Introduction

Concepts like "nation," "society," and "culture" name bits and threaten to turn names into things. Only by understanding these names as bundles of relationships, and by placing them back into the field from which they were abstracted, can we hope to avoid misleading inferences and increase our share of understanding.

Eric Wolf (1982, p. 3)

Culture, International Business, and the Place of Ethnography

Culture is everywhere in international business (IB). Whether manifested in person, on the telephone, by email, texting, or passively through the internet, IB life is rife with cultural significance. One might argue that this is true in any type of business setting, whether domestic or international, especially given the nature of today's globalized and interconnected world. Certainly, scholars of culture or any individual sensitive to the effects of culture(s) on everyday life would think so. The difference, though, is in kind and intensity. Whatever the effects of culture are in a domestic setting, these are amplified considerably in international settings where individuals scattered throughout the globe with distinct national cultural backgrounds (often multicultural) and with diverging cultural assumptions about how business is done are brought together in real time (often virtually and at different time zones) across distance and differentiated cultural contexts. So, understanding how culture impacts IB phenomena such as foreign direct investment, internationalization, mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, market entry, technology transfer, global teaming, and a multitude of other organizational processes is critical to IB scholarship and practice. Yet, armed with only superficial measures of national cultural differences proliferated by easy-to-use, statistically testable cultural dimensions offered by aggregate values-based models of culture (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004; Schwartz,

2012), IB scholars find themselves stereotype rich and operationally poor where culture meets IB contexts.

The word "culture" is almost always used interchangeably with national culture in the field of IB by scholars as well as practitioners, most of whom treat it as a static, monolithic, and scientifically graspable entity. A CEO of a global company thinking about culture in such narrow and summative terms to inform localization strategies would be like a forester trying to ascertain causes of forest dieback by looking at the forest's general characteristics and not at the trees that make it up. Such knowledge can only be attained by studying the individual trees and learning about their particular circumstances within the forest: Do they have enough sunlight and water? Space to grow? Is there evidence of blight? What kind? Likewise, it is impossible to ascertain culture's effect on IB without learning how it is understood and experienced by the individuals who make it up. For example, if a multinational company (MNC) wants to know why its corporate culture is an asset in one region of the world and not in another, it will need specific local knowledge that would include input from individuals working in and with its subsidiaries in those regions. Or, if an employee of an MNC wants to know why their team counterpart in another country is not responding to their emails in a fashion to which they are accustomed, generalized national cultural values measures likely won't help. They will need more specific knowledge of the situation, including whether there are structural issues such as power differentials between the employee and their counterpart wherein the counterpart is not at liberty to respond without approval from their boss. Values are only one manifestation of a country's culture, and they are not necessarily indicative of the organizational values of the various companies founded and operating in that country. Moreover, values (national or organizational) are not necessarily shared equally among individuals making up a culture. People are much more than aggregate cultural wholes presented in quantitative studies. It's therefore just not possible for such aggregate cultural values measures to capture the link between culture and individual behavior or culture and firm strategy.

Traditional positivist approaches that treat culture as one of a plethora of independent variables in statistical analyses fall short of adequately capturing the complexity of cultural phenomena and their consequences in international organizations. For IB scholars and practitioners, this necessarily means going beyond questionnaires and numerical data, taking more of an interpretivist approach and widening our view of culture to see it as multifaceted and complex and enacted by individuals who are equally multifaceted

and complex. Ethnography, with its focus on learning about culture(s) through firsthand experience, is the most effective approach for gaining insights into such micro-level embedded cultural phenomena. Only by spending substantial time with people in their cultural context can we begin to piece together a holistic understanding of the dynamics of culture and its consequences in IB settings.

Ethnography and Other Fields of Research

Although having its practical and theoretical development in the field of anthropology increasingly over the last couple of decades, ethnography has taken off in a wide variety of fields including communications, education, geography, health and political science, linguistics, management, musicology, organizational studies, and psychology. In anthropology, ethnography has a historical basis in studying non-Western cultures with micro-level focus on how individuals engage with the world around them. In sociology, anthropology's closest relation and the field where ethnography was adopted early on, the approach has been applied at a more macro-level focus on society (historically Western ones) to facilitate richer understandings and thoughtful theory building on how society, social classes, institutions, and structures affect individuals, families, and communities. The documentation and differentiation of immigrant gangs between "street corner" and "college boys" in the North End of Boston (Whyte, 1943), the identifying of three types of bureaucracy in an industrial mining community (Gouldner, 1954), and the uncovering of the informal organizational chart (Dalton, 1959) stand out as important contributions from classic ethnographies in the field. Management and organization studies, close disciplinary cousins of IB, have also experienced what might be called an "ethnography turn" catalyzed by the special issue on qualitative methods in the *Administrative Science Quarterly* (September 1983) edited by John Van Maanen and further invigorated by his *Tales of the Field on Writing Ethnography* (Van Maanen, 1988). The latter has become a classic reading in many doctoral programs in management around the world.

Companies too have begun to appreciate the value of ethnography for a multitude of purposes. These include working with designers and product developers to go beyond features and functionality, rethinking user needs by learning from their day-to-day lives, researching how individuals apply technologies in unexpected ways beyond those intended by developers and

designers, groundbreaking work in corroboration with Big Data and digital ethnography, and even helping policymakers and leaders set the standards for responsible applications of artificial intelligence. Ethnographic thinking offers companies and organizations the cultural insights they need to develop fully informed strategies. Because of this, many MNCs, including Honeywell, Intel, IBM, JPMorgan, Microsoft, Motorola, and Xerox, have hired in-house ethnographers, and the list goes on and on. Change often occurs at the boundaries of endeavors and innovation often occurs at the intersection of domains. In such ways there are currently frame-breaking happenings at the intersections of anthropology and business causing the boundaries of both to expand. LinkedIn, an important social media resource in business, has several groups devoted to this intersectional focus, including Business Anthropology, Consumer Anthropology, and Anthropology Applied to Business, each of which has over 5,000 members, and Organizational Anthropology, which at last count had over 35,000 people registered. On the academic front there are also LinkedIn groups for the American Anthropological Association's National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA) and the *Journal of Business Anthropology* (JBA). There is even an internationally active organization of practicing ethnographers called EPIC: Advancing the Value of Ethnography in Industry, which has been active since the turn of the millennium, holding yearly conferences across the globe and promoting the practice of ethnography to create value in industry, organizations, and communities.[1]

