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*Analysis and Representation in Participant
Observation*

EDITED BY Colin Jerolmack
AND Shamus Khan

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Chapter 3

Macro Analysis

Power in the Field

LESLIE SALZINGER AND TERESA GOWAN

What does it mean to be asked to be the “standard-bearer” for a “macro” perspective? For researchers committed to challenging the hoary micro/macro binary, that is a complicated request indeed. Nonetheless, if to do “macro” ethnography is to act on the belief that, seen from any particular social location, there are structures that constrain, impel, and impress themselves on its occupants—then yes! For us, to be sociologists at all is to recognize the relational, scalar, power-drenched world of the social and to locate the people and fields we study in those structuring practices, relations, and discourses. In this context, ethnography emerges as a privileged method, one that provides a ringside perch on the processes through which subjects act and are made in the asymmetrical interactions of daily life.

All this suggests that one’s “analytic lens” is not a methodological issue in a narrow sense, but an attitude toward one’s data that reflects political and theoretical investments. For us, that means a primary focus on questions of power and domination, and on the possibilities of instability and critique. Given this attention to how hegemony is made—or not, macro analysis in ethnography focuses on the intense force fields between larger structures of power and the subjects they constitute, and who make them in turn. That is, we are interested in making manifest and understanding the interface between the self and discourses of subjectification, where the social—with its accompanying inequalities of power, access, and voice—is actually made in practice. As people move into action as social beings, their need for meaning drives them to make (or remake) sense of what they’re doing, whether they take on hegemonic formulations or innovate their own frameworks. Thus, we take the processes through

which meanings are made to be a primary focus of empirical investigation, in which we can see power relations being made and unfolding in real time.

There are of course many modalities of power, organized around varied intentions and understandings and backed by equally varied iterations of force, control, and knowledge. Too often, in analysis that takes the notion of structure seriously, capitalism and state power count as “macro,” and formations of gender, race, and sexuality are lumped together with “culture” and read as “micro.” This habitual framing misstates every element. Capitalism and state power are as much discursive as material, and gender, race, and sexuality themselves are material as well as cultural relations (Foucault 1975; Gilmore 2007; Omi and Winant 1994). These theoretical formulations lead us to methodological practices that always seek to situate observations in constitutive frameworks, in which discourse and selfhood are always within the frame. This does not mean that our field notes are full of vanilla interactions, to which we then simply apply distant Marxist, feminist, or Foucauldian frameworks. To the contrary, we seek to identify power as it operates in the field, focusing our ethnographic eye on those relations in practice and, only once they are identified, seeking to situate them in constitutive structures. Among other strategies, this leads us to prioritize comparison across both situation and subject, as focusing on meaningful practices across varied contexts makes it easier to grasp both the specificities of each case and the commonalities driven by discursive or economic forces shaping the field.

Our interest in how power works up, down, and through social space has led us to investigate not only the situations of those located lower down in society’s many hierarchies, but the constitution of the forces they encounter as well (Burawoy 1998; Burawoy et al. 1991, 2000). In shifting our lens from those with less power (e.g., the homeless) to those with more (e.g., financiers), we are not alone. Since Laura Nader’s (1972) prescient call for anthropologists to “study up,” anthropologists, and increasingly sociologists, have begun to study the powerful. In recent decades we find sociological ethnographers in labs studying the development of knowledge (e.g., Latour and Woolgar 1979) and on trading floors studying finance (e.g., Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002), focused on understanding the workings of scientific and economic knowledge. What is striking about many of these works, however, is how little they discuss power. Our own aims in following Nader’s call, then, are to undo the essentializing distance that has produced objectifying images of social forces, while retaining the broader question of social relations of power, thus locating these ethnographic descriptions of power in hierarchical social space.

In the following two sections, we turn to our empirical work,

looking at subjectifying processes and fields of power up close. For an ethnographer interested in power, subjectification has a magnetic draw. As we move through the field, we pay close attention to the ways that people come to be the subjects they are in social space. How do they identify, whether explicitly or implicitly, across the varied social contexts, spaces, and moments they inhabit? What does this emergence and variety show us about the intimate, institutional, and cultural discourses and practices that summon them as particular kinds of subjects (Althusser 1971)? What kinds of interests—both near and far—might this local subject-making serve, and what are its intended and unintended consequences? In the accounts that follow, we show the process through which, in very different projects, we each investigate fields where discursive power addresses, forms, and bring subjects to life, and where subjects repurpose and reshape larger discourses in turn. And we demonstrate that ethnographic practices focusing on the relationship of self and context lead us out to structuring discourses and their obdurate material manifestations. These in turn bring us back again to subjects and daily practices, enabling the endless, hegemony-producing looping of power relations to be made visible.

The first of these sections focuses on subjects situated at the bottom of the power relations under investigation. The second section sees us both looking for more traction on how power itself is established within our respective fields of inquiry, and so in quite different ways we each turn our lens from the constitution and more limited agency of those on the receiving end of capitalist and governmental power to those who exercise those forms of power or who make up social universes whose power is felt far away. That is, as previously noted, we move from “studying down” to “studying up.” However, we retain our focus on situating what we study vis-à-vis macro forces, thus limning the political culture of social inequality and grappling with the constitution of power as well as its consequences.

Constituting Subjects

To be a social actor requires social recognition, hence the fundamental polysemy of the noun “subject,” with its apparently contradictory referents: object of study, object of power, agent (Foucault 1982). Much sociological research (e.g., surveys) comes late to the action, working with “subjects” whose identities are already established and interpreting outcomes within seemingly fixed and self-evident categories (e.g., race or socioeconomic status). However, here the ethnographer has an advantage, as she can watch identities as they emerge in social space, tracking the discursive processes within which

subjects are recognized and constituted, and within whose logic they act on the world. Thus, the trick of fieldwork is to catch those subjectification processes in action, to identify the multiple addresses—in language and practice—through which intelligible subjects are made, and thus to delineate the mutating relations of power in which action takes place. In the brief descriptions below, we each take a core sample from a larger project to show that process as it unfolds, demonstrating the method of identifying discursive power at work in real time and space as an integral aspect of macro analysis.

