

Politics of Analysis: Causality, Ethics, Institutions

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Abstracts

Session 1: Measuring Moral Debates

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Measuring and explaining racial bias in policing

Racial and ethnic discrimination by the police has been a major research theme in the US and UK for several decades. Studies have shown that racial bias in policing is a common phenomenon. For example, empirical studies in the UK have established that the police practices of stop and search, arrest, and use of physical force target members of black, Asian and minority ethnic groups disproportionately to their representation in the population. However, the causal explanations of this discrepancy, that are put forward by the researchers, vary, and the disproportionality is likely to have multiple causes.

This paper presents some theoretical models used in explaining bias in policing such as institutional racism (Phillips 2011) and different forms of discrimination (Rainer 2010). I also discuss the empirical problems related to measuring racial and ethnic discrimination in policing. Finally, I make a few remarks related researching racial discrepancies in policing in Finland based on the data and results of the Stopped Project on ethnic profiling (Keskinen 2018 et. co) and my PhD project (Himanen 2021). Because the Finnish police does produce very little register data on the distribution of different police actions among different

segments of the population, and no racial or ethnic data, quantitative research of policing bias is necessarily very different in the Finnish context.

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Unveiling the past to pursue the objectivity in surveys: lessons learned from the Morally Debatable Behaviors Scale

This paper analyses how the field of comparative quantitative research suffers from not paying enough attention to the critical issues of questionnaire design. More specifically, it investigates the incorporation of the Morally Debatable Behaviors Scale (MDBS) in the European Values Study (EVS). This paper shows how the “sloppy” approach to operationalization and data collection changes under the pressure of new research ethics standards and institutional transformations over time. The EVS was launched in 1981, with successive cross-national longitudinal waves every nine years. However, despite its current scientific reputation, the EVS’s first wave was designed not only by academics but also by politicians, business executives, and priests. Some of the questions, therefore, were not formulated in the best way, yet they cannot be easily changed for the sake of comparative strength. Unfortunately, this makes the usage of something like the MDBS complicated, albeit possible. This scale is a fitting example that demonstrates why a solid theoretical and methodological foundation is crucial for any survey that strives to measure social and cultural changes. The paper argues that even using highly reputed cross-national longitudinal surveys does not protect researchers against construct and validity problems, as they may hide problems with constructs and scales back from their early days. Drawing on insights from survey methodology and history of science, the paper highlights how survey research of the cultural differences in Europe is affected by the political and social changes and how scientists should take it into account when using these surveys, instead of perceiving them as objective and clear from any biases.

Keywords: Survey Methodology, Values and Attitudes Measurement, Morally Debatable Behaviors Scale, European Values Study, Research Ethics

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Symbols of Identity Politics in Consumer Climate Change Debates

The study examines the intersections of consumption and identity politics in consumer climate change debates. As consumption has become a key climate policy issue, consumer choices are increasingly linked to political reference groups and the values they represent. These aspects of consumption have not yet been extensively explored. However, they are particularly important areas of research to understand the modern consumer, whose choices are constantly a subject of moral judgment and political struggle. The research material includes comments related to climate change from the Suomi24 discussion forum. Due to the large size of research material – over two hundred thousand comments in total – computational text analysis is used to classify the discussion topics, which are then further interpreted qualitatively. According to the preliminary results, the climate change debate on the Suomi24 forum is dominated by a climate-skeptical perspective in which consumer goods are used as symbols of identity politics, for example by juxtaposing meat and vegetarian food.

Keywords: Consumer research, Computational Social Science, Qualitative methods, Identity politics, Social media analysis

Session 2: Institutions and Activism

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Causality and responsibility for historical injustices: redressing assimilation policies on indigenous children in Canada

This paper discusses causality in the context of obligations to redress historical injustices, focusing on past and present policies of removing indigenous children from their families in Canada and two claims for redress. These cases concern two lawsuits raised against the Canadian government: one over the impact of residential school system for indigenous children on First Nation communities and another one concerning the disproportionate number of First Nations children apprehended through child welfare, allegedly due to discrimination through underfunding of child welfare services on reserves. In both cases, the claimants are setting their claims in the context of a long history of generations of indigenous children being removed from their families and communities through first residential schools and then child welfare, and the damaging impact of these removals on family relations and transmission of culture and languages from generation to another. The government, while recognizing the harm caused on indigenous children and families through the schools and the child welfare system, is challenging these particular claims as unfounded. Its statements maintain that no sufficient evidence can be found of direct adverse impacts of the actions of the government in the context of the residential school system on First Nation communities, and that impacts of apprehensions through child welfare should be assessed on individual basis. The cases highlight tensions between complicated, long-term historical developments on the one hand and demands for clearly demonstrable causalities and measurable impacts on the other. They also reflect difficulties in balancing between conceptions of individual rights and responsibilities with collective ones. This paper discusses how conceptions of causalities and intergenerational continuities between the past and present child removal policies intersect with those of responsibility of contemporary actors for the situation and their consequent obligations to address it.