Barriers to Ethnography in the Field of IB

Given all this endorsement, why then has ethnography rarely been used in IB scholarship? Perhaps this is due in part to the difficulty of conducting ethnographic research in one's home culture, let alone abroad and often in a foreign language, and in part to the time commitment involved in transcribing, translating, coding, and analyzing the data. What's more, ethnography is generally not taught in the principal research design courses in doctoral programs in IB. These barriers are, of course, exacerbated by the bias toward positivist, large-scale quantitative deductive studies and the priority given to journal articles rather than monographs in advancing one's academic career in

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[1] The abbreviation EPIC stands for Ethnographic Praxis in Corporations. For more information on EPIC's activities, see www.epicpeople.org.

the social sciences in general, which is even more pronounced in applied fields such as management and IB. Indeed, crafting journal articles from ethnographic monographs is no small endeavor and helping future IB ethnographers accomplish this is one of my key motivations for writing this book. But beyond these methodological and institutional challenges, there are several repressive false assumptions about ethnography which have made it so that only the most adventuresome and risk-taking of researchers in the field of IB have been brave enough to take it on.

False Assumption #1: Ethnography Is Just Another (More Intensive) Form of Qualitative Research

Too often, discussions of how we go about seeking knowledge fall into a kind of epistemological dualism, pitting positivists against interpretivists, science against art, quantitative against qualitative methods. In these kinds of discussions ethnography generally comes out as interpretivist qualitative art. Binary oppositions such as these are oversimplifications at best and inaccurate misrepresentations at worst which do little to help guide or inspire good research. After all, the best science generally comes from highly skilled and imaginative researchers who can be seen as consummate artists in their fields of research. Why? Because the goal of science is to answer specific questions and the best answers come from researchers who are imaginative in how they frame those questions and flexible and open in the way they go about learning about them. Creative researchers are resourceful and select from the wide array of tools available those best suited to the collection and analysis of data with which to answer their research question. Certain questions are best answered with data gathered qualitatively, which always requires artistic interpretation and often relies on some sort of quantitative claim, for example that certain observations occur more or less frequently, with more or less intensity, or have more or less effect on the object of study.

Ethnographers have always been methodologically eclectic and have regularly used mixed methods of some sort, blending words with numbers, photos with drawings, primary data with secondary data, and so on. It should be noted, though, that when ethnographers use numbers, we usually do so with a distinct purpose from that which is sought by traditional quantitative researchers in the social and behavioral sciences. Beyond counting how many people fall within one or two standard deviations from the norm, ethnographers are interested in both the overlapping similarities and

interconnections between informants as well as their differences. Outliers that stand out against the norm are just as important to an ethnographer as the norm. As ethnographers, we iteratively learn more and more details of the research context and the subjectivity of the people with whom we interact as we go along. Our knowledge of the culture we are studying is thus constantly evolving as we come closer to understanding and piecing together the various perspectives we uncover and pursue. As we talk to one after another person, we therefore keep track of similarities as well as variability within their accounts. We continue along this path of learning until we no longer find significant variation in the accounts – a point in the research process that is sometimes referred to as reaching "data saturation." Then we begin to construct a story from the inferential generalizations we arrive at about the people we have come to know in our research, their day-to-day life experiences, and the context in which they work and live. We try to identify what is typical in one sense or another, taking care to make note of variation. We then strive to understand the variation by evaluating similarities among the accounts of our informants (our data) searching for processes, practices, and understandings that go together and those that don't. We also evaluate similarities among informants to try to identify who agrees with whom about what, why, and to what extent.

False Assumption #2: Ethnography Is (Solely) a Research Method

Ethnography is often spoken of as just another type of research method to choose from out of an array of others including interviewing, focus groups, case studies, surveys, and so on. Ethnography is much more than this. Rather, it should more accurately be understood as a philosophical approach to the study, recording, and analysis of cultural phenomena. The etymology of the word from the original Greek underscores two essential elements – ethnos (ἔθνος), meaning a group of people who share a common culture, and graphein (γράφειν), meaning to write. Ethnography, in other words, is writing about culture. Why is this important to know? Firstly, because it identifies culture as the central focus of ethnographic inquiry. Secondly, and perhaps most critically, because it underscores the ethnographer's active part in constructing cultural knowledge through writing. Beyond the finished product (journal article or book manuscript), which the reader receives and interprets within their own knowledge base, this includes the unpublished primary research data documented by the ethnographer in writing. Texts in the form of fieldnotes, journal entries, and interview transcripts, as

seen through the eyes of, written up by, and then analyzed by the ethnographer, comprise the bulk of the data generated along the path of the ethnographic journey. Unique to ethnography, the researcher is the research instrument. Knowing this puts a great deal of responsibility on the ethnographer to be ongoingly reflexive as to their effect on the research process as well as the written outcome and is the basis for the ethical and philosophical approach we take to studying cultural phenomena. This approach necessarily includes an understanding of culture that goes beyond aggregate reifications of culture either as stereotypes or as causal variables in statistical analyses, which can result in significant theoretical and real-world problems. Beyond the personal examples given in my Preface, think of further-reaching consequences such as the numerous and violent hate crimes against Asians that transpired in the wake of calling the 2019 pandemic the "China Virus." Rather than a static, monolithic designation of a people, an ethnographer sees culture as dynamic and constantly evolving. We expect variations on how culture is manifested to abound with changes in time, space, and historical, social, and geographical context. We also know that this cultural fluidity is furthered by the fact that, while culture is seen as a group-level phenomenon, it is enacted by individuals who likely have differing and decidedly partial views of what goes on in their culture. This variance is only becoming more pronounced in contemporary global society where people receive cultural influences from many places in many ways and often simultaneously.