Making Productive Subjects

Leslie: In the early 1990s, when I first entered the export processing plants (*maquilas*) that were to become the center of my first book (Salzinger 2003), I was interested in the gendered composition of the workforce: Why were men replacing women in certain sectors of the industry and not others, and what were its implications in production? However, my work as an ethnographer—immersed in the daily labor of production on the line, feeling the sharp and anxious eyes of supervisors, responding to the teasing, confessions, and competition of co-workers—brought me to a different set of questions about gender itself. Why did it feel so different for me to be a (young, US born) woman in some plants than in others? Why did masculinity and femininity look so different across plants located in the “same” cultural space? How were these meanings related to the striking quiescence of workers at three of my four sites and to the entertaining chaos of the fourth plant? And how was all this related in turn to the swashbuckling success of the maquila industry overall, with its skyrocketing efficiency and profits?

It was ethnographic immersion that brought me from the original question of workforce composition (workers as objects) to making workers (workers as subjects), from gender as a question of numbers to the question of gendered meanings, from taking “woman” and “man” as fixed categories to looking at their constitution in local process. The move to subjectification was not a move into “micro processes,” however, but instead an attempt to understand that crucial border between capital and labor where working subjects are produced (or refuse such production), and thus where profits are ultimately secured or lost.

By my arrival in Juárez, shrinking global distances had long since unleashed a race for cheap labor that converged on a single desired object, the reputedly “docile and dexterous” young third-world woman, whose nimble fingers would build the circuit boards guaranteed to produce profits back home. In interviews and

conversations throughout the city, managers expounded upon the virtues of a female workforce, composed of hires who were “by nature” inured to boredom and frustration and in need of only minimal wages. This structuring assumption, which I came to call the “trope of productive femininity,” organized the mechanics of hiring and shop-floor production, as well as the laboring conditions of industry workers. However, over the decades since the industry’s 1965 founding, managers’ obsession with women workers had led to periodic shortages of not only female bodies, but feminine docility, as tight labor markets predictably undermined shop-floor compliance. Thus, by the early 1990s, although the desiring discourse about the predominance of women workers persisted, the gender composition of factory floors varied widely and some companies began to look farther afield for assembly workers.

To grapple with this fragmented production arena, I embedded myself on the shop floors of four maquilas from three production industries, working on the line, hanging out, and chatting with workers and managers alike. The plants proved to be sharply different social universes, despite their similar embedding in a transnational system of production and in the culture of Mexico’s northern border, thus making it possible to investigate both local subjecthood and the specific discourses that produced those distinctive selves. In the TV production plant that I called “Panoptimex,” sexy, self-conscious young women—trope come to life—populated the shop floor, models of productivity in every sense. Across town, in “Andromex,” a sterile hospital goods plant, masculinized men and women alike jockeyed for respect and remuneration in a highly productive fencing match with management. The last two plants I studied were both owned by the auto parts maker “Autoworld.” “Anarchomex,” a nearby plant, stood out for its shop-floor disarray, with catcalling young men and interested young women concerned more with each other than with quality indices and assuaging managerial frustration. And in Anarchomex’s sister plant, “Particimex,” three hundred miles to the south in “Santa María,” responsible, avowedly “nontraditional” young women ran the shop floor, to the enthusiastic applause of their successful young Mexican managers. Comparison thus made structuring forces more visible, and these differences in turn became the project. Who were the gendered selves that emerged on each shop floor? What shop-floor practices, rules, and forms of address explained the specifics of their enactment? How did these management decisions relate to the unforgiving competition over profit margins that had established this corner of global production to begin with? What was it about the specific imperatives, contradictions, and tensions of production on each shop floor that led to local managerial discourses, and how did these in turn enable the

idiosyncratic gendered subjectivities I found in each plant?

Of the four plants I studied, Particimex was perhaps the most surprising. A bright new building set alone amid *chile* fields, it owed its very existence to the problems I'd seen at Anarchomex, which managers at "Autoworld" headquarters attributed to their inability to obtain the docile maidens whose promise had enticed them to Juárez to begin with. The Santa María plant was thus their solution—greener pastures in every sense. But the plant I encountered was full of surprises. As the young, enthusiastic Mexican manager took me around my first morning, explaining the plant's innovative participatory team structure and "auto-control" mechanisms, I was struck by scattered groups of young women workers sitting around tables, chatting among themselves. Unlike workers caught chatting in other plants I'd seen, they made no move to return to work at our approach. To the contrary, they watched with open curiosity as we passed by, some calling out casual, first-name salutes to my guide, then returning to their conversations. "We're not traditional here," he commented pointedly. Wandering the shop floor a few weeks later, I noticed a woman packing finished goods—a job generally described as too "heavy" for women workers in Anarchomex. She explained that she was part of an all-women team, and team members wanted to keep it that way. They rotated jobs. "We had a man on the team . . . He just wanted to . . . order everyone around. We called him *el influyente*. He left . . . and we told the supervisor we want only women. We can do all the jobs." These internal practices had repercussions for how women workers discussed life outside the plant as well. A young woman speaking of being bossed around by her husband commented, "Here, really, they don't order you around. You are responsible for your own work, for what you do." A co-worker mused, "Maybe I won't get married. They [husbands] don't let you do anything . . . Now that we work here, we're different than before."

These assertive "nontraditional" versions of womanhood were surprising in a rural area in which the lives of these young women outside the plant were structured through the ritual of asking for permission to do almost anything, whether from fathers or young husbands. And they were especially surprising in a factory built for the express purpose of getting access to a conventionally docile female workforce. But I realized that they were part of a highly effective labor control system, in which rhetorics of empowerment drowned out discussions of low wages, and the plant reliably turned out some of the highest productivity numbers in the company worldwide. Given my interest in capital and profits, I couldn't but be struck by the contrast between Anarchomex's chaos and Particimex's acclaimed productivity indices. And as a scholar of gender, I couldn't help but wonder about its links with the unusually assertive versions of femininity I found on

the shop floor.

So why here? To the frustration of the iconoclastic head of organizational development in Autoworld's Juárez headquarters, Anarchomex's US-born managers had categorically refused to try participatory management strategies, but then, they weren't prepared to work in Santa María either. On the other hand, not only were Particimex's Mexican managers willing to relocate, but, they told me, they saw these systems as enabling them to put themselves on the company map. In a large US corporation in which what they had to offer was their knowledge of "their people," participatory management leveraged that knowledge, highlighting their particular strengths for their sometimes dismissive US bosses. And in an American corporation in which they were always in danger of being lumped with local workers rather than US managers, gender became a terrain in which women could articulate their own modern difference from "traditional" Mexico, producing the surprising femininities I found at work on the Particimex shop floor.

