

*Sociologists in a global age: Biographical perspectives*  
Deflem, M. (ed.) (2007). Aldershot: Ashgate.

*Reviewed by David Pearson*

How many of us go to international conferences to see in person a sociologist whose work has achieved fame or notoriety, or wondered what the author of this book or article we are reading is really like? Perhaps we will protest that we are only interested in the text and its arguments or information, and to admit to a kind of mild voyeurism is superficial and inappropriate. Yet, if, as most first year sociology texts still assert, much of the sociological imagination ties back to Wright Mills' equation of private troubles and public issues, greater understanding of the background of our practitioners should aid our grasp of their perspectives.

I confess I opened this book with some anticipation, since, with very few exceptions, many of the contributors to this anthology (Albrow, Sassen, Munch, Morawska, Sztompka, Tiryakian, for example), were very familiar to me, but I knew nothing about what they looked like and their biographical backgrounds; or they were entirely new names and faces that I looked forward to reading about. In this sense, Mathieu Deflem's project succeeded in whetting my appetite, but fell short of providing a full menu.

The editor's aim was to bring together a variety of sociologists from across the world and request them to write about their personal journeys along the paths that brought them to their discipline and guided them through their careers. The contributors were asked to provide details about their autobiography and how this shaped their entry and continuance within their profession and to reflect on significant others and events that impacted on their lives and sociological work. They were also required to write about how their theoretical and/or methodological orientations related back to the social and intellectual contexts they found themselves in and to comment on how they saw their futures. This is a big ask, and few of the contributors really succeed in conveying all these aspects in a lively and accessible fashion; although

in some instances, I suspect an opportunity to relay their thoughts in their first language would have added more texture to their personal expression.

Deflem admits to not having any explicit plan to construct a particular sample of individuals, nor did he attempt to provide a gender or ethnic balance. He also concedes that his contributors, whilst coming from varying European and non-European backgrounds, tended to have some United States connection. Five of the seventeen contributors are female, and three are working in Japan (and USA), China and South Korea, with another of Egyptian birth who moved to England as a child, but ended up in the States. All the others are men of American or European ancestry. Does this matter? In one sense no, because all these sociologists have moved between countries, their work expands beyond the confines of their upbringings, and they, would rightly, deny any attempt to pigeonhole them into essentialist compartments. Yet reading this in Aotearoa, I felt disappointed that so many parts of the globe, including our own, are missing in this collection.

Who are the standouts in an anthology that runs the gamut from fairly dull place and name dropping, through undisguised grandstanding, to essays that succeed in capturing the delights and anxieties of doing sociology – with the added bonus of literary merit and humour? Karin Knorr-Cetina beautifully conveys the interlacing of the local and global in her life and work in a chapter that stamps her personality on its pages, and Ewa Morawska, traversing a life lived in Poland, America and now England, neatly shows us how her own research on migration flowed out of her personal experience. Whilst shifting from Cairo to post-War London, and ending up in Tacoma, Leon Grunberg evocatively relates how he stumbled into sociology through literary and political interests that many of us can empathize with. Plus a nice, wry piece from Piotr Szompka, who sticks closely to his editor's recommendations and provides his own useful prescriptions for how to succeed and survive in our discipline.

So who will read this book? Researchers seeking a more personal slant on colleagues whose work they have found illuminating, and students looking for ways to ground the often abstract words and worlds

their teachers try and get them to enter. More hopefully, perhaps anyone who's reading of these essays encourages them to find other pages these people have written – and make sociology part of their own lives. This volume only partly fulfills its promise, but it might inspire someone else to stretch the academic and geographical boundaries a little further. Whatever their origins, the editor and his contributors should be thanked for allowing us to see who they were, are, and might be, as sociologists in their own local and global settings.

## Instructions for Contributors

**Submission of manuscripts:** All manuscripts submitted will be considered for publication, on the understanding that they are original material and are not being considered for publication elsewhere. Please submit only finished manuscripts.

Manuscripts should not exceed 8,000 words, and files should be submitted to the managing editor as an attachment, preferably in Microsoft Word rich text format. If you are unable to attach a file to an e-mail message, please contact the managing editor to find another means of transmission.

The author's name(s), departmental or institutional affiliations, snail-mail and e-mail addresses, and a short biography of each author should appear on the first page of the paper. A short (100 word) abstract of the paper should be included.

**Specifications for manuscripts:** Authors should consult articles in current issues of *New Zealand Sociology* on general matters of editorial style, e.g. titles and headings, indentation of paragraphs, form of referencing, etc. Do **not** underline any words in the text. Please ensure that your text conforms to UK spelling rather than American.

**Graphics:** Type each table on a separate sheet with as few lines as possible, and indicate the placing of the table in the text. Use wide spacing in tables. Tables should be numbered in Arabic figures with a clear legend to identify the table. Drawings (graphs, figures, etc.) should be on good quality white paper and on separate sheets.

**Footnotes and references:** Footnotes are to be reserved for substantive commentary. Number them from 1 upwards. The location of each footnote in the text must be indicated by the appropriate superscript numeral. Footnotes will appear at the foot of the page where they are located.