



**Global political ethnography:  
A methodological approach to studying  
global policy regimes**

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*“Producing ethnography is ongoing, and so are its effects” (Rancatore 2010: 75).*

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this working paper is to sketch out the contours of an emerging methodology for studying global policy regimes at a time when changing world orders, new actors, and new technologies challenge and transform these regimes.<sup>1</sup> In fields such as environment and climate change, migration, development, natural resources, trade, and state & peace-building, comprehensive policy regimes have developed to deal with problems at a global scale. The policy processes involve a wide range of international, national, trans- and subnational, governmental and non-governmental actors; they blur or redefine boundaries of private and public domains, of the state and the ‘non-state’; and they produce effects (and affect) at many different levels.

The paper focuses on the role of ethnography in global policy studies. Ethnography is apt for studying meanings and effects of policies among people ‘on the ground’ but may also be used to ‘study up’ (Nader 1972); that is to study policies among their makers, translators (Latour 1986), and unmakers, and to understand how assemblages of knowledge, policy, practice and technology come together, transform, and fall apart. Closely associated with the study of context and contextualization, ethnography can help to show how the encompassing, abstract and mobile templates of global policies are articulated in a contingent, unstable, and messy inter-

relationships that make up the ‘lives’ of policies. Interpretative policy and organizational studies have shown that the lives of policies are formed by dynamics and rationalities that have less to do with their explicit aims than with their capacity to bring together policy actors or to depoliticize highly political issues, and with contingencies, turf battles, and institutional interests. We suggest that ethnography provides approaches that are well suited to studying these kinds of dynamics and contingencies which seem to be even more important with the degrees of complexity and encompassment that characterize current global policies.

As Shore and Wright (2011) suggest, policy studies can provide windows onto ‘larger processes of governance, power and social change that are shaping the world today’ (Shore and Wright 2001: 1), which is a very good reason in itself for developing this kind of studies. But they might also point to reasons why policies often fail to reach their aims, why they can have more unintended than intended effects, or why they continue to be reproduced despite poor ‘results’. One example would be state- and peace-building policies that emphasize the importance of context, local ownership and non-state actors while consistently producing abstract, state-centered blueprints and marginalizing local actors (Baranyi and Desrosiers 2012).

Linked to the surging popularity of ANT, as well as practice-oriented and pragmatic approaches in social and political studies, the interest in ethnography seems to be increasing in various disciplines and fields of policy studies. Thus, we see how political ethnography, political anthropology, global ethnography, and interpretative policy analysis, are converging across disciplines to form a dynamic field worth exploring with a focus on global policy analysis. At the same time,

<sup>1</sup> This working paper was written to frame the discussions at the international workshop, ‘Global Political Ethnography: Studying Policy Regimes in Flux’, at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), November 25-26, 2014.

the use of ethnography in the analysis of different policy fields is uneven, and disciplines that have incorporated ethnography vary in their understanding and use of the methodology.

On this background, the purpose of this working paper is twofold: Firstly, we seek to contribute to the emerging cross-disciplinary dialogue and provide some common ground for discussions by introducing different academic fields in which ethnographic studies of politics and (global) policies are developing. We do not pretend to provide a full overview of these extensive fields, but since it is our impression that disciplinary developments to some degree have taken place in isolation from one another – political ethnography separately from political anthropology,<sup>2</sup> and analysis of international policies separately from domestic policy analysis<sup>3</sup> – we will present the different strands of ethnographic engagement with the political as building blocks to consider the development of a global political ethnography.

Secondly, the paper focuses on and seeks to push the methodological discussions concerning how to approach ethnographically the highly complex global policy processes that are currently developing. What are the appropriate empirical scale(s) and units of analysis when studying global policy networks? How are the voices and practices of actors operating at different scales and in different sites balanced, weighed, and connected in policy narratives informed by ethnographic analysis? In order to identify sites, encounters, situations and materials where ethnographic approaches can generate different and maybe more critical insights than more conventional approaches to global pol-

icy analysis, we need conceptually and theoretically informed reflections. We will consider various contributions, including global ethnography and others that provide valuable suggestions and building blocks. But there is a lot more to be done conceptually and theoretically to develop what we will call a global political ethnography as such.

The paper is organized in three parts: the first looks into ideas and practices of ethnography; the second part focuses on approaches to studying policy and the political, including political ethnography, political anthropology and interpretive policy analysis; and the third part discusses different contributions that have taken on the challenge of studying ethnographically the lives of global policies in a context of accelerated processes of globalization through concepts of scale, network, field, apparatus and assemblages. Together, these contributions draw the contours of an emerging field of global political ethnography.

## **ETHNOGRAPHY: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND BEYOND**

In this paper, ethnography is taken as a collective term for method and methodology, that is, data collection techniques on the one hand and the consideration of epistemological and ontological issues in the research process on the other (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2002). What concerns us most here is methodology. But since ethnography has long been associated with the method of participant observation in particular, we will start by discussing issues of method in the scholarly literature that deals with the ethnographic study of global governance and policy.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Joseph and Auyero 2007

<sup>3</sup> See Yanow 2015

A great strength of ethnography is its ability to generate empirical data, which otherwise would not feed into scientific thinking and policy analysis. Ethnography enables grounded knowledge by way of the researcher immersing herself in the setting(s) relevant to the object of study and connecting the units of data to an analytical whole that generates intimate understandings of local practices and social relations. Through critical reflection and theoretical consultation, the empirical experiences generated through fieldwork can be translated into scientific discourses that deepen, or even change, our understanding of social life and, perhaps, to the reformulation of theory.

Broadly speaking, we may characterize ethnography as ‘the science of contextualization’ in which context is ‘construed through personal relationships bound by self-knowledge, expectation, and commitment, and by language, memory, and imagination to registers and relativities of experience beyond the present here and now’ (Greenhouse 2010: 2). Thus, ethnography always involves ‘experience-based inquiry into the interpretive, institutional, and relational makings of the present’ (ibid.).

Within anthropology, participant observation has been the ethnographic method par excellence since Malinowski. In the words of the Comaroffs, any first-hand knowledge generated by participant observation has enjoyed an ‘a priori privilege’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003: 153). Thus, for anthropologists more than for ethnographically inclined scholars from other disciplines, the dominant model of fieldwork has been a ‘celebrated and mystified notion of “being there”’ (Hannerz 2003: 202).