Shop-floor subjectivities are inescapably local and particular, and as in any locale, they can be analyzed in isolation. However, to ignore the macro context in which they actually emerge—at the fulcrum of capital's attempt to create surplus value—would be to misunderstand their origins, their implications, and the many and complex roles they play. The assertive, invested, independent young women of Particimex stood out as a group, not only among the many maquila workers I had met in other plants, but against the background of daily gendered practices in Santa María as well. This ethnographic observation led me to seek explanations beyond local norms. Immersed in daily life in the plant, I found subjectifying discourses that emerged from a transnational structure whose origins were both distant—in global capitalist competition and in the offices of Detroit—and nearby—in the professional ambitions of their bosses and the shifting gender mores of the community of Santa María. The distinctively "feminine" subjects I found on the shop floor therefore made social sense only *within* these overlapping contexts.

The multiple power structures at play on the shop floor—of capital, US domination, and gender—thus become visible not because of some prior theoretical claim, but through the always interpretive work of ethnographic observation and its iterative analysis. As Cynthia Enloe (1990: 3) so concisely says, the basic feminist (and, I would add, sociological) question is, "how was this made?" It is in thinking about the idiosyncratic local subjects that ethnographic immersion makes visible and asking not just "who is here?" but "what are the forces in and through which they emerge?" that we can more fully grasp power's crucial constitutive edge.

Producing “the Homeless”

Teresa: As we shuttle between analysis and fieldwork, the challenge for the would-be macro ethnographer is to *let the field speak*—that is, to remain flexible enough to focus and extend the case in the most pertinent directions—without flying off in centrifugal chaos. A constant eye on subjectification and its effects helps us to hold the center, when other lines may be shifting.

Galvanized by the example of Leslie and other fellow Burawoy advisees, my study of homeless men in San Francisco opened with a macro extension to capital—namely, situating the increasingly ubiquitous homeless recycler with his shopping cart full of bottles within the return of large-scale informal labor produced by deindustrialization and the radical retraction of the social state.

Burawoy’s (1998: 16) call to “begin with our favorite theory” has been characterized as imposing a theory-driven rigidity on field investigation that precludes “surprises” (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 173). Yet as both a scholar and a teacher, Burawoy emphasizes theoretical reflexivity and flexibility with the motto “Be Bold, Be Wrong!”

No two cases are likely to be identical (Sayer 1984). If we initially brainstorm the academic and “commonsense” assumptions we are bringing to the field, subsequent anomalies will likely show that the case is on the move. “Wrongness” may lead us to modify or extend existing theory, but often, as in my case, this is not enough. Early on in a project, especially, our attempts to extend our cases meaningfully may propel us into new questions, theories, literatures, and, ultimately, sites. Here, I’ll sketch this process drawing on a research crisis toward the end of my first year of fieldwork.

I had started out with some assumptions about dumpster diving as a “survival strategy” that would be experienced as stigmatizing. This turned out to be mostly wrong. While all sorts of very poor people collected bottles and cans for money, in San Francisco most prominent were a core group of “pros” who had created an intense web of meaning and pride around an activity they eagerly constructed as “work.”

After publishing my first article, which described this construction of scavenging as a blue-collar job, I had the sense of following an increasingly obscure target. Limiting the context to the labor process and macroeconomics of the recycling industry felt increasingly disingenuous. The recyclers’ routine was punctuated by comments to housed people that mobilized their work as evidence that they were neither criminal nor incapable. “I ain’t hanging out, I’m resting!” “At least some people are working for a living.” “It’s good to know you are cleaning up the neighborhood.” The crucial role of the work in

stigma management was further underlined by men's conspicuous physical performance of the work, imperiously holding up traffic to roll their loaded carts across busy intersections.

As I adjusted to these messages and we started talking more about the experience of homelessness, some people said directly that psychic survival was as much at stake as economic rewards. "You lose that sense of getting through the days, that's the worst thing . . . With us recyclers, it's different—at least you are doing something and you can live with yourself," said a middle-aged Latino, Anthony.

If this "dirty job" was not only about the homeless getting cash but about surviving the master status (and social death) of homelessness, I was faced with tough decisions about how to extend my case differently, and eventually how to reconceptualize my sampling. If case extension is about moving beyond local processes to macro structuring forces, it seemed that pervasive cultural discourses about homelessness held enormous force over these men's lives. How was it that people on the street seemed increasingly molded as stock homeless archetypes, such as the withdrawn service recipient, the friendly panhandler as public character, the wily drug tout, and the pro recycler? Did entering such roles represent fleeting or lasting shifts in subjectivity?

"If you ain't here, you ain't no idea," commented Derick, an energetic, defiant African American in his early thirties, about his commitment to recycling. "So I got my hands dirty. Right, but I didn't have to deal with any bullshit poverty pimps to get my money; I've got my own. No police, no questions asked, no supervisor, no motherfucking workfare jacket."

Derick explicitly referenced both the carceral state (which threatened to reimprint the status of criminal) and the degraded social state or "poverty pimps," who would medicalize and individualize his poverty with their probing questions. And indeed, once I retooled my fieldwork around the more holistic questions of *what defined the experience of homelessness for different men, and how*, what seemed ubiquitous was wholesale criminalization and pathologization. As Derick suggested, the city's closely entangled punitive and welfare functions played a viscerally immediate role in their lives. Regular police clearances, with tickets for "camping" and other status offenses, corralled thousands toward the purgatorial shelter system, leaving the men constantly disrupted and on the defensive.

Whether trying to get shelter beds for more than a night, to retain General Assistance, or to keep out of jail, men on the street were endlessly burdened with "questions asked," demanding ritual excuses for indigence combining modest claims to "deserving poverty" with admissions of personal failings.

Within this messy field, overlaid by complex and sometimes

conflicting images of criminality, mental illness, and drug compulsion, how might I draw together the most fruitful macro trails? Rather than sticking with favorite theories about labor informalization, I was led by my field experiences in the direction of a discourse analysis of homelessness, contextualized by the history and sociology of homelessness, criminalization, and poverty management.