To uncover more authentic accounts of culture(s) allowing for such dynamism and variance, ethnographers engage in what might be termed an "up close and personal" way of understanding through participant observation and extended fieldwork (interviewing, shadowing, analyzing cultural artifacts) in the culture(s) we study. Participant observation compels the ethnographer to be part of the situation we are studying so that we can begin to sense what day-to-day life is like for the people we are studying. This enables what anthropologists term an insider, or "emic,"[2] perspective. Such immersion in the lives of others requires not only time but also substantial emotional resilience to deal with the inevitability of what some have termed a kind of cultural disorientation which arises from having to identify with

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[2] The linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Pike (1967) was the first to opine the distinctions between emic and etic standpoints in describing behavior. Emic (as in phonemics) refers to the role of cultural and linguistic categories as understood from within the cultural context or linguistic system they are a part of, while etic (as in phonetics) refers to the analytical study of cultural behavior and language grounded outside of the system itself.

and at the same time remain distant from the people being studied. This epistemology is the basis of the research paradigm or logic that guides the agenda, structure, questions, analysis, and, ultimately, the writing up of culture in a way that portrays as closely as possible the points of view of the people making it up. It is therefore axiomatic that there is no one template on how to do ethnography as it is decidedly not procedural. Rather, it is improvisational, path dependent, and oftentimes recursive. Ethnography as such is much more than a method or a written product. Rather, it is a philosophy that guides us to construct representations of culture that are as true-to-life as experienced by the individuals we are studying as possible.

False Assumption #3: Ethnography Is Description, Albeit Deeply Contextualized, but Not Theory

Limiting the use-value of ethnography to description is probably the single biggest cause of why it has been slow to catch on in IB studies. Theory, especially that which can be applied to IB contexts, is the research currency of the field. Interestingly, the source of this false assumption comes from within the field of anthropology – where ethnography originated. Following the interpretive turn in anthropology and Clifford Geertz's (1973) widely influential coining of the term "thick description," ethnography has generally been credited as a source of description, but not necessarily theory. Yet, theory, defined as a rational type of abstract thinking about a phenomenon, or the analysis of a set of facts in their relation to one another, clearly makes ethnography a theoretical endeavor, one that has had and still has practical significance as both description as well as explanation of cultural phenomena. In this regard, ethnographies themselves as well as their explanatory capabilities are theoretical undertakings. Ethnography has always been much more than description. Even thick description itself doesn't stop short at theory. Rather, by surfacing cultural context and meaning that people attach to actions, words, things, and so on, thick description provides ample context so that a person outside the culture in question can make sense of the behavior of those inside. Thin description such as the kind we get from surveys, by contrast, is where facts are communicated without providing such meaning or significance.

From the beginnings of anthropology there has been a polemic between romanticizing "being there" among isolate, exotic people, and doubts concerning the theory-building capabilities of a methodology that purports to uncover the whole of a culture seeking to answer all the basic questions people encounter in their everyday lives. Spending months to years living and

participating in the societies they studied, early ethnographers sought to understand the entirety of a particular culture by documenting in great detail every dimension of people's lives, including their language, subsistence strategies, political systems, formation of families and marriages, and religious beliefs. This emic ethnographic approach to studying cultures established by Bronislaw Malinowski in his seminal study of the Trobriand Islanders (between 1915 and 1918) and then further honed by Franz Boas and his students in their studies of diverse Native American societies in the United States (between 1901 and 1911) was in direct opposition to the nineteenth-century tradition of armchair scholarship and its uncritical use of the comparative method to develop theory on the evolution of human societies from what was seen as primitive to those that were considered civilized (mainly Western). Taking an outsider's or etic perspective. these early scholars of culture (ethnologists as they were called), including Herbert Spencer, Sir Edward B. Tyler (1858–1917), and Sir James Frazer (1832–1917) in Britain, and sociologists Emile Durkheim (1832–1917) and Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) in France, based their analyses on secondary accounts of what were considered primitive and uncivilized cultures from material collected by missionaries, traders, scientists, and travelers. Intellectually, this research was strongly influenced by evolutionary theory (Darwin, 1859, 1889) and sought to understand the stages of human and societal development through comparative studies of Western "civilized" societies versus those of the primitive Other(s). Practically, much of this research was commissioned by colonialist governments in order to amass as much information as possible about their colonies – their organization, kinship patterns, beliefs, customs, and so on. These interdisciplinary scholars, now considered the antecedents of modern social anthropology, were extremely well-read on the customs and beliefs of the cultures they studied. By comparing and contrasting different cultures using standardized measures and frameworks from other disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, and sociology, they strove to build generalizable theory on culture(s) across geographical areas, nations, regions, and, in some optimistic cases, universally. But, because their research was conducted from their offices in British and French universities, rather than in the originating cultural contexts, and due to their use of secondary data randomly collected from a decidedly biased Western and Christian position, motivated at least in part by colonial interest, this research has met with substantial criticism.[3]

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[3] It's hard not to notice the parallels between what was seen as unreliable research in anthropology and what is the status quo in IB on topics involving culture – studying it from a distance and at an aggregate level of analysis using secondary data rather than up close and personally generating data at the source.