Several voices from within the discipline have challenged the hegemony of ethnography as participant observation. Notably,

scholars who have been ‘studying up’ (Nader 1972), looking into elites, security communities, criminal networks or similar, have experienced problems of ‘being there’. In such studies, access to fieldwork sites, informants and knowledge can be particularly challenging, and the method of participant observation thus less applicable. Gusterson, who studied nuclear power plant laboratories with no access granted, developed instead of participant observation an approach that he calls ‘polymorphous engagement’. Gusterson interacted with informants across sites, sometimes in virtual form, and used a mix of interviews, newspaper and document reading (Gusterson 1997: 116). He even conducted ‘journalistic interviews’ and talked on the phone to the same extent as participant observation in traditional fieldwork. Indeed, as Forsey (2010) has suggested, there are many situations in which the ethnographer is participant *listening*, rather than participant *observing*.

Obviously, the intensified processes of globalization in the 1990s presented a different kind of challenge to the traditional ethnographic approach in anthropology. In response, Marcus (1995) introduced the idea of multi-sited fieldwork. This approach promised a way of updating ethnography as a relevant methodology to study phenomena dispersed across borders and articulated in flexible networks. Multi-sited ethnography broke with static and mono-locational conceptualizations of community, identity and culture. It had as its object(s) of study the connections and relations within a system by, literally, following the people, the thing, the symbol, and other conceptual entities.

However, as Hannerz (2003) has observed, even multi-sited studies are not necessarily served by repeating the participant observation mantra of ‘being there ... and there ...

and there' for an extended period of time. He argues that since multi-local studies typically focus on topics that are trans-local – in Hannerz' case foreign news correspondents – it is less a question for the ethnographer of confining herself to singular localities where she should know everybody. Rather the task is to get into the dispersed networks; being present in particular sites at particular moments, such as conferences, festivals or meetings; and making extensive use of a range of documents. The trans-local object under study could also be an abstraction, such as the state, in which case the ethnographer cannot reduce the object of study to the object of observation (Trouillot 2001).

Another difference from the 'being there' model of fieldwork regards the perception of 'local' interlocutors as specialists in their own culture. The global condition means that there are no true natives; as Ferguson (1999) notes, nobody 'can claim to understand it all or even take it all in' (Ferguson 1999: 208). Since also the informants find the world opaque, we have to understand both the 'structure of knowledge' and the 'nature and social organization of ignorance and misunderstandings' (Hannerz 2003: 210). Further, the intensified processes of globalization have also challenged 'place' as a bounded methodological construct (Appadurai 1995), and hence the nature of the paradigmatic anthropological 'field'. Grappling with the changing field of anthropological fieldwork, Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 26) suggested that ethnographers employ '[c]reatively eclectic methodological strategies', which include close observation of everyday life, as well as more macro-level textual approaches (see Li 2007 for an example). This, again, releases the ethnographer from 'being there,' while activating through critical reflection the anthropologist's special sensibil-

ity of being an insider and outsider at the same time.

Despite these and many other critical voices, anthropologists have tended to hold on to the primacy of participant observation and hence of 'being there'. This, according to Feldman (2011a) and others, is an expression of the empiricism that permeates the discipline. He argues that 'anthropology has not made a decisive epistemological distinction between ethnography and participant observation because it has not clearly distinguished between 'connections' and 'relations' as methodological constructs' (Feldman 2011a: 378). In Feldman's interpretation, connections and relations differ qualitatively: whereas connections implies the anthropologist mapping the links between geographically separated people and sites in the way suggested by Marcus, relations imply the study of abstract, arbitrary and mediated contact (Feldman 2011a). Here, the mediating agents can be money/exchange value, policy discourses, social norms, objectifying techniques of governance etc.

As we will return to below, Feldman uses the notion of 'apparatus' to conceptualize this complex of mediating agents. He emphasizes the abstract, non-local nature of the apparatus and hence the inadequacy of an empiricist ethnography based on direct, face-to-face engagement. Instead, he suggests a 'non-local ethnography' – performed by means of a pragmatic mixture of methods such as archival studies, media analysis, observation and interviews – claiming to maintain the essence of participant observation in terms of its two key qualities: first, the 'value of displacement', the removal from the familiar, as a way of interrogating or problematizing the hegemony of the taken-for-granted of the researcher; and second, the possibility of knowing the role of contingency by seeing how chance, contestation, alliance, petty mal-

ice, etc. may produce change or continuity at critical moments (Feldman 2011: 46).

## **ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE POLITICAL**

Roughly speaking, ethnographic approaches to the study of the political have been limited and marginal in social and political science for decades. On the one hand, scholars in international relations and political science – the *staatswissenschaft* so enmeshed with the development of the modern state – have focused on formal political institutions, even though there has been some recent interest in the use of ethnographic approaches in these disciplines.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, anthropology became intimately identified with ethnography in the 20th century – but the discipline’s relationship to the political has for decades been limited by various impasses, as we will show below. In parts of sociology, in particular due to the legacy of the Chicago School’s use of participant observation, scholars have held on to ethnographic approaches. But the sociological engagement with ethnography in the study of politics and the political has been minimal (Joseph and Ayuero 2007).

Since the 1990s, however, things have changed somewhat. Anthropology has seen an invigorated political anthropology develop, whereas in political science, IR, sociology and other disciplines a growing, though still marginal, interest in political ethnography has (re-)emerged. Contributing to this has been the influence of pragmatic and practice-

oriented approaches, as well as the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) – not least via the work of Latour, who is greatly inspired by anthropology. These approaches have foregrounded ethnographic approaches as a way of getting closer to practice and the ‘heterogeneous realities that enter into the fabrication of some state of affairs’ (Latour 2005: 142; Bueger 2013). In this section we will briefly point to the somewhat parallel developments of political anthropology and political ethnography, as well as interpretative policy analysis. These approaches focus on policy, rather than politics in general. They are energized by their opposition to mainstream positivist policy analysis and have gathered momentum in the 2000s as a forum for ethnographic and other forms of interpretative approaches. The three fields all contribute to what we see as the emerging field of global political ethnography.

### **Political anthropology**

Whereas anthropology was always about politics in some sense, the discipline has persistently had difficulties in locating and bounding the political (Spencer 2007). Indeed, when the sub-discipline of political anthropology developed in the 1940s and 1950s, one of the main insights was that the political cannot be neatly separated from cultural and social spheres. This was particularly so in the ‘state-less’ societies that anthropologists studied at the time. But also in contexts of ‘modern states’, anthropologists have systematically pointed out how informal networks and institutions permeate formal ‘political’ ones. The lack of definition and boundaries of politics has been a point of criticism from political science scholars (e.g. Easton 1959), but anthropologists have

<sup>4</sup> Early political science did exhibit an interest in the close encounters with politicians’ daily life, as argued by Schatz 2009

emphasized sensitivity to the pervasiveness of power and politics and the constant grappling with its location as a strength of the discipline and a fertile point of reflection (Vincent 2002; Biehl and McKay 2012).