My questions now turned on the ways men experienced homelessness on the street and in the poverty agencies. What new kinds of subjects were being made? To what extent did the pro recycling scene create an anomalous homeless reality, and how?

I developed a schema highlighting three institutionalized discursive logics constituting contemporary homelessness—sin-talk, sick-talk, and system-talk. Rooted respectively in criminal justice, the shelter system, and the radical advocacy movement, these discourses created different structures of coherence with antithetical causal stories about homelessness and potential solutions. Sin-talk summoned the twin strategies of exclusion and punishment to deal with “street people,” sick-talk called for treatment for “multi-problem individuals,” and system-talk turned the lens outward, demanding reform, or even transformation, of the broader society.

Methodologically, this turn entailed retooling both samples and sites. I continued to study men, given their separation from women, but went in and out of poverty agencies and other institutions with my street companions wherever possible. I broadened my sample on the basis of the working schema to include men who identified more closely with the strong agency of criminality or with the moral reprieve of disability and addiction, trying to keep a demographic breakdown roughly typical of the city’s homeless population.

I found that the way men were “doing homelessness” led them to converge in different spaces, leading me toward new naturalistic samples, such as the self-identified hustlers of the Tenderloin skid row neighborhood—who refused to see themselves as victims and never used the language of “homeless” or “on the street,” instead claiming the streets as their own turf. How different groups understood poverty and homelessness became key, but so did the gathering of intimate life histories, revealing the relationship between durable dispositions and the making of homeless subjects in the present.

In order to understand the making of the field, though, I needed to extend up through its institutional structures, grasping the larger processes producing, mediating, and culturally coding male homelessness. Here is not the place to recount that entire journey, but one point seems important to emphasize: the question of how far the macro extensions of my San Francisco case could be generalized.

We ethnographers are often quizzed about generalization. Our capacity to generalize from our cases depends, I argue, on the scale

and character of the structural forces involved. For example, there are strong correlations between deindustrialization, economic depressions, and homelessness across the world. Of course, these are highly mediated across places and demographic groups by different social welfare systems, housing prices and tenure, the strength of kinship ties, and many more factors. However, in other aspects, far more uniform effects can be seen. For instance, during the middle to late 1990s changes in federal homelessness policy transformed shelter programs all over the United States. A general professionalization led by changes in federal funding stipulations shifted toward substance abuse counseling, changing the character of case management and consolidating sick-talk as the institutional lingua franca. As programs offered more services to clients in return for much deeper levels of compliance, substance abuse became the default “problem” for able-bodied people who could or would not offer other justifications for their homelessness.

Many men complained that the new programs assumed every able-bodied man was homeless because he was an addict. One skilled construction worker, Carlos, finally found some painting work only to be told, “Nuh-uh. No way. It’s not work you need right now. You need to work on your recovery.”

Carlos called me from the shelter, nearly crying from frustration. “I don’t know what to do. They are going to kick me out the program if I take the job. It’s so fucking stupid. [Wayne] is so sure that it’s all about drugs, you know . . . ‘You’ve got to work on your issues,’ he says. All I know is, for me, work is a big fucking issue, the biggest. I came to this town for work, and this is the first decent work I find, and they won’t let me stay in the shelter if I don’t go to fucking AA every day.” Carlos was about to blow. “Jesus Christ, it’s like, it’s like all the change has got to be you. You’re the asshole, everything thing else is just fucking dandy. Well, maybe it’s not that simple!”

The shelter’s focus on substance abuse and other “sick-talk” meant that Carlos’s admission to some cocaine use (in common with many successful tradesmen and professionals) foreclosed his “system-talking” attempt to maintain his identity as a carpenter, firmly constituting him as a “street addict.”

As a “macro” ethnographer, I could have continued to focus on the political economy shaping Carlos’s experience, highlighting his subaltern position in the trades as a man of color, then following his increasingly desperate migration coinciding with regional construction busts starting in the East. This story was well worth telling, but given that I was deeply embedded in various street scenes, it made more sense to explore the *erasure* of such a way of seeing across the whole homelessness industry. By turning from political economy toward the institutionalized discourses that generated radically different

constructions of extreme poverty, the project settled into a different kind of macro.

Fixing Power in the Gaze

In the first half of this chapter, we explored the constitution of subjects subordinated by capital and state power. However, such analyses too easily reify those impinging structures, imagining a set of relationships between thinking subjects as a geometric edifice that operates beyond human reach. This is both inaccurate and politically unhelpful, as it suggests a kind of power immune to intervention or even critique (Gibson-Graham 2006; Salzinger 2004). For an ethnographer, “studying up” is one way to short-circuit that objectifying dynamic, to get more traction on the constitution and operation of dominant structures as well as their consequences. In different ways, we have each taken on that challenge, looking to describe from up close some of the structures that shape the world we inhabit. That is, rather than studying the constitution of only those whose agency is most circumscribed, in this section we describe ethnographies focused on subjects who themselves make up structures of power with far-reaching implications.

Spinning Nationality into Capital

Leslie: Shortly after I finished the fieldwork for my maquila study in 1994, the peso collapsed and the entire Mexican export-processing industry went through one of its periodic restructurings in response. Looking up from the shop floor, I decided my next project should turn from production to finance, from those constituted by the vagaries of capital to the traders who made up the market itself. From that thought to the research itself was a long journey, but in the early 2000s, I began fieldwork on the New York and Mexico City trading desks of “Globank,” a major, US-owned transnational bank that dominated peso/dollar exchange.

Seen from the vantage point of the maquila sector, foreign exchange markets were an external force, shifting the conditions under which production occurred with breathtaking speed and finality. However, viewed from up close, from the perspective of the Globank trading desks, these same markets are themselves made up of individual agents, every move a gesture in a cultural field defined by economic assumptions, national and corporate goals, market norms, and tropes of appropriate masculine, national, and “professional” (i.e., disinterested) performance. That is, the market itself is made of these

discursively produced gestures; although the agency of individual traders is of course sharply circumscribed, there is no pre-social “market” to which they are added: they *are* “the market.” Thus, traders are both cogs in and producers of a discursive structure with formidable consequences beyond their own realm. To take a macro approach to studying up in this context, then, is to document the many structures that impinge on specific sets of traders in specific market locations—domestic economies and politics; workplace-level incentives and hierarchies; Forex market norms; discourses around masculinity and appropriate forms of national affiliation and professional distance—and to document their consequences for the exchanges that emerge. In so doing, we can begin to limn an economic “force” (Burawoy et al. 2000) we more typically view from afar.