What resulted was a paradigm shift in the study of culture away from the etic, outsider perspective to a more contextually situated, holistic insider perspective that was decidedly descriptive and wary of theorizing beyond highlighting the interconnectedness of the various dimensions of social life observed in the particular culture under study. After Malinowski and Boas, anthropologists practiced and honed the ethnographic approach predominantly for the sake of description alone – the approach reaching its descriptive peak within the field of symbolic anthropology with Geertz's (1973) notion of thick description. This cautiousness around theory building in the study of culture was further exacerbated in the late 1980s and 1990s with what is known as "the crisis in anthropology" resulting from the convergence of its colonialist past, armchair theorizing, and heated debates in critical and post-structuralist anthropology around the predicament of ethnographic authority and representation (see Clifford, 1988; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Fox, 1991; Marcus & Fischer, 1999; Ong, 1987). This was a watershed moment in the field of anthropology that led to an understanding that doing and writing ethnography has always been more problematic than presupposing and arguing the interrelatedness of cultural components. Consequently, a flurry of existential questions sparked heavy debate: As ethnographers do we document what informants say they do? Or what we think about what they say they do as they go about their day-to-day lives? Or how our informants want us, their resident participant observers, to think of them? This kind of disciplinary introspection led to the elaboration of the notion of reflexivity as a critical practice in the ethnographic research process, one that has significantly contributed to building rigor and validity into ethnographic accounts.

While "being there" certainly provides verisimilitude to our accounts, it is the iterative adjustments in our interpretation of what is going on at our research site that come from constant reflection on the subjectivities of our informants, our own subjectivity as researcher/scholar/writer, and the interrelationship between these that give rigor, internal validity, and plausibility to our accounts.[4] Ongoing reflection of this sort gives ethnographers an in-built inclination toward surfacing paradoxes or breakdowns in understanding caused by a lack of fit between what we experience – our field data, or empirical material – and what we thought we knew either from previous scholarship or from what we thought was going on in the field. As ethnographers we attempt to resolve these dilemmas by seeking an understanding of

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[4] See Mahadevan and Moore (2022) for a thoughtful discussion of this process of ongoing reflexivity and a conceptual modeling of what they term "reflexive engagement" in the ethnographic triangle composed of researcher/writer, subjects, and audience.

the cultural elements that are causing the inconsistencies and then by adjusting our research agenda. We welcome these breakdowns as they encourage creative reflection by freeing up our mind to rethink the relationship between data and theory, and we expect them to continue to occur until we sufficiently understand the culture we are researching. In such a way, reflexivity and openness to breakdowns in understanding provide a strong base from which to build theory.[5]

What Ethnography Can Offer IB Research

Very little defines IB as a coherent discipline apart from a geographical domain – the world, or at least the non-domestic part of it – and a focus on new and evolving IB phenomena. Researchers have come into this domain of study from a variety of research traditions that fall broadly into two seemingly disparate categories – those that take a more macro and strategic perspective, including economics, business history, political science, finance, law, and those that follow a more micro and cross-cultural perspective, including communication studies, linguistics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. By riding the crest of rapidly emerging IB phenomena, researchers following the macro and strategic perspective seldom have paused long enough to grapple with the effects of organizational and cultural undertows on their object of study. By focusing on national cultural variance and advising parochial managers of their critical consequences, cross-cultural researchers have settled into a sort of construct complacency regarding culture fixated on surface differences and blind to the dynamic ebbs and flows of cultural interactions and their effects on IB issues. Whether riding the crests or resting in the troughs, both perspectives have utilized partial and decidedly arm's-length approaches to research characterized by often inappropriate large-scale, cross-sectional studies with reductionist cultural variables. As such, neither perspective has been able to develop full understandings of cultural processes and their effect on IB phenomena that provide robust integrative theories and help guide practice. Ethnography can provide IB with the theoretical insights needed to bridge these two perspectives by studying macro- and meso-level phenomena and processes through a local, more micro lens, thereby documenting the interlocking and interdependent nature of these levels of analysis.

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[5] See Alvesson and Kärreman (2011, pp. 19–20) on mystery as method and for more on the notion of learning from breakdowns.

Ethnography is particularly useful for theory building when the organizational phenomena under investigation are relatively new or rapidly changing,[6] and when the research agenda involves understanding how culture (in all its contexts – national, organizational, institutional, occupational, etc.) affects these phenomena. These applications correspond directly to two of the most basic characteristics of IB research – that it is phenomena-driven and culture-ridden. Given this matching of utility and topic, ethnography, freed from the false assumptions just discussed, with its conscientious focus on understanding culture in context and its liberal practice of incorporating a variety of methods, offers a way forward. Nascent and evolving culture-ridden topics in IB proliferate as the center of gravity of internationalization shifts from West–East to South–North and as the epicenter of economic growth comes from outside of North America and Western Europe. For example, consider such emergent research opportunities as understanding the contribution potential to MNCs of cultural hybrids (the new workforce demographic) made up of refugees, immigrants, biculturals, multiculturals, and so-called global cosmopolitans; identifying process issues and surfacing best practices in globally dispersed multicultural virtual teams; learning about the internal organization and informal processes of emerging market multinationals; and so on.

The need for deeper theory development around cultural contexts and processes is only increasing as the organizational playing field has become increasingly more international not only domestically, due to foreign direct investment, but also overseas, due to the continued need for firms to have a strong presence abroad to remain competitive. Internationalization, for the average individual, is no longer a simple matter of choice of food, fashion, films, or financial instruments from around the world. Today, the majority of people encounter internationalization in their daily work lives whether it is in person or through the plethora of technologically mediated ways in which we interact with people from around the world. The reality of contemporary work life is such that individuals work together in groups and organizations that place members from different cultural backgrounds into situations of close proximity, high interdependence, and significant shared responsibility. Conducting business in and across such multicultural contexts is a dynamic process of active engagement and learning, which more often than not takes place in a problematic interpersonal milieu of mismatched values,

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[6] In an otherwise heated debate on the strengths and weaknesses of single versus multiple case study methodologies taken up by Dyer and Wilkins (1991, pp. 613–619) and Kathleen Eisenhardt (1991, pp. 620–627) in the *Academy of Management Review*, there is agreement that in-depth, single-case studies are particularly useful for theory building in the early stages of research.

expectations, and misunderstandings. As such, the conception of culture in IB research is in flux. New conceptions of culture are needed to understand the complex cultural changes in organizations spurred by the increasingly globalized nature of work contexts. Ethnography, with its specific focus on understanding and describing culture, is a particularly well-suited approach for surfacing a deeper awareness of culture in IB that might generate more sensitive readings of organizational culture in complex multicultural contexts.