As Vincent (2002: 2) states, the anthropology of politics is intimately related to ethnography, ‘the anthropologists’ pride and joy, the discipline’s life-blood on which everything else in their craft depends.’ Classical political anthropology incorporated the colonial administrative practice of ethnography (Salemink 2003), making ‘thick descriptions’ of types of political organization and leadership, ways of dealing with conflict in colonial societies without formal institutions, brokerage etc. But in general, anthropologist juxtaposed these thick descriptions to thin, a-historical and homogenizing representations of modern and capitalist institutions, including (markets, bureaucracies and) the state, which, by the mid-twentieth century, had become the dominant horizon for political authority and imagination across the world (Hansen and Stepputat 2006).

Paradoxically, the established sub-discipline of political anthropology faded away as anthropology became ‘increasingly political, even politicized’ from the 1980s onwards when post-structuralist, feminist and post-colonial approaches invaded anthropology (Thomassen 2012:263).<sup>5</sup> An intense interest in discourse and representation was complemented by Gramscian themes of hegemony and resistance, not least inspired by the subaltern studies school. Western anthropology moved closer to home, and as ethnographic studies of modern institutions multiplied

in the 1990s, the contours of a new political anthropology emerged. Thus, anthropologist engaged participant observation inside organizations and bureaucracies looking at rituals, symbols, identities and other issues among employees in state bureaucracies, the EU, NGOs, and private companies (Geertz 1980; Abélès 1990, 1992; Herzfeld 1992; Wright 1994; Riles 2001, to mention a few).

A particular thriving field has been the, by now institutionalized, ‘anthropology of the state’.<sup>6</sup> Whereas Radcliffe-Brown [1940] famously discarded the state as an object of anthropological study – considering it a fetishized and mystified object, and as an ideological construct without agency and hence without existence in the phenomenological world – a new generation of anthropologists asks how the state as an idea comes into being and with what effects. Inspired by sociologist Abrams (1988) they see the state as both an idea and a loose, trans-local system of institutions, policies and practices.

Therefore, to study the state in its historical and geographical specificity, anthropologists seek to disaggregate the state into practices and processes to identify sites for ethnographic exploration (for instance meetings, encounters with state employees, acts of violence, everyday policing). The aim is to understand how ideas, imageries, effects, and affect of the state are forged through representation and performance (Trouillot 2001; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Stoler 2007). Importantly, anthropologists explore the state in a transnational perspective, analyzing for example how the development of modern states in

<sup>5</sup> Also important was the influence of world-systems theory (Wolf 1982; Mintz 1985) and more historically informed analyses of power and politics, in particular in relation to colonial societies

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Gupta 1995; Nugent 1997; Trouillot 2001; Hansen and Stepputat 2001, 2005; Nuijten 2003; Das and Poole 2004, Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005; Sharma and Gupta 2006

Europe was related to the ways in which colonial states developed, or how templates and discourses of governance circulate globally (Sharma and Gupta 2006).

The latter has been a consistent object of study in another, overlapping subfield of anthropology, the anthropology of policy. As we will consider more in detail in the section on interpretative policy studies, anthropological policy studies have particularly focused on the complex of policies and politics associated with the spread of neo-liberalism, such as good governance, empowerment and participation, democratic reform, and new public management.<sup>7</sup> As in the case of the anthropology of the state, these studies are based on what is usually considered the ‘main strength of anthropology: examining global processes by studying how these are manifest in everyday practices’ (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005: 7).

### Political ethnography

Writing from the discipline of sociology, Joseph and Auyero (2007) noted in the mid-2000s that ethnography was experiencing a revival within the discipline. However, they also noted a ‘double absence’: on the one hand, ‘politics and its main protagonists (state officials, politicians, and activists) remain largely un(der)studied by ethnography’s mainstream’;<sup>8</sup> on the other hand, those who study politics as part of their profession –

political scientists and political sociologists – with few exceptions prefer surveys, formal modelling, statistical approaches and secondary sources rather than ethnography for generating their data (Joseph and Auyero 2007:1, 2).<sup>9</sup>

Ten years later, a still marginal but growing community of scholars in political sociology, political science, and international relations, grapples with ethnographic approaches in their research (e.g. Autesserre 2010; 2014; Vrasti 2008; Pouliot 2008; Weaver 2008; Epstein 2008; Schatz 2009; Rancatore 2010; Pachirat 2011; Aronoff and Kubik 2013). As Pachirat<sup>10</sup> has described it, ‘ethnography [in the big family of research methods in political science] is clearly the youngest, somewhat spoiled, attention-seeking child, always poking fun at and annoying her more disciplined, goal-oriented and outwardly-successful older siblings.’ In particular in IR and political science, ethnographers have to confront the lack of understanding from scholars who are unfamiliar with ethnography, but also what they experience as anthropologists’ attempts at ‘policing’ ethnography (Yanow 2009b) – despite the fact that the origins of ethnography lie in administrative (colonial) practices, rather than in the academic discipline of anthropology (Salemink 2003).

In contrast to the traditional notion of anthropological ethnography, Yanow (2009a) describes political ethnography as 1) multi-sited, not bounded physically, but rather

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Ferguson 1994; Yanow 1996; Shore and Wright 1997; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Paley 2002; Mosse 2005; Tsing 2005; Ferguson 2006; Englund 2006; Li 2007; Greenhouse 2011

<sup>8</sup> The works that the authors cite as exceptions to this rule suggest a certain disconnect between political ethnography and the reinvented political anthropology; there are surprisingly few overlaps of the works mentioned in the previous section and the ones mentioned here.

<sup>9</sup> There are notable exceptions to this: Led by Apter (1973), Scott (1987, 1990) and Fenno (1990), ethnographic methods of data gathering were incorporated in political science, not least taken up in feminist and post-colonial writings of politics (e.g. Cohn 1987). See Vrasti (2008) for a selective review of the ethnographic turn, and Aronoff and Kubik (2013) for examples of its application.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Wedeen 2010: 256

letting the policy define the field, the delimitation of which you find by 'following the policy', and 2) using documents as an important source of data. Interviewing is not ethnography but can be, if the interviewer seek to gain 'conceptual access to the unwritten, unspoken, common sense, every-day, tacit knowledge of the 'Prime Ministry operating manual' (Yanow 2009a: 34).