Between 2001 and 2006, I did six periods of ethnographic research, ranging from two weeks to three months, on peso/dollar exchange bank trading desks in New York and Mexico City, spending most of that time in Globank. On trading desks in both cities, I sat next to any trader willing to put up with me for the day, chatting, questioning, being teased, taught, and lectured, writing and writing, and then jumping out of the way whenever a trading rush hit. Here I will focus on a single locale, Globank’s Latin American “emerging markets” desk in the United States, as its function as the administrative hub of Globank trading desks throughout the Americas makes the complex and asymmetric power relations that typify the market easier to spot. For similar reasons, I will concentrate on a specific set of interpellatory discourses within that locale—the reiterated citation of nationality and its unmarked other, “professionalism”—as nationality threads through the market, linking traders’ personal identities to the national objects they trade and making visible the power relations that structure both. The descriptions to follow thus demonstrate how ethnographic observation of the way subjects turn up in social space, attuned to the pressures and invitations within which that occurs, can illuminate both local processes and their consequential links to cross-cutting discourses around nationality, workplace hierarchy, and market power.

The “New York desk” is in lower Manhattan, a cramped island of eleven young, mostly Latin American men. The group’s small size belies its outsized reach. The desk is the fiber optic hub for currency exchanges that ricochet across the United States and Latin America, and sometimes across the globe. Linked directly to Globank offices in all the major Latin American capitals, this group trades many millions of dollars a day, in constant internal interaction, not only with their multiple screens and with each other, but in real time over open mics with their compatriots in branches throughout Latin America’s major cities. At every moment, they live and function at the nexus of

transnational and national space.

Globank's "comparative advantage" in these markets is the access to information provided by its local trading desks throughout Latin America. However, local trading desks are far away and can be mired in "local viewpoint." This was made explicit when a Globank economist told me flatly, "Local treasury may be reluctant to go short because they've got to live there." So how could they leverage that local knowledge, that privileged access to information, without having to pay for it in inconvenient allegiances and sensibilities? The New York desk is Globank's answer to that question: populated by traders circulating up from "home" offices for several-year stints, work on the desk provides on-the-job training in "objectivity" in the trade, cultural performance in the rich social life surrounding it.

Globank's New York traders work for a transnational corporation, live outside their countries of origin, speak fluent English, and are casually, unthinkingly mobile. That is, they are precisely the sort of rootless global elites so frequently invoked by academics (e.g., Castells 1996) and media alike. Except, in practice they are not. Watching them over time on the Globank desk revealed that they constantly indexed nationality in daily interactions. This, I soon realized, is because they are hired as Mexicans or Brazilians, expected not to erase their nationality but to use it to financial advantage. Effective trading in these markets requires the capacity to read between the lines in political developments and find information in a context where asymmetries of access abound. Latin American traders are frequently the first to hear rumors of impending shifts and shocks in their own country's currency. New York traders' relationships with those back "home" and their commitment to returning make these information flows possible.

Access to information is only part of what nationality brings. Being Latin American itself is a kind of currency, and although most of the traders' English is flawless, Spanish marks boundaries. A Latin American salesman, annoyed at the spreads provided by the lone Anglo on the trading desk, says loudly to his client in Spanish, "It's a gringo who's giving us those prices. The Ecuadorians, the Mexicans, they all give us good prices." The other traders laugh approvingly, despite the fact that they *agree* with their colleague's pricing. When an Anglo salesman complains to an Ecuadorian senior trader that he doesn't understand a conversation just forwarded to him, the trader yells across the aisle, "It's emerging markets! Learn Spanish!" Although the financial heart of electronic transactions is always written and confirmed "professionally," that is, in English, I'm struck, as I look over shoulders, at how Spanish marks technically unofficial conversation. This is where the market's lifeblood—news, rumors, gossip—flows, and this is where allegiances are cemented and rifts

marked.

The nationality claimed here is also a prized cultural object. When I tell Diego I'm planning to go to Globank in Mexico City, he answers in English, "You'll like it . . . It's very 'folkloric.'" What it is not, however, is an expression of either material stakes or political belonging. For one thing, the New York-based traders' pay comes in dollars. The Brazil trader makes explicit the effects of these practices as I push him on how he feels about the persistently falling Brazilian currency. "Sure, if I were being paid in reales [I'd worry]." He shrugs. By pulling Latin American traders out of their countries of origin and paying them in dollars, Globank gets access to their local expertise, without having to worry about countervailing personal interests.

All this is part of the active constitution of an appropriately market-oriented attitude among traders whose friends, families, and futures lie in the countries whose currencies they trade. Discussions on the desk and in meetings are packed with critiques of home governments and jokes at their expense. Over time, I'm especially struck by the unusually harsh treatment meted out to a young trader up from Brazil for a training visit who keeps betraying an inappropriately citizen-like concern for Brazilian policy. All month, the other traders school him, correcting not his assessments but the vantage point from which he makes them. One day he makes clear that he disagrees with the substance of some new policies at home, not because of the way they affect his position in the market, but as someone who has to live with them. The room is uncomfortable, and following him out after the meeting, Diego, uncharacteristically brusque, tells him he talked too long. Later they hear the Argentine president is threatening to resign. "Is that good or bad?" he asks. "Are you flat?"¹ "No." "Then it's bad."

Focusing on the discourse of nationality as an ethnographic object allows us to look at one slice of the three-dimensional space that is the global foreign exchange market. Discourses of national identity, produced both inside and outside the bank, interpellate traders, who use those discourses in turn not only to make money but to make the market itself. Far from obliterating national identity, participation in Globank reconstitutes it in productive terms, sidelining political issues and bringing cultural tropes to the fore, allowing Latin American traders to use knowledge and connections, with feeling!, without being weighed down by conflicting interests or distracting loyalties. On a daily basis, they perform a market in which "culture" produces affiliation and alliance but "professionalism" enables buying and selling "Mexico" without reference to the lives lived within the country itself.