Keywords: responsibility, causality, historical injustice, colonialism

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Institutionalization of the Green Revolution in Mexico: From 1930's agrarianism to 1960's State-led industrialism

This paper is part of an ongoing research regarding insecticides as technologies of rule during the Long Green Revolution in Mexico. Its purpose is to make a brief historiographic account of the institutionalization of the so-called "Green Revolution" (GR) in Mexico and its changes during the period that ranges from the 1940's to the 1960's. This period comprehends what some authors have described as the "first Green Revolution" characterized by the development of the technologies that exponentially increased wheat yield in Mexico, and it was considered a major success for the GR by its promoters.

The transformations that the GR brought to agriculture are commonly seen as being almost exclusively technological in nature, however, since the very beginning, it brought institutional changes during its development. These changes were applied on a local and global scales, being an example of this the Food and Agriculture Organization's evolution from an advisory agricultural entity during the 1940's into a fervent promoter of the GR during the 1960's. However, the most profound institutional changes came at the Nation-States of the Global South that embraced the GR.

In the case of Mexico, a plethora of institutions were created (or restated) during this time with the purpose of controlling and administrating the perceived benefits of the GR through the funding, promotion, and distribution of its technologies. These new entities took a significant distance from the ideas of land redistribution and rural justice institutionalized after the Revolution, and instead, sought to accomplish the industrial "modernity" that the Mexican State pursued through State-corporativism. This institutional structure was as fundamental for the "success" of the GR as its technologies, and arguably, it was also exported worldwide alongside them.

Keywords: Green Revolution; Mexico; Agriculture; Global South

Session 3: Contemporary Ethnographic Interaction

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Ethnographer In Interaction – Researching in the culture rather than on the culture

Ethnography on internet research is too often understood only as a way of choosing and collecting data by hand. It is frequently set as an opposite for automatised and quantitative data collection methods. I am arguing that ethnography on the internet research should be seen as a method of learning and getting familiar with the logics of the culture to be studied to strengthen the analysis along with other analytical tools. It should be understood more like a process in which the researcher adopts the meanings of the culture by actively participating in interaction with members of the cultural group.

One of the biggest ethical issues on ethnography has always been its comparing, patronizing and normative point of view. This brings up the question, how to study something without setting it contrary to the mainstream or dominant culture, contrary to the researcher's culture, how to handle with the question of emic and etic. And on the other hand, should we even define cultures on the axis of "mainstream culture" and "subcultures" in the fragmented times where people fluidly identify with multiple, and sometimes even contrary cultures and groups. Who defines the cultures which ethnographer study?

In my proposed presentation, I will discuss on ethnographic method on research of culturally comprehensible, ephemeral and inconsistently appearing internet communities and introduce the ethnographical method of constructed week I developed on my Master's thesis, and which I am also going to utilise on my doctoral dissertation on moral-cultural conflicts and moral polarization of the online public sphere. I will also discuss how to observe internet cultures with the intention to find and analyse the stable and coherence features of the culture, and defining the cultures of the internet platforms and -communities without setting them in subordinate position contrary to the mainstream or normative culture.

Keywords: Cultural Sociology, Ethnography, Research Ethics, Qualitative

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Digital alternatives for an ethnographic study of multispecies cultural heritage in Brazil

My PhD. project is an ontological analysis of the multispecies cultural heritage in the area of São Francisco River among the Tuxá people, an indigenous community located in the Northeast of Brazil. In this context, I define multispecies cultural heritage as a dynamic changeable process of relationality and co-existence between humans, nonhumans (including cosmological agencies) in terms of knowing, being, existing and experiencing. One of my research hypothesis is that I assume that the territory (land and river) is a heritage, a transforming entity constituted by different agencies with a powerful meaning. In this paper, I ask, how will I carry out the ethnographic fieldwork with digital advances together with the Tuxá people? In Brazil, the situation of the Covid-19 still is serious; and it has compromised and limited the collection of ethnographical material in my research place. However, I find this situation as an opportunity with freedom to be creative on the ways I will gather material. This paper discusses the different usages of digital technology, such as satellite images, platforms for drawings, communication platforms (zoom, meet, etc.), for achieving a cautious study of the perceptions and significations of the territory as a multispecies cultural heritage among Tuxá.

Keywords: Ethnography; Tuxá people; digital technology; multispecies cultural heritage; territory

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Research ethics in colonial institutions: Are our standards radical enough?

Scholars and students of global development studies, anthropology and related fields are encouraged to reflect and critically assess their positionality when conducting research. Explicit, critical negotiation of researcher positionality in relation to her field is considered a key method for adding to the reliability and validity of qualitative, social scientific research that leans on subjective interpretations.