What's more, the strategic intent of internationalizing firms has changed in such ways as to make understanding cultural processes and their implications even more important. Most notable is the increased complexity of what firms are trying to transfer across cultural borders. When internationalization meant exporting products and setting up foreign sales offices, the effects of changes in the cultural context were predominantly a marketing concern. Products often gained new meaning or distinct cultural significance in new settings, which could lead to new opportunities or failures for the firm. For example, Mickey Mouse, hardly a symbol of reliability in the US, is used to sell money market accounts in Japan; and in France, the same Mickey is best known as the clever, adventuresome sleuth of "Le Journal Mickey," a comic book series (Brannen, 2004). As global competition has become increasingly driven by innovation, firms are no longer simply transferring products abroad; they are transferring whole systems of management. And, as the complexity of what is being transferred increases, how it is received becomes even more critical because a new environment offers greater opportunity for equivocality in sensemaking (Orton & Weick, 1990). Notwithstanding the surprising transformation of Mickey's persona in the examples above, as firms attempt to take even more complex products and capabilities abroad, cultural contexts – both internal and external – present significant sources of unanticipated causal ambiguity in the transfer of firm offerings. The tacit understandings that supported firm offerings in one culture are typically absent from or displaced in another.

In addition to changes in the strategic intent of firms and the concomitant types of complexity of firm offerings being transferred, the nature of international markets has also changed. Modern transportation, communication, and media services have made most of the world a single market. Foreign consumers are no longer ignorant of, and often have firsthand knowledge of, what other countries have available. It is not accidental that Mickey Mouse is popular enough to be co-opted as a bank mascot in Japan. Like their American counterparts, Japanese under the age of forty were

reared on the "Mickey Mouse Club" and can readily sing along to a Japanese version of the television theme song. Interconnectedness does not necessarily lead to shared meanings, though. A Mickey Mouse bank account would mean exactly the opposite in the United States as it does in Japan. When firm offerings are even more complex, the interconnectedness of global markets can have severe results. Consider Toyota's transfer of its entire production system to Kentucky in the late 1980s.[7] The Americans hired by Toyota had already been exposed to Japanese management practices by the business press and popular media. Some of this preexisting knowledge was construed positively. For example, the idea of lifetime employment or munificent Japanese capital investment in plant and equipment would most likely have been appealing. However, other impressions, like the media image of Japanese job-training programs as "hell camps" with strict work norms, group exercises, mandatory uniforms, antiunionism, and relentless work hours, were decidedly negative. Preexisting knowledge, whether accurate or not, affects sensemaking. In particular it affects how employees apprehend and take on new work norms and is therefore critical to the successful implementation of a firm's strategic intent. Superficial knowledge of a foreign culture is inadequate.

Beyond the merits of rigor, internal validity, and the plausibility of the approach, it is the rich, "thick" process descriptions of such complex cultural phenomena provided by ethnographic data that can significantly nourish theory development in IB. Even though the approach has hitherto been used sparingly in the field, ethnographies have surfaced novel constructs or the "what" behind research questions (see, for example, Caprar, 2011 on redefining and furthering our understanding of what constitutes a "host country national"; and Mahadevan, 2012 on how language power and white subalternity frame what non-Western migrants have to offer IB organizations). Ethnographies have generated propositions which might then be tested deductively in large-scale cross-sectional studies (see, for example, Thomas et al., 2010 testing propositions regarding the intercultural effectiveness of biculturals). They can also generate process models or the "how" behind the research question (see, for example, Moore, 2011 on how complex interactions and conflicts between ethnicity, gender, and cross-national and organizational culture can be resolved in post-acquisition organizations;

[7] See the detailed account of Toyota's experience of bringing its entire system of management to the US by John Shook (1997), the first US employee to work for Toyota headquarters.

and Yagi (2006) and Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011 on how biculturals negotiate and leverage their cross-cultural identities in MNCs).

Contributions to the field can be embedded in conceptual articles to advance the field in its understanding of the dynamics of cultural phenomena (see, for example, Salk and Shenkar, 2001 on social identification in international joint ventures) or documented in whole ethnographic monographs such as Moore (2021), which explores the different ways in which Taiwanese expatriates living in London and Toronto use their shared Taiwanese identities to construct and maintain global and local networks. There might be practitioner contributions that evolve from ethnographies (see, for example, Brannen & Doz, 2012 on language and strategy; Brannen et al., 2013 on revitalizing multinationals by means of insider ethnography; Doz & Hong, 2013 on leveraging bicultural skillsets). New frontiers in ways to build theory in IB have also come out of ethnographic research: for example, Brannen and Peterson (2009) on survey triangulation of ethnographic findings; Brannen (2011) on using multiple case studies to generalize from ethnography; and Mahadevan and Moore (2022) on the relevance of reflexive engagement and ethnographic types to research in IB.