For political science, Schatz (2009a) has suggested an ethnography much like the above. It consists of two legs: immersion through participation, and an ethnographic sensibility going beyond participation to extract the 'meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality' (Schatz 2009a: 5). Like Gupta and Ferguson, he suggests that ethnography's main method, participant observation, is coupled with analysis of 'human artifacts (texts, cultural products, and so on)' (Schatz 2009a: 6), which can reveal the meaning that people attribute to their world, i.e. the ethnographic sensibility. This sensibility, Schatz argues, transcends the divide between fieldwork and deskwork, observer and observed, in an 'epistemological commitment' that goes beyond particular methods.

Returning to the issue of access to elite sites, 'studying up', Schatz adopts a quite pragmatic approach: it is not about being inside or outside, but rather about striving for '*the nearest possible vantage point* to study a given problem (...) To the extent that she falls short [of gaining access to the ideal location] she provides reasons why' (Schatz 2009b: 307, original emphasis). Whereas we would add that conducting ethnographic fieldwork close to the conventional center of power does not provide better data for analyzing politics, it is still a valid, if under-studied, perspective of its articulation.

Bridging anthropology and political science, Aronoff and Kubik (2013) examine

every-day political practices. Among other political situations, they draw on their ethnographic studies of the Oslo Peace process, in which they conducted participant observation in the Israeli Knesset and American Camp David and held interviews with prime-minister Ehud Barak. They also draw on studies of the Israeli Labour Party through regular participation in Party meetings and Standing Committee gatherings. Their ethnography was thus carried out among the formal(ly recognized) power brokers, legislators and policy makers to produce new, grounded understandings of nationalism, democracy and civil society – not from the bottom up or among the policy targets, but from the top (down).

Despite these contributions, the use of ethnography in political science has tended to stay at the margins (Schatz 2009a: 3). In IR, critics have pointed to the mal-appropriation of ethnographic methods as selective, instrumental and timid, and as neglecting important reflexivity on the inherent ethical dilemmas posed in conducting ethnographic research (see Vrasti 2008). Others hold more pragmatic views. Rancatore (2010) contests Vrasti by arguing that the combination of ethnography and IR does not overlook ethical dilemmas. Rather, these pose potentially useful findings in themselves. We would hastily add to this the point that such 'findings' are of little value, if they are not brought out reflexively, something Vrasti might have retorted, too. Schatz suggests that 'ethnography helps ensure an empirically sound, theoretically vibrant, epistemologically innovative and normatively grounded study of politics' (Schatz 2009a: 5). However, he combines with this inductive and interpretative approach, the propensity (some would argue) in political science of adjudicating, arguably positivist, truth claims (Schatz 2009a: *passim*). Such

truth claims, we would argue, is not an *a priori* task of ethnography.

In this sense, we believe that (the methodology of) anthropology and political science still tend to differ; we follow Nader (2011), who considers ethnography a theory of description, in that it is contemporary and situated. Thus, echoing Wolf (1969), ethnography is a subjective kind of knowledge production that reflects the society of which it is a part – in much the same way that globalization is not just an object of study, but also a subjective experience for both observer and observed. The normative bias held in the undertaking of putting forth truth claims through ethnographic enquiry is thus inevitable. Indeed, science can never be politically neutral (Nader 2011:217). But empirical observation should still drive interpretation.

### **Interpretative Policy Analysis (IPA)**

Today, policies that seek to regulate (or deregulate) society and economy are found everywhere. From the 1960s onwards, policies have spread as an instrument of change and have now become ‘truly global’ (Shore and Wright 2011: 3), both in terms of their multiplication and their scope. Far from relating to governmental actors only, policy decisions and practices today are often diffuse and involve a range of inter- and non-governmental, as well as private actors.

While an ever-expanding field of policy studies has developed over the same period, IPA and what Shore and Wright (1997) call the ‘anthropology of policy’ has emerged as a critical current in opposition to mainstream, positivist policy analysis. Starting with Lipsky’s ethnographic analysis of ‘street level bureaucracy’ (1978, 1980) this current has developed a sustained critique of the naïve

application of Weberian theories of authority and bureaucracy in many policy studies; of the instrumental-rational model of the policy process; and in particular the dichotomy between the political agenda-setting of policy *making*, and the a-political, administrative policy *implementation* (Yanow 2015).

Thus, policy is not just a legal instrument implemented through objectively defined solutions to govern individuals or groups; even if they are often conceived and represented as something neutral and rational. Instead, policies are dynamic documents with almost agentive power in that they produce and alter the normative and political processes around them. To be sure, policies, by virtue of formulation and implementation, possess the authority and influence to (re-)define ‘target groups’, ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’ and thus actively create renditions of the world, rather than merely reflecting it. This ‘classification of people and problems’ through policy formulation (Wedel et al. 2005: 37) not only transcends straightforward implementation of objective solutions; policies are also interpreted by the diverse receivers. Once formulated, policies gives rise to a wealth of interpretive meanings and effects – intended as well as unintended. In addition, policies can be transplanted into other contexts, where the original purpose and intended effects are once again up for renegotiation (Shore and Wright 2011: 3).

As Yanow (2015) observes, the tradition of engaging in participant observation in studies of bureaucracy in the 1940s and ‘50s disappeared when policy studies emerged in the 1960s. Thus, it is only recently that critical policy studies have adopted ethnographic approaches, not only for studying policy effects and involvement ‘on the ground’, but also for studying up; or for ‘studying across’ policy networks as Shore (2011) suggests.

With often neo-liberal approaches to policy-making, such networks have become (even) more diffuse and extended, and ‘following the policy,’ tracing sites of agenda-setting, decision-making, translation, silencing, reframing etc. across space and time, is a challenge for the practice of ethnography (Yanow 2015). While IPA clearly has its roots in domestic policy analysis, trans-nationalization and globalization is leaving their marks on IPA; new fields of analysis, such as development cooperation (e.g. Mosse 2005; Li 2007) are making their way into IPA debates. Nevertheless, the currently emerging ethnographic policy analyses within IR tend not to take the previous theoretical and methodological developments in IPA and domestic policy analysis into account. EU policies are obviously a field in which the domestic-international disconnect is being overcome (Yanow 2015), but there is still much scope for taking IPA developments into a global political ethnography.

