



The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy (Global Issues Series)

Michael Herzfeld

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In this fascinating book, Michael Herzfeld argues that 'modern' bureaucratically regulated societies are no more 'rational' or less 'symbolic' than the societies traditionally studied by anthropologists. Drawing primarily on the example of modern Greece and utilizing other European materials, he suggests that we cannot understand national bureaucracies divorced from local-level ideas about chance, personal character, social relationships and responsibility. He points out that both formal regulations and day-to-day bureaucratic practices rely heavily on the symbols and language of the moral boundaries between insiders and outsiders; a ready means of expressing prejudice and of justifying neglect. It therefore happens that societies with proud traditions of generous hospitality may paradoxically produce at the official level some of the most calculated indifference one can find anywhere.

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