Without attempting to understate the importance of such a methodological practice, this paper initiates discussion on whether critical self-reflexivity is enough from an ethical and decolonial perspective. Might writing down confrontations and ethical challenges also serve as a free pass from having to confront the coloniality of academic knowledge extractivism more generally? As Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) put it, our disciplines still rely greatly on white Europeans “hunting and gathering of raw data” in the Global South, regardless of how well the researcher might acknowledge her complicity in colonial power structures.

This paper builds on experiences from my PhD research process, and especially reflections from the field in Kenya. Working with young, radical feminists unafraid to speak their minds on academic coloniality has forced me to constantly negotiate my researcher positionality in dialogue with my interlocutors – which will undoubtedly provide sufficient content for ethical reflection in my final dissertation. However, as critical voices towards academic coloniality arise ever more loudly among our interlocutors in the Global South, is explicit critical self-reflexivity enough to validate our positionalities ethically? Or, should we take more action as (young) scholars to demand changes in the coloniality of academic knowledge production?

Instead of analysing or presenting research content, this paper provides raw thoughts for initiating a critical discussion on self-reflexivity and fighting academic coloniality beyond the requirements of our faculties.

Keywords: coloniality, research ethics, academic extractivism, self-reflexivity

Session 4: Managing Environmental Impacts

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Towards impact governance? Evaluation of societal and environmental impact in impact investing and impact bonds

Impact evaluation as applied in impact investing (II) and impact bonds (IBs) presents interesting cases of transformations concerning how causal effects are understood and pursued within policy-making. In II – defined as a new form of responsible investment where both economic profits and social or ecological impact are actively pursued hand in hand – sociotechnical change is perceived in a way in which a lot of focus and resources are placed on careful modelling and measuring of the impacts. The causal inference of impact is also structurally attached to economic goals: in projects such as IBs private investors provide the starting capital and the investors are only paid their investment back, with profit, if it can be proved that sufficient impact has been achieved. This mechanism has been promoted as a prospective revolution for policy-making in its ability to be able to achieve “win-win-win-situations” for the public sector, private sector and service providers and in participating in sustainability transitions. Yet it has also been opposed with challenges concerning the pursuit to achieve and evaluate impact and some more general level questioning of the implications it has on policy-making. In this paper I present and dissect some of these dynamics apparent, aiming to outline what I call “impact go-vernance”. I identify four key characteristics of impact governance: financialized risk, ecosystems thinking, a broadened time frame of action and the causality of nudging impacts. I also aim to showcase briefly how the emergence of impact governance can be identified not only in II but as a more extensive characteristic of neoliberal policy-making that places its trust on market mechanisms as a key solution in addressing collective concerns.

Keywords: impact governance, impact investing, evaluation, causality, economic sociology

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Water contamination and environmental suffering in the fragile Andean waterscapes

The rapid expansion of mining activities since the early-2000s has raised concerns of local ecosystems and local people's water rights and well-being in the Peruvian Andes. Increased extraction of minerals has been accompanied by a growing number of conflicts as local communities stand to protect their living environments and livelihoods. In this article, we analyze how past and present extractive operations and water policies shape local people's experiences of environmental suffering and claims for justice in front of contamination in the Cunas watershed, in the Peruvian Andes. We are especially interested in the materiality and the fluidity of water contamination, the malleability of political alliances, contestations related to extraction, and the experiences of suffering by highland communities. Most of the previous studies on hydro-social struggles focus on social and political aspects of justice, with scant attention paid to biophysical conditions that shape people's experiences of environmental suffering. Here, we seek to expand the scope of the analysis to include the material effects of contamination on water, soil, and human bodies, as well as the 'contamination' of people's minds by discourses that underestimate their suffering related to contamination. We argue that a political ecology approach that combines both the materiality of water contamination and the politics over access to water resources and over symbolic meanings of water can enrich understanding of how the hydrological and the social, and the ecological and the political, are intrinsically interwoven in people's lives and livelihoods. This is crucial especially when trying to understand how hydrological changes shape ecologically and socially fragile waterscapes of the global South, such as the Andean highlands.

Keywords: Water contamination, water justice, environmental suffering, socio-environmental conflicts, Peru

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Environmental social science after COVID: from institutionalized sustainability towards weak unsustainability politics

The general causal relation between science and policy is not what we would ethically hope for —at least from not from the perspective of environmental social science. Science demonstrated that the modern project is materially unsustainable in its current capitalistic mode. But after this, more elaborate (climate, environmental, even “sustainability”) science has not led to more meaningful policy. Instead of policy, science has caused politics: an explosion of organisational arrangements and discourse production around the theme of sustainability.