What Ethnography Can Offer You in Your Career as an IB Scholar

These promised values of ethnography to furthering the field of IB notwithstanding, given all the methodological, institutional, publication, and false assumption challenges, a young IB scholar might just decide to choose a simpler route to research. Before doing so, let me share some pretty significant benefits of taking on what might seem like quite a career risk that I can confirm from my own experience. Firstly, because ethnography involves being there in the day-to-day world of IB practitioners, ethnographic researchers tend to amass lots of real-world stories that they can call upon in teaching. Such accounts spark student interest and go a long way to giving credibility to a newly minted PhD. The latter is especially handy when one is put in front of a classful of whipper-snapper MBAs, many of whom have had corporate and/or consulting experience. Secondly, such firsthand in-company experience also gives a young scholar a holistic view of IB real-world concerns and how each of the functions of the firm works together with the rest. Such a full understanding of IB operations and how one's own research fits in with this whole can also open up possibilities for team-teaching in executive-level courses. Teaching exposure of this kind is

invaluable, especially early on in one's career, as it provides an opportunity to learn from senior colleagues and accomplished practitioners in a wide variety of industries. This kind of practical learning can in turn fuel one's teaching repertoire with more real-world stories as well as lead to future research ideas and opportunities. This scope of knowledge is very hard to come by from doing arm's-length, specialized, archival quantitative research which, while perhaps an easier and safer option, tends to make one's contribution and understanding much narrower. Thirdly, such broad and comprehensive exposure to IB phenomena and multifaceted thinking around real-world issues faced by seasoned IB practitioners as comes from doing ethnographic fieldwork makes one open to collegial interdisciplinary discussions that consequently can lead to a wide range of coauthor possibilities.

Finally, it is also important to note that one of the most distinguishing characteristics of IB scholars is that we tend to have deep contextual knowledge of diverse cultural contexts by virtue of our country-of-origin, upbringing, education, and sometimes even cross-cultural marriages. This multicultural and often linguistic firsthandedness means that IB scholars, whether of the macro strategic or the more micro cross-cultural type, are inherently gifted with the kind of intercultural participant observer skills that are fundamental to doing ethnography. What a shame it would be not to leverage such basic research skills and competencies toward strong and novel contributions to IB research.

A Few Thoughts on What Is and Isn't Ethnography

I have often been asked what distinguishes a particular study as ethnographic. How is it really different from an extended case study? Do you really have to be a participant observer in order to be a bona fide ethnographer? How long do you actually have to be in the field to qualify your study as an ethnography? I've even been asked whether ethnography has become a sort of umbrella term for any kind of research conducted in person in organizations – a kind of "ethnography lite" emerging as a viable alternative approach. Certainly, we've seen some of this over the last ten to twenty years in the Academy of Management and in IB journals where opportunistic research (what John Van Maanen has called "squat ethnographies") seemed to have prevailed. It did look as if researchers were using the term ethnography to signify simply having been in the field, in an organization for a period of time, and talking to people. Whether they were participant

observers or whether they were in the field long enough to be able to get an in-depth, emic perspective was often doubtful and unsubstantiated. However, as the research disciplines in management have become more mature regarding qualitative methodology, and as more work based on ethnographies has been published, management-related disciplines have gained a certain amount of sophistication regarding understanding what makes for robust and thoughtful ethnographic research. For clarification early on, I will offer some thoughts as answers to these questions now.

On the Difference between Case Studies and Ethnography

Case study research and ethnography have a lot in common. Both generally involve the researcher being in the field, understanding particular contexts, interviewing individuals *in situ*, reflecting on and analyzing findings. Yet, despite these similarities, there are significant differences in their approach. The main difference in my mind is in their focus. Ethnography concentrates on understanding the whole of cultural phenomena from the point of view of the research subjects (as much as is possible) and seeks to answer "how" or process related questions primarily through abductive reasoning where theory and data are iteratively compared and contrasted. Case studies aim to analyze a particular situation, issue, individual, or group, and are interested in "why" questions as in "why did such a situation come about?"; generally, they are seeking to produce normative theory and managerial relevance, which is often prescriptive.

Some of the most important theory building in IB has been from deep insights of extended case study research. Landmark studies by scholars such as Gunnar Hedlund (1986), C. K. Prahalad and Yves Doz (1987), Chris Bartlett and Sumantra Ghoshal (1987, 1989), and Doz and Hamel (1998) were based on long hours, weeks, and months in companies not only conducting formal interviews but also engaging in casual conversations, lunches, coffee breaks, and sitting in on meetings often discussing strategy formulations with key informants. So, in many ways participant observation was a vital part of this research,[8] making it seem very much like ethnography. The contributions to IB theory and practice from these studies, especially around policy formulation and decision making, have had instrumental effects on IB scholarship as well as on the strategic management of MNCs.

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[8] Most notably in Prahalad's research at Philips' research innovation center at its headquarters in Eindhoven, where he actually had an office on the executive floor for many years.

However, the differences between this kind of in-depth case research and ethnography are important to note and have been laid out exceptionally well by Eleanor Westney (Sloan Fellows Professor of Strategy and International Management Emerita) and John Van Maanen (Erwin H. Schell Professor of Management Emeritus and undisputed authority on organizational ethnography), both at MIT Sloan School of Management, in their perspective piece which they cowrote for the *Journal of International Business Studies* (JIBS) Qualitative Special Issue:

(E)xecutive suites remain the locus of the(se) researchers' primary interactions, and this subculture is projected – knowingly or not – onto the whole organization. Might this not be rather like studying a tribe by hanging out almost exclusively with the tribal elders? The researcher might well emerge with great insights into how the elders see the tribal culture, but not with an understanding of the culture as it is enacted on the ground by less lofty members. (Westney & Van Maanen, 2011, p. 603)

Naming this type of research "casual ethnography of the executive suite," Westney and Van Maanen (2011, p. 603) further elaborate that what they term "serious ethnography" is more concerned with surfacing a diversity of opinions, especially those of less powerful members of the organization. Serious ethnography is also more focused on understanding the sources and effects of cultural tensions rather than presenting a harmonious view of an organization's culture. This is in direct contrast to the case in casual ethnographies where readers are given little to no information about the source of the anecdotes used to support theorizing and whether these accounts were well-known throughout the organization or whether they were stories evoked by the researchers' own questions.