## **TOWARDS A GLOBAL POLITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY**

As mentioned above, globalization in the 1990s caught the scholarly attention and achieved a sort of ‘atmospheric hegemony’ (Cunningham 1999: 538). This represented a serious challenge to the conventional notions of ethnography, the anthropological ‘field’, and to notions of culture and society as neatly bounded and separate entities. Anthropology saw the decline of what Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have called the ‘stereotypical “among-the-so-and-so” mold’ of fieldwork (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 2). Similarly, political science and IR scholars who studied issues of global governance had to look beyond the usual state actors and increasingly include

global civil society, private companies, transnational entities, and ‘non-state’ actors in their analysis.

Thus, the systems of global policy and governance that we would like to study ethnographically are dense and multilayered, characterized by very complex dynamics between a multitude of actors who are involved in the attempt to generate, institutionalize and coordinate global policies. In this section, we look at different ways in which scholars have coped with the challenge of studying globalization and global policies ethnographically. We will not add to the numerous attempts at defining globalization and the global condition – in random order of appearance, we could mention the triumph of a capitalist world (Wallerstein 1974); (neo-)colonization (Khor 2000); the weakening of the state (Beck 2000); the compression of time and space (Harvey 1998); a contest of cultural processes between sameness and difference (Appadurai 1990); and the intensification of social relations linking distant localities (Giddens 1990) – but delimit ourselves to emphasizing that definitions of the global condition are submerged in political and normative discourses.

The following paragraphs will consider different aspects of global political ethnography, such as the question of (global/local) scale, the construction of field and the definition of sites for ethnographic engagement, and more conceptual approaches to global political ethnography.

### **The global and the local**

Whereas globalization has often been associated with de-territorialization (e.g. Deleuze and Guatarri 1980), ethnographers have insisted that globalization is grounded

and instantiated in locations. This means that spaces are constantly being re-territorialized (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Thus Burawoy, who has conceptualized a 'global ethnography' (2000), states that '[o]nly in the locality – the ethnographer's hearth – can one study [the] concrete effects of globalization' (2001: 149). Tsuda et al (2014), taking issue with Marcus' idea of multi-sited fieldwork as a necessary approach to studying globalization, claim that globalization can be captured through in-depth fieldwork in a single location. Likewise, Gusterson<sup>11</sup> suggests 'tilting the field' by studying the totality from the vantage point of one particular site and to trace connections from there to the wider field.

Nevertheless, as ethnography is 'necessarily situated experience,' there is a risk of objectifying the global as something 'external and inevitable' (Burawoy 2000: 29). In this aspect, Burawoy joins many others who have warned against constructing a global/local dichotomy.<sup>12</sup> As Cunningham (1999) and Turner (1999) have suggested, the 'global' is sometimes constructed as a context against which to forge a particular (threatened) local identity. Also Tsing (2002) has encouraged anthropologists to stop distinguishing between the otherwise commonsense global forces and local places; they risk, she argues, drawing themselves into globalist fantasies 'by obscuring the ways that the cultural processes of all "place" making and all "force" making are both local and global' (Tsing 2002: 477). Like Turner (1999) and Tsing (2005) found in the rainforest, the global condition of density and layering conflates different scales of pro-

jects and agents. As Sassen (2004) suggests, concrete localities are 'multiscalar'. Thus, we have to move beyond simple assumptions of local versus global in the study of global processes and their relationships. Otherwise we risk failing to acknowledge not only how 'local' processes effectively inform or shape the 'global' framework, but also how the conventional global of international corporate offices, ministries and convention centers are also local but on another scale. Sometimes the entities are fused into a whole, which might hide important specificities of both; sometimes they are separated into oppositions neglecting their mutuality; yet other times, focus is on their relational dynamics risking *a priori* assumptions of connectedness.

Burawoy's own technique to avoid objectifying the global consists in a triple strategy that employs three defining features of globalization: 'connection', 'imagination' and 'force'.<sup>13</sup> 'Connections' and 'imaginings' refer to the flow of people, things and ideas, while 'forces' refer to their socio-political organization across time and space. Firstly, he considers global *forces* as constituted at a distance in order to study how they are 'resisted, avoided, and negotiated' (Burawoy 2000: 29). Secondly, he considers global forces as produced socially, through *connections*, in order to enable the study of them in and between sites. Thirdly, he considers global forces as something *imaginatively* constructed in order to counter the (post-modern) fragmentation of the world (Burawoy 2000: 29).

Acknowledging the fragmentation of the world, the fragmented nature of knowledge, and the 'non-existing totalities' (of society, culture, etc.), Biehl and McKay, in an almost

<sup>11</sup> 2005, referenced in Shore and Wright 2011

<sup>12</sup> Robertson (1995) sought to transcend the global/local dichotomy by coining the notion of 'glocalization' but, as always, such ideas of hybridity are prone to criticism *qua* the assumption of a prior separation of the global and the local.

<sup>13</sup> He borrows the notions of connection and imagination from the Chicago School, while the notion of force comes from the Manchester School.

post-modern fashion, urge ethnographers, via Geertz, to ‘embrace the splinters’ (Biehl and McKay 2012: 1223). Here, the splinters constitute the ‘creative world-making’ that subjects engage in, and which the ethnographer may study, by thinking through the splinters, at once connecting them to social theory and abandoning totalities (ibid.: 1223-24). For the authors, the goal is not to reveal critical power politics underneath the messiness of everyday life, but rather to give ‘creative form to people’s art of living’ (Biehl and McKay 2012: 1223); we believe, however, that both are worthwhile ethnographic undertakings. Nevertheless, we may regard the making of global policies as attempts to embrace the splinters and create connections in a fragmented world. Likewise, the construction of the ‘field’ that we will study is also a way of shaping or reinforcing connections across the world.

In her book, ‘Friction’, Tsing (2005) develops an ethnographic approach to studying global connections as a way of studying ‘the work of the universal’. She focuses on ‘zones of cultural friction’, understood as interconnecting zones of awkward, unstable, unequal and creative engagement across differences, where new arrangements of power and culture may emerge (Tsing 2005: xi, 4-5). Looking at how neoliberal environmental policy is enacted in different sites in the global South, Tsing engages herself as a scholar at academic conferences, as a nature lover hiking with fellow nature lovers, and as a passionate anthropologist among Indonesian communities, activists and students. The result ‘may not be a classical ethnography’, as she writes, ‘but it can be deeply ethnographic in the sense of drawing from the learning experiences of the ethnographer’ (Tsing 2005: xi).