Pace economists' descriptions of currencies as self-evident objects of speculation, it takes a particular kind of social actor—one who is simultaneously engaged enough to be knowledgeable while

disengaged enough to literally sell his [*sic*] country short—to make such a market function. Studying these exchanges up close makes it possible to demystify their operations and reveal their cultural underpinnings. At the same time, locating these subjectifying processes in institutional structures of transnational capital reveals the connections between these cultural processes and power and inequality more broadly, thus linking culture to political economy. Ethnographic immersion, sensitized to the question of power and politics, can illuminate the quotidian practices through which elite, (re)nationalized selves make a market, and thus identify a crucial site and set of processes in which a “developing nation” is transformed into an “emerging market” and a country is made into a commodity, for sale like any other.

Manufacturing Addicts

Teresa: As I witnessed numerous homeless men without serious drug or alcohol problems being placed by default in mandatory substance abuse groups in San Francisco, it became clear that they could stay in the primary “transitional housing” available to them only if they accepted the addict label and entered highly disciplinary residential rehabilitation facilities. An emerging professional consensus was compelling poverty agency staffers all over the country to read successive waves of dispossession purely in terms of addiction and mental illness, and their academic counterparts were now producing more work on “the homeless” and their personal pathologies than on poverty and inequality.

When time came to design my next large project, I aimed straight for what seemed to be a central engine of this “medicalization” of poverty, the rapidly expanding world of court-mandated drug rehabilitation. This time, I wanted to get deeper into the constitution of a field itself, and thanks to my collaboration with Sarah Whetstone and several others, I was able to gather a treasure trove of both field notes and life history interviews across several sites.

If processes “live in relations,” argues Matthew Desmond (2014: 565), “then studying them requires a dynamic approach, abandoning the group or place as the locus classicus of ethnographic exploration and taking processes themselves as the fundamental units of analysis.” To what extent this strategy means abandoning long-term personal or spatial intimacy depends, of course, on the chosen process, but Desmond argues for tracing social process through new contexts, knitting together diverse spaces and agents.

Our project unpacked the process of a new temperance crusade among (and against) the poor that has taken off over the past twenty

years through the archetype of the “criminal addict.” Rather than hold tight focus on one place or group, we moved through a set of institutions in which this iconic subject is locally identified, disciplined, converted, and punished. In other words, rather than staying with one group or site and using subjectification as a productive launching pad for extending the case, we took a key modern subject—the criminal addict—and followed the ways that subject was constituted, looking far “up” into crucial national policy shifts but focusing the ethnographic research “across” a field of governance. Even more than insured rehab, strong-arm rehab “succeeds,” even in the short term, only with a minority of clients. We retained a strong focus on how the subjects of these interventions themselves took up (or refused) this identity in different ways—strategically, passionately, reluctantly, or creatively, turning it back on itself.

From the jail and city drug court we pursued the clients into the strong-arm rehab we called Arcadia House, which serves as one of the primary sites of subjectification for court-mandated clients. Another key site was Victory Ministries, Arcadia’s powerful evangelical equivalent. Like other conversion-based rehabilitation facilities, Victory Ministries had steadily expanded in size and influence since the various changes in federal law known as Charitable Choice (1996–2000) started to promote government contracts for faith-based social services and drug treatment. Here we shifted laterally again to fieldwork in the churches that provided their performative outlet and much financial support. Finally, we talked to former clients trying to launch new lives, sat in on the AA meetings that reinforce recovery discourse and community post-treatment, and studied the experience of the “sober houses” (both AA and evangelical) that have become a primary source of cheap housing for single adults. In what follows, I focus on one part of the process—the attempted creation of the criminal addict through the collaboration between drug courts and strong-arm rehab.

The war on drug users and dealers has been a primary driver of the threefold increase in the US prison population since 1980, incarcerating many for the first time and steadily increasing the flow of angry, often traumatized men and women from what are often already troubled families and communities. Over the past twenty years, public worry about the expense, harshness, and volatility of this strategy of social control has swelled, giving rise to renewed interest in mandatory rehabilitation. The response has been the explosion of drug courts, which operate on the principle that those charged (or convicted) of drug crimes should give up their rights to due process in favor of “therapeutic justice.” Based on the idea that individuals are incapable of acting in their own interest (by stopping their illicit drug

use) without the criminal justice system's involvement, drug courts turn defendants into clients, with the entire legal team (including both prosecutor and defender) working with the judge and treatment personnel to provide a supportive, firm, and consistent message. Clients are usually sent to residential treatment, but most end up under the harsh discipline of what we call strong-arm rehab, rehab for the uninsured, which emphasizes excising criminality (Gowan and Whetstone 2012).

In the dull wood and beige of the drug court, Donnie, an African American man in his late twenties, was called to the bench. His short braids fell back from a high forehead over bright eyes and a narrow mustache, his light voice and vivacious style at odds with an oversized sweater with large orange and navy stripes. He slouched against the lower shelf of Judge Paak's bench, but valiantly threw himself into the heavy banter characteristic of court appearances framed around "doing okay."

JUDGE PAAK: How are you doing, Donnie?

DONNIE: Doing okay, doing good! Like the sweater? [*He smiles goofily up at the judge.*]

JUDGE PAAK: Any time you're wearing a sweater it's a good day! [*Forced laughter all around.*]

The judge asked the counselor for an update. (In fact, the more significant team discussions and decisions about clients were all made prior to the court session, in backroom consultations where the treatment staff's assessment most strongly determined the outcome.)

COUNSELOR: He's been back almost a week now. He's doing pretty good. Last week he had a few behavioral issues but he's on track, doing all right. [These "issues" were typically minor, such as eating food in a room where food was not allowed.]

JUDGE PAAK TO DONNIE: So do you know what happened last time and what's gonna be different this time?

DONNIE: Oh, *everything's* gonna be different . . . I'll take it *one day at a time*. Evidently *I can't do it on my own* so I asked my brothers and my peers for help.

JUDGE PAAK: You've got it in your head. I hear you say it, so you can use it.

