, seven and eight. The direct intervention or full-scale led wars are ideologically legitimised by the needs of bringing the ideals of American democracy, liberty, freedom and mobility. However, at the bottom, this globalised culture of fear hidden dark interests associated to exploitation. Paradoxically, these types of interventions suggest that terrorism needs the use of force, but in so doing, impotence and deprivation surface. To set an example, Skoll adds, whilst US supported by financial investors, IMF or ONG arrives to Middle East to take the local politics on its hands, a state of chaos and political instability dominates the environment. The allegory of war on terror leads governments not to tackle off real dangers produced by capitalism as pollution or global warming. Last but not least, eight and nine chapters formulate ground-breaking suggestions to stop with the discourse of fear. Unless otherwise resolved, the question whether US and its domains pays attention to terrorism as the main threat of West covering other most terrible risks, one dangles that the probabilities our civilisation collapses are higher than thought. Anyway, citizens are prone to develop sustainable practices of consumption that encourages a real democracy from the bottom to the top.

After further review, I feel professor Skoll presents a well-argued book which is a result of years of academic maturation and research. Starting from the premise post-Marxian studies have a lot to say in terrorism issues, most of them discriminated by academy, Skoll exerts a radical and illustrative criticism on the 'culture of fear' in the USA. It gives us an impressive snapshot of the USA so that readers may expand their understanding of what capitalism is. To my end, this is one of those books which are a must-read reference...

In future approaches, Skoll should resolve what Korstanje dubbed as 'Hobbesian dilemma of politics', which means that Marxism was wrong respecting to the role of power in societal fabric (reproaching the argument more to Max Weber). To put this in bluntly, with Thomas Hobbes we learned that fear underlies in the worlds of politics even during democracy. Although economic production plays a vital role in the formation of society, it is not determinant. There is nothing like a progress towards an end of class struggle, which advances through history. This suggests that society is not affected by fear but it results from the imposition of mechanisms oriented to discipline fear. In other terms, society is created by the fear. The problem with wayward Puritans lies in the fact they have developed a cosmology of conflict where sublimation is only affordable by the imposition of sacrifice. The sense of predestination closed their future in order for Anglo-worker to demonstrate he deserves salvation. In this stage, social Darwinism did the rest. Capitalism worked not only by the culture of fear or consumption imposed to citizens, but by the fact that they enter in competence with others with an exaggerated idea about their real probabilities of success. Because of Americans feel special, superior or even supermen, narcissism undergirds the social trust. The survival of the strongest is the final goal, but behind this, only one is the winner. We can see scenes of this nature in main reality shows as Big brother or even in films as *Hunger Games*, where the glory of few entails the ruin of the rest. This is a normal ideological resource to normalise the precarisation of workforce. Inevitably, the war of all against all emulated by Darwinism

allows the reproduction of material asymmetries by means capitalism expands (Korstanje, 2015).

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3 **Anger and Forgiveness. Resentment, Generosity, Justice**

by: Martha C. Nussbaum

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In this new book, Martha C. Nussbaum, Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at University of Chicago, USA, explores a more than interesting and pungent topic which associates to the exercise of violence, the derived sentiment of anger, and finally its intersection to forgiveness. She distinguishes anger from grief and other emotions in the following way.

While grief requires for certain restoration, denoting an earlier loss, anger signals to accomplish something on the perpetrator. Though both are inextricably intertwined, they evolve for different channels. In the same way, hatred looks to efface the other, whereas anger paves the ways for the rise of an answer to be heard by society. With these definitions in mind, Nussbaum sees though anger often situates as a useful emotion, no less true is that retribution is not feasible without forgiveness. Those persons who have experienced a loss, mourning or traumatic event are prone to construct a genuine memory only if they embrace what she calls ‘transition-anger’.

In the introductory chapter, a coherent map of the book is presented for readers, commenting briefly her disposition to anger and generosity. In fact, what this book proposes, besides being of interests of philosophers and social scientists concerned by human right violation issues, seems to be an efficient reaction to understand the effects of ‘wrong-doing’. In this respect, while the roads towards forgiveness start with anger when a terrible crime is committed by others, *transational forgiveness* sublimates grief into justice. This happens simply because, Nussbaum adds, anger not only is necessary but also helps in considering wrong-doers seriously. Western societies appeal to use tactics for downgrading offenders, which produces some counter-effect reactions. Doubtless, one might believe that angers leads to justice, when victims do not become in judges. Rather, the second chapter centres on the philosophical borders of anger and weakness. This raises the question whether anger should be considered as a problem of moral life as it was formulated in the current philosophical literature or as a derivative action normally triggered by an inflicted harm. Well, in these terms, she holds that “anger starts with the act that inflicted damage, seeing it as intentionally inflicted by the target – and then, as a

result, one becomes angry, and one's anger is aimed at the target. Anger, then, requires causal thinking and some grasp of the right and wrong" (p.17).