Wedel et al. (2005) suggest a different way of analyzing connections and relations of

policy processes. They use the ‘social network analysis’ which is both theoretical and methodological in privileging social relations over individual actors, and tracing sites of their articulation and interaction. Mapping social networks provides a ‘snapshot of the workings of transnational policy processes’ and shows how different ‘levels’ (local, regional, national and international) are connected and how such processes involve governmental, non-governmental and corporate actors (Wedel et al.: 40). Hence, taken-for-granted entities and oppositions of the local and the global, or private and state are believed *a priori* to be mixed. But more than a snapshot, such analyses can also offer ideas of how relations develop over time by, for example, giving attention to careers and trajectories of individuals and organizations that move between different positions and roles in the policy networks. Here Wedel’s studies of Western aid to Eastern Europe (2001) and of the influence of a small group of neo-cons on US foreign policies (2004) are exemplary.

In their overview of anthropological studies of public policy, Wedel et al. use the notion of level in a relatively un-problematized way. However, spurred by the globalization of the 1990s, level, as well as scale, has been the subject of extended discussions in various disciplines. Not least in human geography, the ‘scalar ontology’ of a vertical local-subnational-national-regional-global hierarchy has been criticized, and a ‘flat’ or ‘site’ ontology suggested to take its place (c.f. Marston et al 2005; Jonas 2006), since social and political processes ‘do not exist at specific spatial scales, levels or tiers’ (Hay 2014: 36). In regard to the analysis of global policies, it is hard to see how scales or levels can be entirely avoided, however. Legislation, jurisdictions, identities and many forms of material resources are bound to differ-

ent scales, and scales and levels are also inherently part of the strategic and everyday engagements of policy makers (and -breakers) (Jonas 2006; Hay 2014). Thus, instead of taking as a point of departure the common-sense ideas of local, regional, national, and international arenas as hierarchical and concentric arrangements of progressively larger scale, or alternatively to discard scale altogether, we should rather the politics of scale in policy making and turn scale and scale-making into an object of analysis (Tsing 2000; Gupta and Ferguson 2002).

### **Field, apparatus and assemblage**

Encompassing the social world of actors operating at different scales, Bourdieu's concept of field seems relevant to use in an ethnographic analysis of global policies. The concept encompasses Martin's (2003) three senses of field – as a topological space of positions, a field of relational forces, and a battlefield of contestation – with an emphasis on the latter. Empirically, Bourdieu is interested in determining what the field is about; where its limits lie; what forms of capital operate in the field; and, most importantly, what legitimate principles, or rules of the game, define the social world of the field and the participation and exchanges herein (Bourdieu 1991; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Here, the rules of the game could refer to the practices that define policies as an overarching way of reforming the social world, as well as to the ways in which a specific policy develops to frame and problematize particular issues, thus contributing to the symbolic power of dominant groups (Bourdieu 1991).

However, whereas Bourdieu regards the state as an instance of defining relations be-

tween different fields – providing the 'last judgement' (Bourdieu 1999: 67) – we cannot assume that the state(s) have this role in contemporary global policy regimes. Furthermore, as we will see below, the formation of global policy fields may involve the merger or coordination of pre-existing fields, such as security and development or trans-nationalized migration policies. These caveats aside, the field makes good sense as a methodological concept that can help develop the ethnographic exploration of global policies.

Shore and Wright suggest defining the field as 'not a particular people or organisation' – far less a reified policy itself – but as a 'social and political space articulated through relations of power and systems of governance' (Shore and Wright 1997: 14; 2011: 11). This creates 'links between agents, institutions, technologies and discourses and brings all these diverse elements into alignment that makes it analytically productive' (Shore and Wright 2011: 11). In furtherance of this suggestion, Shore offers perspectives on how to position the ethnographer, namely by choosing within the field of all possible actors and activities and institutions of relevance, specific sites in which to study policy-related practices and processes (Shore 2011: 28).

Defining the field, as well as the strategic sites for studying global policies, cannot always be done in advance of the study. In an extensive, collective research project, a team of researchers developed a multi-sited ethnographic analysis of the global reinsurance industry by following traders in various companies and trading hubs across the world, as these reacted simultaneously on certain disastrous events (Jarzabkowski et al 2014). However, the researchers spent a long time observing, analyzing and sharing interpretations before they could define the 'strategic sites', their 'units of observation' and their 'eth-

nographic object'. As it were, they reached a definition of their ethnographic object as being a 'global risk trading practice', a practice which was both local and an interconnected global practice (ibid.).

The understanding and mapping of the policy field can be a serious analytical challenge in itself, as illustrated by Pal and Ireland (2009) in their mapping of the global policy network around public sector reform. These policies are focused on the reform and (good) governance of state administrations, rather than global issues as such. But the network's reach and policy agendas are global in scope. We may further argue that these policies, in particular after 9/11, have become part of a nexus between international security and development policies, which aim at improving regional and global security by preventing state failure.

In distinction from 'epistemic communities' (Haas 1992), which are more tightly focused around professional-scientific research issues and credentials, the public policy network that Pal and Ireland delineate comprises a broader range of expertise and institutions, including inter-governmental organizations, bilateral donors, professional associations, and non-governmental organizations – even ones that do not see themselves as taking part in any alliance. Despite the limited use of directly coercive means or clearly delineated channels of 'policy transfer' (Stone 2004; 2012), the accumulated changes in governance systems over the past 25 years are dramatic (Pal and Ireland 2009). The loose network is connected through different instruments and practices, such as conditionality, training, advocacy, networking, research, and systems of indicators, standards and norms. The agenda is not coherent, and ideas, objectives, orientations and tools differ greatly. But there is a common understanding of governance as a

problem, and the desirability of public sector reform is shared.

This kind of shared understanding and networked governance which, in Neuman and Sending's (2010) words, 'adds up to government over governments' (Neuman and Sending 2010:164) is a crucial subject in Foucaultian analyses of neoliberal policy to which we will now turn.

While Pal and Ireland's rather empirical mapping of a policy network points to a range of institutional actors, processes and events where ethnographic explorations would make sense, Feldman (2011; 2013) is interested in the kind of relations that cannot be traced and mapped directly as point-to-point connections spanning the world. He looks at how disparate policy processes are coming together to regulate illegal migration to Europe through the production of discourses that enable the emergence of an 'apparatus' through a 'great conversation' across time and space (Feldman 2011: 45). Here Feldman borrows Foucault's concept of apparatus, namely the 'ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, and philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions' (Foucault 1980: 194). The apparatus works from a certain political rationale and is strategic in nature. It is bureaucracy decentralized, mediating between the policy subject and object through the 'expert,' here the technocrat who operationalizes connections between policies.