To this informative discussion I would add only the following thoughts around reflexivity and the researcher's role. As previously mentioned, reflexive engagement is a critical part of the ethnographic approach and one that goes far in adding rigor, internal validity, and plausibility to our accounts. Indications of reflexive engagement in ethnographic write-ups should include at least discussions of (1) the ethnographer's assumptions regarding culture and observed behavior, (2) the interrelatedness between the ethnographer and their research subjects (or, the positionality of the researcher), and (3) the effect of the reader or audience on how the research is represented in writing or presentation.[9] In the case studies mentioned earlier, we don't get any sense of what the researchers struggled with in their studies.

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[9] See Van Maanen (1988, p. xi) and Mahadevan and Moore (2023, pp. 6–8) for further elaborations on reflexive engagement including the interplay between observer and observed as well as text and reader.

For example, what contradictions came up between their assumptions and observations, or between what one subject recounted versus that of another? What biases or preconceptions did they bring with them to the research site? How did they (or did they) gauge their interrelationships with their informants? As readers we are not informed as to how these researchers were received by their informants – were they perceived as expert consultants (all were Harvard PhDs), whose thoughts and interpretations might therefore have been formative? In "serious ethnography," field notes are taken not only to record observations while immersed in the setting but also to note reservations and confusion, and it is by bringing the issues grappled with in the field to our thinking and analysis that we are able to build trustworthiness into the basis of the final written ethnography.

On the Criticality of Participant Observation

Ethnographic methods are exploratory and longitudinal, and they include direct observation, journaling, video recordings, photography, and analysis of artifacts such as slogans, posters, office layout and design, how people dress, as well as of the devices that a person uses throughout the day. Participant observation, on the other hand, is a methodology for approaching ethnography. It allows us to see what people are doing and then understand it from their own point of view, which we can then compare with what other people in the organization are doing and saying in order to get as holistic an account as possible. It also helps us to see if people are doing something different from what they say that they do. People within their own context often don't know what they know intrinsically in order to articulate it. This is particularly true about things that they take for granted or that they do so regularly that they just do them automatically without giving them much thought. For example, fish who spend the entirety of their lives in water don't realize how important it is to them until they find themselves reeled in and without it. Or people and air – we breathe it without giving much thought to it unless something happens like sickness or low air quality that makes us aware of how much we need it. Deeply tacit knowledge can only be surfaced by someone who doesn't take it for granted and who has spent some time in the other's context in order to have noticed some behaviors or assumptions that are unarticulated – someone who is both an insider and an outsider – like a participant observer. If you want to understand a fishing culture, you don't sit on the dock with binoculars; you go out and help make the nets, catch the fish, cook the fish, you spend time with the people and

participate. By participating and paying attention to what is happening around you, you will better be able to construct your ethnography because you will begin to understand things from the perspective of the people making up the culture. Hence, participant observation is an essential tool in the kit of ethnography.

This particular aspect of ethnography seems to be quite daunting to many first comers to the approach. Typical worries are about how to gain participatory access into an organizational setting. Concerns range from being seen as bothersome to being seen, in the worst-case scenario, as an occupational spy. There are quite a lot of ways of being a participant in a research setting that do not have to entail working incognito or having a formal role in the organization you wish to research. You can interact informally with individuals at your research site, have lunch regularly in the company canteen, hang out in break rooms, ask to sit in on an occasional meeting, socialize with your informants, and so on. Gaining access to organizations is often one of the most challenging issues for those who wish to do ethnographic research. I have found that it is most helpful if the researcher has something to offer that would benefit the company. For example, I have offered cross-cultural and also language training for companies undergoing international mergers, acquisitions, or joint venturing. In other cases, I have given pitches as to how the research I am engaged in might benefit the company. For example, in researching biculturals in the workplace, one benefit is that biculturals and people with mixed cultural identities tend to have hidden talents that are not being recognized, and these could benefit the company in terms of learning from its global footprint, global teaming, knowledge transfer, and so on. It is helpful to think of something that might benefit the company that you have to offer either in the first instance or as the research progresses. Ethnographic research generally requires a long-term commitment of weeks, months, or years, and commands the researcher's active interest in the process at hand. In the best-case scenario, the researcher's enthusiasm for the project spills over to the participants and they become eager to share their native view. The ability to communicate clearly and authentically with subjects about the motivations for your research and the process of how you will carry out the study is critical both for gaining entry and for gaining and sustaining trust.

On Time in the Field, or How Do You Know When You're Done?

My feeling is that as ethnographers we are never done. There are always more ways to look at a research question and to expand our understanding of an

issue, phenomenon, or process. The length of time necessary to spend at a research site really depends on the research question, the research context, the research process, and what it takes to sense that your interpretation of your observations (or, "findings") is trustworthy. However, if the intent of this question is really "when can I stop researching and start writing?" then I do have a few thoughts on this. In doing any kind of grounded theory–type research, when you have reached what is called "theoretical saturation" – the point at which collecting and analyzing additional data through a variety of triangulation techniques does not teach you any more about your topic, when no new themes, relationships, dimensions, or insights are emerging – then you are ready to write it up. Ethnographies often generate a multitude of themes, constructs, processes, and other types of understanding that surface during the research. The ethnographer can therefore "chunk off" different parts of the study into separate articles constituting distinct contributions to the literature.

This Book

My main objective in writing this book is to demonstrate how robust theory can emerge through ethnography, be crafted into impactful journal articles, and lead to significant contributions to the field of IB. There are already plenty of books and articles on ethnographic methodology, and, though my thoughts on method and approach are scattered across these pages, this book is not about how to do ethnography. Rather, it is about theorizing from ethnography with the intent to champion, inspire, and guide ethnographic scholarship and practice in IB.

In the wake of the fiftieth anniversary of JIBS, the leading academic journal in IB, we can say that our field has reached a certain amount of maturity. With the maturing of the field comes a need for a more nuanced understanding of its fundamental constructs – culture and our approach to studying it are front and center of what sorely needs attention. Yet it takes much more than the maturity of the field to open it up to a new approach to research and theory building, especially in a field entrenched in a positivist paradigm and already replete with methodological diversity from the numerous disciplines that make it up. Equally needed are a supportive infrastructure, expertise, and championing from senior scholars.