Hindsight is 20/20, and in the light of Donnie's relatively quick abandonment of the program after this episode, his performance feels less than wholehearted. He made an unorthodox differentiation between "brothers" and "peers," which marks a refusal to fully enter Arcadia's color-blind "family" construct. And despite Paak's encouraging statement that now he had "it" in his head, Donnie

appeared on the edge of satirizing this same received wisdom, claiming total renewal all over again (only one week after returning from the street), then stringing together one clichéd AA motto after another. Yet performing these lines was in fact what the theater of drug court demanded, and the clients knew that the line between performing and mocking the script was fine indeed. Indeed, “Fake it till you make it” is a motto of its own, speaking to the uncertain place between force and consent, between going through the motions and the slow distillations of those new motions into habit.

Yet there is no doubt that Donnie had learned how to “talk the talk” to some extent. The first priority in Arcadia is to get clients to take on the identity of the criminal addict. In a typical exercise comparing and contrasting addicts with sober people, clients called out that addicts were “selfish, greedy, manipulative, monstrous, dirty, irresponsible, and arrogant.” Sober people, on the other hand, were canonized as “selfless, giving, accountable, lovable, clean, responsible, and humble.”

Strong-arms like Arcadia are not in the business of saving people from damaged aspects of themselves, but of making brand-new people. Backed up by criminal justice, they required the intensive reprogramming of behaviors and attitudes, not rehabilitation but “habilitation.” Rehabilitation would imply the preexistence of a socially adjusted adult, whereas “criminal addicts” needed to start from scratch, acquiring the disciplined behavior and life skills that they had never learned. This project allowed very limited attribution of honor or rationality to the pre-recovery persona, and statements to the contrary were inevitably interpreted as “stinking thinking,” a sign of the addict who had not been transformed.

It was mostly the African American clients, generally the least drug-dependent in reality, who were paradoxically the targets of the most confrontational makeover attempts. Young African American Lamar reflected:

Sylvia threatened to make me wear some rainbow suspenders because she says my pants are too low. Stupid shit . . . When I went to jail I got treated better than this.

Anchored by the diagnosis of criminal addict, Arcadia staffers slipped easily between biological, therapeutic, moral, and ultimately racial-cultural frames. Given Sylvia’s focus on the tightness of Lamar’s belt, it’s not surprising that Donnie and Judge Paak emphasized the wearing of the sweater in the court’s treatment theater.

“The bus to prison is always waiting,” the counselors would tell the Arcadia men. “It’s right outside your door.” And indeed, some weeks after the “sweater” day Donnie returned in cuffs and an orange

jumpsuit. With a beatific smile he assured a stern Judge Paak that no, he did not want to return to Arcadia but would rather serve out the rest of his sentence in jail.

“You understand that you are done with drug court and are now doing straight time?” asked the judge.

“Yup,” Donnie grinned quickly, his former slouch and ingratiating jokes a distant memory, along with the ill-fitting stripes. He radiated electric energy, feet apart and shoulders square. “Straight time.”

Donnie was evidently unconvinced, but the project of becoming a new subject seemed to resonate with some of the clients. Those who stayed the course duly learned to present themselves as new people. Cory, a white methamphetamine user in his early twenties, told his “brothers” that he was trying to leave behind his “criminal-thinking mind”: “I never want to be my old self again, because that was my demon self.”

For the minority who graduated and stayed sober, a cohort heavily skewed toward white men, the makeover continued to feel worth it. “You just gotta take it, and take it, and take it, till you start to get it,” said Steve, a white forty-five-year-old who had lost his livelihood as a city parks worker to his alcohol and cocaine use.

Jimbo, a white man in his mid-forties who had been sent to Arcadia after doing some time on a weapons charge, insisted that for him the turning point had been calm advice and the promise of family, rather than severity.

Counselor Mike takes one key from his hand and drops it in the other hand, and he says, “You know the key is gonna fall. And the more you do it, you know that . . . that you’re gonna get the same outcome. Sobriety is the same way. The more you do it, the better your life will get.” And then I [Jimbo] was like, Wow, that makes sense . . .

It wasn’t sitting on the bench [which combined public humiliation with solitary confinement], because I already did all that bullshit from the military. You can beat me, you can stick me out there and do push-ups all day and say whatever you’re gonna . . . But it was the little things that really helped me.”

Jimbo had spent his teens on the street stealing and selling sex, and the next decades crisscrossing the country, in and out of the military and precarious jobs, haunted by alcoholic bingeing and sudden rages. He had never found peace in regular family situations, and Arcadia’s (and AA’s) promise of an alternative family structure became increasingly compelling. Jimbo had now been living at Denham halfway house for an unusual six years, firming up the habits of peaceful sobriety with the help of AA, Wicca, and learning the guitar. Like other successful graduates, Jimbo expressed gratitude that “the system” had forced him into serious treatment, commenting that his military background

helped him deal with the harsh discipline.

While a minority of clients of mandatory treatment struggle through into new sober lives, well over half disappear before the halfway mark, walking out or kicked out. Yet in the process of cycling between precarious employment and poverty management institutions saturated with strong-arm's "criminal addict" construct, even the recalcitrant learn to present themselves as well-meaning but helpless creatures in strong need of firm external discipline. They simultaneously learn that pointing to experiences of chronic unemployment, racial discrimination, poverty, and isolation represents "not taking responsibility." Within the increasingly hegemonic construct of poverty as (criminal) addiction, I learned that the word "structure" means only one thing. Far from being a vital concept for critical analysis or critique, it refers to the bridle that substandard Americans "need": necessary systems of accountability enforced by the muscular state or the low-wage labor market.

The Necessary Politics of Macro Ethnography

So what does macro analysis mean for ethnography? Like Andrew Sayer (1984: 122), we take the social world to be inherently complex, each research site a node within an infinitely open system riven by all sorts of flows of economic, discursive, and institutional power. Sure, each scholar has to choose a focus for her research, but too much bracketing of larger-scale power relations mutes the vitality of the sociological imagination. In order to understand power in the fluid, multi-scalar way that the great twentieth-century theorists teach, "micro" and "macro" have to be understood as linked by and infused with cultural structures "all the way down" (Geertz 1973: 28–29), whether our terminology centers on discourse, racial formation, hegemony, heteronormativity, or governmentality. For us, a good ethnography should explore at least some of these flows.