Over recent decades, psychologists acknowledged that anger may be rechanneled towards the fields of experience, working together in order for the self to evaluate new course of actions. To put this slightly in other terms, this suggests that any harm is accompanied by a reaction which is previously determined by the needs of retribution, which are cemented in the memory of a person or its group, but what does happen when the affected person is a friend or a relative?

To answer this above formulated question, Nussbaum elegantly argues that anger often is rechanneled through three roads. The first (most common) is based on narcissism and consists in downgrading the status of offender to the extent affected person and its in-group recovers their sense of security. In this vein, by humiliating criminals serves as a mechanism for good people to feel 'special' or restoring their harmed-ego. The second road lies in the 'payback', doing to offender the same one suffers. Nussbaum indicates neither the logic of payback, nor debasement is fruitful for society. Needless to say, there is a third option, which corresponds with organizing all resources not only to rehabilitate criminal, but also preventing the same traumatic event or crime happen to others. Her main thesis is that anger contributes to correct those factors that generate social injustice.

Third chapter, entitled *Forgiveness a genealogy*, Nussbaum discusses to what she dubbed the procedural aspects of forgiveness, which means the bridge between the omnipresent God and his offspring. Unlike other mythological structures, Judaism first and Christianity later agreed a covenant with God that upended the nature of anger. While God has the only right to manifest his anger because of human sins, we (mortals) are limited only to forgiveness. In chapters 4 and 5, which are purely descriptive, the argument of justification is placed under the lens of scrutiny. The fact is that when anger is morally justified, some others inappropriate emotions may very well surface. As Nussbaum puts it, people always wish not to be punished, and of course, anger provides with a coherent justification people to be sanctioned to reinforce the law. She dissects the ancient philosophical dilemma that anger is essential for trust and social cohesion. What is important to discuss is that not only emotions are useful to construct the other, but it is important not to lose the sight some emotions as anger can subordinate this other to the desires of ego. The restant chapters (6, 7 and 8) reviews the stoic legacy and the concept of 'the middle realm', For this philosophical wave, far from being functional to community, anger encourages some social reforms to make this life more just, but at the same time, paradoxically, unless regulated it involves person into a life-consuming road to death. But anger takes positive connotations stoics has ignored. Some historical examples as the moral position to Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela interrogates on the reasonable uses of forgiveness.

This book represents an all-encompassing model to expand the current understanding of justice, anger and forgiveness. When I say 'all encompassing', I mean to multi-varied themes which not only are very hard to grasp but also oscillates from criminal justice, to ethnic cleansing and genocides. In view of that, her argument permeates the logic of ethics, providing a fresh alternative to discussion in academic fields and specialized literature. Likely, this excerpt synthesizes the main core of the project,

“My focus has been the institution of the criminal justice system, not the emotions of actors within it. By now, however, we see that many roles within the system have discretion built into them, and to that extent require people who can inhabit those emotional roles well. People cannot be good judges or jurors if they are robotic or unresponsive. However, it is also crucial that they do not let their emotions wash all over the place, that they inhabit the carefully demarcated emotional roles that a decent system constructs for them.”
[Nussbaum, (2016), p.209]

As the previous statement given, criminal justice system faces a rise of claims and demands (from citizens) for stronger punishment against criminals. Ideologically, this tendency which flourished in penology some decades ago resulted in the needs to accept some policies oriented to achieve a climate of political governance (Simon, 2007), however despite the financial investment and plans for rehabilitation, these policies failed to control criminality and delinquency. The conception of criminality, which is based on precautionary principle, called the attention to the needs of using disciplinary instruments to isolate criminals, ignoring their needs to be re-educated. In terms of Nussbaum, although this enhanced the armed ego of citizenry to recover its sense of security, the problem came out of control.

Quite aside from any polemic, ethically, Nussbaum’s book helps reader to discern between populism in penology, and a theory of anger which leads to further understanding. As Korstanje and Skoll (2016) observed, for some reason, capitalism imposed a new atmosphere where not only forgiveness is annulated, but also criminals should be marked in order for enforcing law-making. This paradoxical stage creates a double hermeneutic circle, where offenders are used as commodities in order to highlight the importance of the mainstream cultural values of capitalism. Therefore, far from what popular opinion precludes, which supposes states are inefficient to fight against criminality, Korstanje and Skoll (2016) pose the opposite thesis, states are promoting ‘criminality and resentment’ for gaining further governance.

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