To study how this 'nonlocalisable apparatus' emerges, functions, and fabricates what is presented as 'an objective target of regulation', Feldman (2011: 45-46) suggests a 'nonlocal ethnography.' As mentioned above, this is a flexible methodology that retains the assets of participant observation – critiquing the 'hegemony of "common knowledge"' and tracing the 'role of contingency in

human affairs' – without being fixed to a few places. It is a kind of concrete, empirical analysis that reaches through disparate policy domains and locations, using methods such as archival research, analysis of documents and speeches, as well as participant observation in offices, international meetings, conferences, and the like (Feldman 2011: 46-47). As one particular strategic site of ethnographic engagement, Feldman chose an office of coordination between European migration policy, criminal law enforcement, and border control, to see how a shared understanding of crisis and (in-)security emerged.

Moving beyond Feldman's ethnographic discourse analysis, Collier and Ong (2005) suggest the notion of global assemblage to frame a practice-near analysis of how 'global phenomena,' such as techno-science, circuits of exchange, systems of governance, and regimes of ethics, work to define material, collective and discursive relationships, and to raise new problems of individual and collective existence (Collier and Ong 2005: 4). These phenomena, or 'global forms', have a global quality in that they are not dependent upon the 'props' of a culture or a society; they are universal in the sense of being abstractable and mobile. They have a capacity for de-contextualization and re-contextualization, and being designed to produce 'functionally comparable results in disparate domains' (ibid: 10-11).<sup>14</sup> The cases of ISO standards or biometric devices for migration control are good examples.

However, these global forms interact with 'ensembles of heterogeneous elements', oc-

cupying a 'common field in contingent, uneasy and unstable interrelationships', the 'space of the assembly' (ibid.: 12). In the case of the ISO standards, their introduction may impel people who are unable to manage the standards to circumvent the discipline of the standards. This circumvention – or 'irregulation' effect (Stepputat 2009) – is as much a part of the assemblage as the standards themselves. Likewise, new forms of migration control procedures and technologies spur illicit migration agents to circumvent controls, as captured in Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen's (2013) idea of 'migration industries' that encompass public and private, as well as legal and illegal entities. As such, *global* assemblages hold an inherent tension. As Collier and Ong write, 'global implies broadly encompassing, seamless, and mobile; assemblage implies heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial, and situated' (Collier and Ong 2005: 12).

To describe the place in which global assemblages are articulated and, thus, can be studied, Collier and Ong (2005: 4) use the term 'site', which they describe as a 'politically and morally charged domain.' Compared to the apparatus approach that focusses on the governmental side of affairs, an assemblage approach seems to expand considerably the number of potential sites for ethnographic engagement.

Anyway, as Marcus (2010) has observed, the kind of sites where ethnographers engage themselves in studying policy are increasingly sites of specialized knowledge production. Here, the ethnographer works alongside others who may be patrons, colleagues, partners, and subjects of research at the same time (Marcus 2010: 15). This situation is inherent in attempts at studying global policies in the making, not least as ethnographers might be given access to otherwise restrict-

<sup>14</sup> The idea resembles the repertoires of technologies of government that produce an abstract space (le Febvre 1991) by rendering populations legible and formatting contextualized information to be transmitted to administrative centres, as developed in relation to historical analyses of state formation (eg. Scott 1998).

ed-access fora in their capacity of being consultants, experts, or policy analysts (see for example Cohn 2006; Mosse 2005; Stepputat 2012).

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethnography is a relational, subjective endeavour in which the researcher engages with actors and practices in and of a field through various methods. Whether by engaging directly through participation or more indirectly by way of gaining knowledge through interviews, observations or textual analysis, the ethnographer becomes involved in, and is knowledgeable of, the social harmonies and tensions of the field. This position grants attention to ethical considerations. Whereas all ethnography merits close consideration of ethics, the ethnography of global policy brings out this circumstance more urgently, since power, politics and control are often of direct or indirect import in this context – whether studying up among policy makers, moving among those subjected to the policies, or both.

Immersing oneself in one or more sites and engaging with its actors' practices, secrets and inclinations points to issues of confidentiality (see Palys and Lowman 2012). Further, ethnography poses a potential threat to the sensitive information of a field and the delicacy of its relations, not least in sites with 'vested interests of powerful persons of the exercise of coercion or domination' (Lee and Renzetti 1990: 512), which global political ethnography often does. The reliance in ethnography on direct or indirect interaction may, then, refer the ethnographer to sites that informants and gatekeepers deem sufficiently safe or appropriate for an ethnographic outsider's

eye. Thus as we saw above, Gusterson (1997) conducted fieldwork *on* nuclear power plant laboratories, rather than *in* them because he was not able to gain access. Such biases are ubiquitous caveats to be addressed analytically, but in studying global policy processes this presents a no less urgent ethical dilemma in terms of management of sensitive information, confidentiality and representation, to which we return below.

There seem to be two over-all approaches to dealing with ethical issues. Firstly there is what we may call an institutional approach, for instance adherence to procedures and guidelines (e.g. AAA 2009 and Chatham House Rules), signing of informed consent and approval by research boards, whether for 'real-life' ethnography (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2008) or online research (Warner 2009, Weeden 2012). Secondly, and more complex, an approach to dealing with ethical issues is ethics as an on-going exercise throughout research – or in the distinction offered by Fujii (2012): 'procedural ethics' and 'ethics in practice' (Fujii 2012:717, see also Guillemin and Gillam 2004). However, as Fujii (2012) points out about procedural or institutional ethics, "consent forms are of little value if participants do not understand to what they were consenting" (Fujii 2012: 718). Informants might be illiterate or living in repressive or authoritarian societies (see Goduka 1990), where individual choice and empowerment are scarce resources. In such contexts, consent forms may set out a relationship between researcher and informant, in which the latter has the authority to define what sensitive information is; how to handle it; and how to protect the informant from adverse effects of research. Consent forms thus rest on the researcher's conceptions of security, rather than the informant's actual or perceived risks.

Further, Bosk and de Vries (2004) stress that whereas institutional review boards offer best practices for routine review and approval, qualitative research will never move within the confines of such models (Bosk and de Vries 2004: 252). A rigid insistence on anonymity and confidentiality, they argue, may hamper ethnographic fieldwork of for instance government agencies, because political environments do not appreciate controversy or power play being made public (Bosk and de Vries 2004: 254). And in terms of anonymity, it can be virtually impossible, despite good intentions, to hide the identities of research participants, as Fujii points out, or there may be instances in which it is necessary for the researcher to lie to preserve confidentiality (Fujii 2012: 720). Whereas institutional ethics is an important standard of practice and is useful as a means of sensitising the researcher, pre-approval procedures and adherence to ethical guidelines do not safeguard research subjects from the actual impacts of the researcher's engagement in the field and the repercussions of her knowledge production. The responsibility in action still remains with the researcher beyond procedures and approvals.