This causal relation, “the institutionalized politics of sustainability”, is a working relation between democratic and academic institutions that benefits those involved —but not the goals of social science per se. With COVID we have seen that the tempo of the crisis does not change this basic causal premise. After decades of slow-motion climate drama, during the fast-moving pandemic again natural science evolved (e.g. with a vaccine) and meaningful policy-making for the long-term failed (e.g. to address deforestation as the root cause of zoonotic disease risk, or increased inequality as the main structural outcome). And again, much of environmental social science, including sustainability science, produced research-discourse about sustainability —for example, about how the crisis could be an opportunity for “sustainable transitions”.

In my presentation, I will consider the ethical and implications of assuming this causal relation for environmental social science analysis. In practical terms, I will sketch an alternative research agenda to move from the institutionalized politics of sustainability towards a weak politics of unsustainability. I suggest this could result in a more suitable methodological framework for environmental social science analysis in our times of pandemics and permanent politico- environmental crises.

Keywords: environmental social science, sustainability discourse, sustainability politics, research agenda, crises

Session 5: Consumerism, Trade Unions, & Political Partnerships

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Institutional analysis of the structure of consumer society

Money and debt have not been essential analytical starting points within consumer research. Indeed, this scantness is recognised in the literature as well as that the underlying premise of much of consumer research is that all consumers share the relative affluence necessary to partake in the available abundance of markets. What the literature has focused on is nevertheless a wide array of related topics such as local currencies, novel currencies and cryptocurrencies, children and money, money/power in relationships, time and money, valuation of money, and sacred and profane monies. There is a broad tendency to focus on how people are developing, sustaining, representing, and transforming meaningful social relations. That which however does not receive much interest is how the monetary system increasingly undergirds global social relations as a quasi-ontology, and more problematically how there is a persistent individualistic premiss that makes it impossible for the field to move to the macro, social level theorizing resource circulation.

My aim is to present a macro understanding of the monetary nature of the consumer society. Building on Modern Monetary Theory (MMT), I analyse and map the institutional arrangement on which the consumer society is built. This reveals that what is guaranteed to consumers is the necessity to engage with markets as no financial or real means for sustenance are guaranteed. Money should be understood as a social technology to coerce consumers rather than a natural emergence from free activity. Consumers are enclosed into the monetary system and must follow its logic as there is no escape from the markets. Taking this as the actual starting point for studying consumers within the system allows for more accurate understanding of the consumer society.

Keywords: money, debt, markets, power, consumer society

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A Fourth Sector Perspective on Finnish Trade Union Organizing: (Re-)activating the Grassroots, Countering Institutional Crisis?

The institutional status of Finnish trade unions is currently under threat. Many unions face the challenge of membership decline combined with a withdrawal of the employer side from long-established collective bargaining structures. Can unions improve their situation through building an active, even activist, membership?

During the last decade, certain unions, especially within the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions SAK, began to apply the so-called organizing model: an approach encouraging member activism and individual commitment. Organizing is often described as a return to the origins of union work. It is considered a strategy for re-engagement with members after decades of union institutionalization, and a way to restore union power. Simultaneously and in contrast, organizing is also experienced as new and even strange to the Finnish union context.

This development has taken place roughly at the same time as action and participation within civil society have taken new forms, induced by the internet age and online networks. One recent academic approach to these changes is the formulation of a fourth sector theory, which describes a sphere of self-organized civic activism, the fourth sector, developing in Finland alongside the organization-based third sector. The interaction between these two sectors remains to be studied in more detail.

Through qualitative analysis focusing on interviews of union employees, this study explores the extent to which the idea of organizing within unions corresponds to the concept of a self-organizing fourth sector, and whether, from this perspective, organizing may provide means to counter the current crisis. In times of changing participation, can organizing contribute to strengthening the position of unions? Do unions themselves change in the process – is rebuilding an institution the price of survival?

Keywords: trade unions, institutional change, participation, civil society

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The political geographies of strategic partnerships

In my article, I analyze the changing relations and deal making of the State of Finland and Finnish cities in the context of the so-called partnership approach in regional development. Within the partnership approach, the state apparatus and cities are figuratively posited as equal partners in development, though this equality has not been achieved in practice. These strategic partnerships are analyzed by utilizing the so-called regional cities, a group of Finnish minor cities, as a case study. The article looks at how different participants, interviewed state officials and mayors of the regional cities, evaluate and frame the partnership approach. While the interviewees often regard the partnership approach as a functional mode of interaction and development, in practice it creates and solidifies spatial categories and further contributes in justifying instances of spatial selectivity. It becomes evident, that the deal making as the mode of regional development policy relies on hierarchization and categorization and reflects the wider trends in state spatial transformation. The article argues that deal making reflects wider contours of politics of urbanization, and manifests as policy failures when addressing the needs of minor cities.

Keywords: institutions, urbanization, regional development, the state, state spatial transformations