For many years, Burawoy's version of the extended case method has come to stand for macro within US ethnography, sometimes with respect, sometimes as caricature. Both of us continue to value it as a framework that highlights the social as a dimensional space and that places power and social critique at its center. Like many scholars who have engaged productively with this work (e.g., Eliasoph and Lichterman 1999), we give cultural structures a more central place than earlier iterations that focused more narrowly on political economy. However, the perennial potential for both capital and the state to throw ordinary people's everyday lives into crisis has been demonstrated yet again over the past decade, as the 2008 financial crisis nearly brought down the world financial system, leaving

massive food and housing shortages in the global south and increased unemployment, debt, and precarity everywhere (Desmond 2012; Weinstein 2014). At the same time, the United States' long turn toward criminal justice as the foremost principle of and institution for the social control of poorer Americans has been met with successive waves of revolt, from Occupy to #BlackLivesMatter, inspiring sociologists to maintain vigorous engagement with both those "on the ground" (Haney 2010; Rios 2011) and those in more powerful locations, such as city lawyers, police captains, and leaders of prison guards' unions (Beckett and Herbert 2009; Page 2011).

Both the above-mentioned crises and the multiple social refusals and revolts they have engendered suggest the continuing centrality of power to any form of social analysis. They also make clear that power always lies both beyond and within any site we study. Yes, some of the processes of domination that shape the field are beyond the view of the ethnographer (and often of the participants). However, vital strands of power related to these "external" structures run through all of life, as powerful or hegemonic discourses, as ingrained practices, and sometimes, indeed, as overt moments of economic domination or authoritarian despotism. As ethnographers, our aim is to make these strands visible and to draw out their links to larger structures.

Perhaps because the increasing political and economic polarization of the past few decades has made elite power so evident, ethnographers are increasingly not content to study consequences but have turned instead to "studying up" (Nader 1972)—to focusing directly on power itself. Yet this has proved to have its own pitfalls. For instance, a project like Leslie's, in which she spent informal time over a long period with elites, creates a powerful temptation to "go native." After all, Leslie is more like an elite trader than she is like a maquila assembly worker! The general expansion of economic sociology and science and technology studies motivates highly educated middle-class intellectuals to do fieldwork with people with whom they have a lot in common (e.g., Beunza and Stark 2004). In some cases they gain rare intellectual recognition and financial rewards from the field itself.

Given that sociology's political traction has shrunk in tandem with declining commitment to the social state and the regulation of capital, such enticing conditions tempt us to lose critical distance and to underplay power relations altogether (especially as domination is usually the least popular topic among powerfully situated field informants!). However, in the current conjuncture, it is more essential than ever that ethnographic work at the managerial and elite levels remain truly macro, attuned to the complexity of subjectification in a world where those with more privilege tend to have bigger, better selves and to be oblivious to the ways that their "smartness,"

dynamism, charity, or autonomy may be predicated on the helplessness, drudgery, or routinization imposed on others (Sherman 2007). Ethnography has a long tradition of empathy for the subject, which has often flowed seamlessly into sympathy for the “underdog” (Gouldner 1973). In the context of “studying up,” however, it is all the more important to separate the ethical and political, avoiding the seductions of becoming “traditional intellectuals” (Gramsci, Hoare, and Nowell-Smith 1972: 5–23) for the market or punitive state.

Of course, the notion of studying “up” or “down” feels rather crude in a post-Foucauldian academy. “Up” seems to imply simply more raw power, and “down” its endpoints or results, with “culture,” or the workings of race and gender, relegated to the everyday. In practice, many ethnographers seem to be doing away with this divide (e.g., Haney 2010; Mahmood 2011). Leslie details the on-the-ground production of purportedly traditional gender hierarchies in the maquilas, and Teresa the individualization and medicalization of poverty within homeless shelters and strong-arm rehab. In such cases, the everyday practices of middle-class professionals, whether in factories, social services, or the legal system, play a vital part in developing or maintaining projects of intimate control and productive power. In so doing they indeed serve various “higher-up” imperatives to increase productivity or pursue new disciplinary targets, but they also draw deeply, in specific ways, on the existing patterns in which race, class, and gender work to mark bodies and constitute subjectivity.

To further complicate the picture, the workings of power are often unstable or unpredictable. People fight domination in all sorts of ways, from refusing eye contact to flipping dominant discourses, from working slowly to building large-scale social movements (which become power structures of their own). Ethnographers, like other scholars, are now more likely to theorize agency as a new form of subjectification than as pure “resistance” (e.g., Mahmood 2011). The women of Particimex claim new dignity and autonomy, but at the same time help their managers achieve record productivity. But we could equally write the sentence the other way around. The limited dignity and autonomy allowed within one setting may break new boundaries in others, and new possibilities may emerge, sometimes even revolutionary ones.

Whether we are studying authoritarian settings or social movements, subjectification—the making and remaking of people under different social conditions, the meaning that they make of these conditions, and the action that ensues—should be a core analytic of ethnographic investigation. And given that we all live within complex global webs that interweave economy, culture, politics, and ecology, it makes sense to extend our cases where the lines of connection are

most charged for the lives of our participants and those they affect. When working with people experiencing oppression, ethnography should not just serve as a field guild to the exotic, but follow these charged lines of connection “up” and “out” into linked structures of domination. Similarly, work within sites or fields of privilege should trace how privilege is made and exercised—by extending the case to implicated others near and far (e.g., Sherman 2007).

Subjectification isn’t the only form that power takes, of course. A drone dropping a bomb on a wedding party, a sudden layoff, a cancer due to asbestos exposure—such disasters are not fundamentally discursive. But the strength of macro-oriented ethnography lies in its ability to see the processes whereby meaning is created, becomes power, and sets humans in action. This means that, for us, all micro is inherently macro, and vice versa. We look for the most interesting and important ways that people’s lives are being shaped by hegemonic projects and assess the success or failure of this subjectification. Or we travel up lines of power to take apart the constitution of social “forces” (Burawoy 1998: 15–16), excavating the ways that the small day-to-day practices of those in powerful locations make, shake, or break the life worlds of the rest of humanity. Sometimes we do both. Whatever the case, we center our research within a multidimensional and “macro” vision.

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1 "Flat" is a market term signifying that a trader does not have a speculative position in the currency he's trading. In this case, not being flat meant that the trader was financially at risk if the Argentine peso collapsed.