Here, the second strand of ethical considerations is of import, namely the approach to ethics as an on-going consideration during research. The ethnographer is confronted at all times with choices of relationships and foci in studying and representing global policy processes and its actors. As mentioned earlier, in defining the field(s) of global political processes, one might argue that the ethnographer inevitably constructs the field, rather than locating it – both offline (Stepputat 2012: 443) and online (Forte 2004: 224). But it entails influence over knowledge production, where the chosen sites and relationships constitute the building blocks, while leaving

out others. Presenting both formal and informal knowledge and practice, as ethnography does, means that the ethnographer not only defines the field of study, but also develops its narrative. To triangulate data, the idea of member checking<sup>15</sup> is useful, i.e. sharing notes, analyses and drafts with informants to ensure proper understanding and clear potentially sensitive information. But it also points to the power vested in the ethnographer.

This leads to another consideration of 'ethics in practice' in the ethnography of global policy, namely the politics of writing and representation. As Mosse (2009) points out, the anthropology of policy produces knowledge and text that more often circulates among informants than other ethnography. Being a knowledge producer among knowledge producers accentuates a set of reflections and challenges, which echoes the critique of the power differentials between ethnographers and their subjects-interlocutors that were raised in anthropology in the 1980s. With this, handling the privacy of actors, the politicking among them and secrets in and between sites grants consideration. Mosse describes the challenge of ethics in the ethnography of policy as a 'problem' because informants – in his case policy makers and development experts – do not share epistemology and purpose with the ethnographer. The former relies on official knowledge, universal logic and consensus on appropriate technologies of problem-solving; the latter lives on the meanings that escape authorised policy interpretation and which shows both personal interest and unintended consequences of policy and practice. The policy makers and practitioners, he argues, thus may find ethnography a threat to professionalism – *their* professionalism. Likewise, Stepputat (2012) argues that

<sup>15</sup> We thank Dvora Yanow for the idea of member checking.

the researcher-turned-consultant may produce knowledge that undermines narratives of public policy, but since ethnography recognizes the 'situatedness' of knowledge production, it may just as well undermine the authority of the researcher herself.

More urgently, however, since ethnography of global policy often produces micro-perspectives, the knowledge can have unintended and serious effects. The ethnography of global policy studies phenomena which span sites and actors that are linked across normative divides through political, social or other processes. The ethnographic knowledge may be used, or misused, by readers and informants once circulating in the field. Here member checking, procedural ethics or ethics in practice seem insufficient and questions fundamentally whether the kind of research is not only viable, but valuable.

But ethnography of global policy may also empower informants, whether studying up or down. Cunningham (1999) has followed a US religico-political activist group over an entire decade and found her informants to increasingly adopt the globalization speak used by social scientists to further their cause. Likewise, Turner (1999) has showed how the Kayapo of the Brazilian rainforest reproduced, or even constructed, their indigeness through the production of a video documentary to counter global forces threatening their rights. Feldman (2013) speaks of ethnographers' ability (and obligation?) to help technocrat informants to reflect on ethical conflicts in the administrative system. And Rosga (2005) straddles the dual role of anthropological researcher and technical consultant in drafting a report on human trafficking, where her attempt at advocacy must be negotiated. Scheper-Hughes' speaks of 'militant anthropology' (1995) as a way of calling anthropology's bluff by parting with the

traditional position of the ethnographer as a neutral observer and instead engaging politically (and ethically attuned) with the field, at least in situations of human suffering. Merry (2006) has studied how Hawaiian women through 'translators' appropriated a human rights terminology to place their experiences of domestic violence in broader international discourses on violence against women. However, returning to the risks of the ethnographer's negative impact in the field, Merry shows how these 'translators' – NGO workers and anthropologists alike – work in both global and local domains and are therefore "not fully in one world or the other" (Merry 2006:48). This restricts their knowledge, practices and the emancipatory effects, indeed promises, of their endeavour. Here, Kumar's (2003) critical methodology of globalization points to the inherent normativity in (theories of) global processes – and with this, the study of it. It poses a challenge in terms of identifying epistemological foundations and upholding a sensitivity to the nature of ethnographic knowledge production and analysis and, in turn, this reaches back to the considerations above of loyalty and representation. In this regard, many have pointed to the necessity of the ethnographer's reflexivity in the field (Fujii 2012, Yanow 2009b, Guillemin and Gillam 2004), as a basic feature of ethics in practice.

The examples of action research in the above paragraph coupled with the scrutiny of power by studying up and the use of ethical guidelines all offer various ways of responding to ethical critiques. Other approaches incorporate a strategic response in ethnography itself. For instance, Marcus (2010) focusses on a situation that has given rise to experimental designs, such as the 'para-site'.<sup>16</sup> This

<sup>16</sup> The term is inspired by Michel Serres' (1982) *Parasites*.

is a term for the overlapping academic/field-work space in contemporary ethnographic projects. Deeb and Marcus (2011) explain how they, in relation to Marc Abélès' ethnographic mega project on the WTO (Abélès 2011), met with the Director-General of the organization to 'gain insights by trying to share a perspective on the problems of and at the WTO, which ethnography might elucidate, as well as the forms that ethnographic data and knowledge might take' (Deeb and Marcus 2011: 53). While this encounter could be interpreted as a sort of 'member checking' in a case of ethnographic 'studying up', Marcus emphasizes that para-sites and 'collaboratories' can help giving account of what kind of questions contemporary ethnography can answer, what results it might be expected to produce on the basis of what data (Marcus 2010: 14).

icy areas are necessarily flawed by lofty and contested notions (site, place, space, locality, level, scale, network, apparatus, assemblage). However, we hope that this working paper has shown that it is worthwhile to take up the challenge.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

We fully recognize that this paper has only scratched the surface of several very large fields of research and reflection. Nevertheless we will argue that there is a field of (policy) research emerging across several disciplines and sub-disciplines that we may call global political ethnography. As the need for and practices of policies that are global in scope are growing, so are the complexity and challenges of doing critical research on how such policies are coming together, transforming and falling apart. It is clear that the question of how ethnography can be applied in this kind of research is as much a question of how ethnography will be transformed on the way towards a global political ethnography. Attempts at sustaining a methodological meta-dialogue across disciplines and pol-

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