

Session 12: Global Ethnography

Michael Burawoy (2000) chapter 'Reaching for the Global' focused on the role of global ethnography within the fields of sociology and sociology of anthropology and the methods available to support the framework in grounded theory. Burawoy argued that the principles of sociology's participant observation can be transformed into a strategy for global ethnography. Participant observation is defined as being grounded in the subjective interpretation of social situations and processes within the nation-state bound communities and borders, its disciplines focused on what was local and institutional ethnography (Burawoy, 2000). Burawoy, argued that sociologists were in many ways limited in moving towards global practices due to their fields historical view of research, which has emphasised the civil, state, and nation roles of participation, the 'global' counters the fields theoretical view of the local (Burawoy, 2000). However in contrast, anthropology has been able to move seamlessly into the global arena, its theoretical framework was never influenced by the nation-state relationship, thus it is not constrained by its historical limitations.

The movement towards globalisation has altered the way people live, socialise, and process their daily lives, its framework has been shaped by neo-liberal theory, Burawoy reflects on its role in ethnography by stating "The neo institutionalists do not deny diversity, but they leave ethnographers, who work from the ground upward, without theoretical tools to delve into the connections between micro-practices and macro-structures" (Burawoy, 2000: 29). The ethnographer is now tasked with looking at globalisation from the individual to the collective; from the singular to the connected locations, in hopes to understand how people's daily lives are shaped and influenced by forces of the world (Burawoy, 2000).

Growingly sociologists are being asked to research gender, racial and ethnic issues within the global context, this is forcing the field to further define its methodology relating to global ethnography. In building on a method, Burawoy took a historical look at his own bibliography which included work at Chicago School, Manchester School and Berkley University (Burawoy, 2000). Burawoy highlights the case study of The Polish Peasants 1890-1920, as one of the most extensive global ethnography

sociologists undertook before moving back to a nation-state view of ethnography. The authors of *The Polish Peasants*, Thomas and Znaniecki researched how global connections and the imaginations of people, letters, ideas, and ethno histories created and influenced the lives and experiences of Polish immigrants living in Chicago, USA (Burawoy, 2000). The authors performed extensive field work in both Poland and Chicago shaping a case study that is now considered global ethnography, their ability to tie the influences of the historical to the modern and the social processes that influenced these relationships were truly global in nature.

The Polish Peasant may have been global ethnography, however the practice within the science of sociology had little following or support, thus the field moved its focus to institutional ethnology, which covered hospitals, prisons, universities, etc. Without any further historical framework for global ethnology within the science of sociology, Burawoy moved his analysis to the work performed at the Manchester School by anthropologist Max Gluckman, who authored the extended case methodology framework (Burawoy, 2000). Burawoy highlighted the principles of the extended case method as a possible foundation for creating a more defined theory for sociologists and global ethnography.

Gluckman's work was based on research he performed in South Africa in the 1930s; he studied the decolonisation and global forces that were wreaking havoc within the Zulu tribal society (Burawoy, 2000). Gluckman's work created in South Africa formed the foundations for the extended case method, which later became the methodology practiced by the Manchester School of Social Anthropology. Historically, Gluckman wanted to understand the processes, dynamics and interrelations of how the Zulu tribe integrated into the wider society. However, the analysis was not global in nature, evident by the fact that the Manchester School did not anticipate the end of colonialism; thus the extended case method needed to incorporate the world economy into its scope (Burawoy, 2000). The following overview highlights the components of the extended case method that was put forward by Burawoy as a framework for global ethnography:

The four moments of the extended case method: “extending from observer to participant, extending observations over time and place, extending from process to external forces and extending theory” (Burawoy, 2000:28). The extended case method seeks to “highlight those limitations not ignoring them but by centering them within the context, the shortcomings of our method only underline the ubiquity of domination, silencing, objectification, and normalisation” (Burawoy, 2000:28). The following dimensions are outlined in greater detail and the corresponding challenges within a global framework.

The first dimension is the one common to all participant observations the extension of the **observer into the world of the participant** (Burawoy, 2000). It’s the process of going out and observing, what we see and do. What makes the relationship problematic is the relation of **domination**, which distorts the mutuality of exchange and openness, which can be further challenged by language and cultures.

The second dimension refers to extensions of observations **over time and space**. It is the concept of “spending long periods of time with subject, learning, watching, and learning, problem becomes one of understanding the succession of situations as a social process” (Burawoy, 2000:27). The problematic aspect of this relationship is the power of **silencing** the observations by our influences.

The third dimension refers to extending out from **micro processes to macro forces**. From the “space-time rhythms of the site to the geographical and historical context of the field, the macro-micro link refers, not to ‘expressive’ totality, but to a ‘structured’ one in which the part is shaped by its relation to the whole, the whole being represented by ‘external forces’” (Burawoy, 2000:27). The challenge within this dimension is the ability to problematise the very concept of forces; the danger becomes objectification, the following highlight the three strategies to counter objectification: (Burawoy, 2000:28)

1. Global forces as constituted at a distance – why global domination is resisted, avoided and negotiated.

2. Global forces as themselves the product of contingent social process – forces become the topic of investigation; they are examined as the product of flows, people, things and idea, the global connection between sites.
3. Global forces and global connections as constituted imaginatively, inspiring social movements to seize control over their immediate but also their more distant worlds, challenging the mythology of an inexorable, runaway world.

The fourth dimension is the “**extension of theory**; we try to constitute the field as a challenge to some theory we want to improve” (Burawoy, 2000:28). The practice is to rid ourselves of our biases and judgements’, enabling us to see the field for what it is (Burawoy, 2000). The problem that arises within this dimension is the power to **normalisation**, the chance to become complacent, versus the ability to continually critique and challenge theories and practices.

In summary, I covered the highlights of Burawoy arguments and his reflections on his own bibliography and views of utilising the extended case method for global ethnography. In my opinion if we are to understand how and what globalisation is and its influence on our daily lives we must incorporate a global view into any form of ethnography. The views captured by *The Polish Peasants* highlight my argument that globalisation is not modern it is historical in nature, it is not technology or the internet, it is the fundamental way we view our existence based our own histories, cultures, and life experiences and there relationship to society as a whole. In closing, I believe the extended case method is a start towards a historical change in how the science of sociology practices ethnography outside the realms of civil, local, and national frameworks.

References

Michael Burawoy, 2000: “Introduction: Reaching for the Global” in *Global Ethnography: forces, connections and imaginations in a postmodern world*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 1-40.