As far as infrastructure goes, much progress has been made to widen the research expertise of the JIBS editorial board to include deputy editors,

associate editors, and area editors who are not only open to but schooled in alternative research methods, including ethnography. What is more, many of these editors (including me) have taken to writing up commentaries and perspective pieces to help reviewers do a better job of appreciating and evaluating papers with alternative approaches to research in IB. There have been recent JIBS articles on qualitative methods in general (e.g., Doz, 2011); on the limits of large-scale, longitudinal, cross-national databases that dominate IB research encouraging deeper, more contextually situated studies utilizing alternative forms of triangulation (Nielsen et al., 2020); and on specific topics related to qualitative methods such as longitudinal historical research (Burgelman, 2011), grounded theory (Gligor et al., 2016), case-based research (Welch et al., 2011), ethnography (Westney & Van Maanen, 2011; Brannen, 2022), and editorials on how readers and especially reviewers can trust the findings of such unorthodox approaches (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2016; Brannen et al., 2020). With each year, additions are made to the editorial review board to include more interdisciplinary scholars with a certain amount of ambidexterity in reviewing submissions utilizing mixed and alternative methods. We still have a long way to go, but there has been significant progress made over the last two decades, suggesting that there has never been a better time for the power of richness from ethnographies to surface and contribute meaningfully to IB theory.

Before laying out how this book is organized, in the spirit of reflexivity I feel it's important to share the philosophical orientation I bring to theory development in IB. My own version of ethnography adopts what might be termed a relativist perspective situated somewhere in the realm between social constructivism and critical theory. This view has as its foundation a subjective ontology and a subjective epistemology. More specifically, my perspective is based on the following principles.

- Reality is socially constructed. Our individual understanding of the world out there (consisting of material, mental, and emergent products) is very limited and is filtered through our existential experience. Physical material things might seem easier to understand than emergent social processes, but in neither case can the entity (object or process) be separated from its socially constructed representation.
- All observations, data, and empirical material are theory-laden and not facts. Thus, IB, as with all social sciences, has no absolute, universal truths or laws.
- All inquiry is subjective and value-laden. Reflexivity is therefore essential to the process of understanding.

- As culture is multifaceted, socially constructed, contextually determined, and individually experienced, grasping complex cultural realities demands the use of multiple perspectives. Adopting such a view encourages more sophisticated theorizing about culture, which can ultimately lead to positive social change.
- Robust knowledge is built by means of theoretical and methodological triangulation where lack of convergence in the empirical data is expected, as are inconsistencies or even contradictions.
- Moving beyond the inductive versus deductive binary (see Brannen, 2022), data is viewed neither as reliable truths that guide the development of well-grounded and robust theory (inductive reasoning) nor as empirical tests that verify or refute extant theory (deductive reasoning). Rather, data is considered more as a source of inspiration or critical dialogue partner (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011, pp. 14–16), helping to uncover breakdowns in theory that then require disciplined imagination (Mills, 1959; Weick, 1989) to resolve.
- Theory building progresses iteratively in an abductive fashion as the researcher seeks better ways to address the problems arising from breakdowns or incongruencies between theory and empirical data, which allows for progressive, if not at times recursive, growth of knowledge. Inferences developed through abductive reasoning offer new plausible alternatives to established explanations of cultural phenomena and thus can make significant contributions to IB theory.

I have organized the book in three parts presenting three somewhat discrete, yet overlapping analytical parameters of ethnography that are most consequential for advancing theory in IB research: (1) intracultural ethnography, as culture works within a single international organizational setting such as an international joint venture, cross-national merger or acquisition, or wholly owned foreign subsidiary; (2) transcultural ethnography, as culture works across national boundaries in multinational enterprises (MNEs) as they expand their multisited global reach; and (3) strategic ethnography, as an applied or problem-centered form of inquiry to better inform global organizations of the cultural contexts in which they operate and the associated challenges and opportunities that arise from such cultural complexity. This arrangement follows the path of my own research trajectory from the most micro level of analysis in one organizational arena, studying the process of cultural interaction and evolution at a Western (Massachusetts) paper plant in the wake of a takeover by Japanese

management (my PhD dissertation research), to a more meso level of analysis studying the differential effects of culture across multiple subsidiaries of an MNC in distinct national contexts, to the most macro level of analysis studying culture's effects on organizational learning and strategic renewal in global organizations. This route charts my growth not only as an ethnographer but, equally importantly, as an IB scholar.

At first, I knew very little about ethnography or IB. You could say that I cut my eye teeth as an ethnographer on my dissertation study, which evolved from a cross-cultural consulting opportunity helping Americans and Japanese at the plant learn about each other – their cultural backgrounds and their assumptions about work – to an initial practice study in ethnographic methods for an anthropology course I was taking in tandem with my MBA studies, and then into a full-blown ethnographic research immersion lasting five years. As I was pursuing a doctorate degree in management, my dissertation necessarily had to contribute to organizational theory of some sort. So, a purely descriptive ethnography was not an option. Rather, I needed to relate what I was seeing, hearing, and documenting to extant theory. At that time there was very little written about the experience of employees in the wake of international acquisitions apart from superficial and often alarmist media representations, the 1986 movie *Gung Ho* being an apt case in point. I did find entry points into theory building from the literature on culture and change in organizational theory (e.g., Barley, 1983; Frost et al., 1985; Jelinek et al., 1983; Kunda, 1992; Martin, 1992; Schein, 1985; Smircich, 1983; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984), from the practitioner-oriented work on corporate culture (e.g., Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Ott, 1989; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Vogel, 1979), and from the Japanese management literature (e.g., Dore, 1973; Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981; Westney, 1987). As I began to present some of my work at anthropology conferences, I was also able to find support and encouragement from other doctoral students (all in anthropology), doing related ethnographic research in Japanese companies, including Kidahashi (1987), Kleinberg (1990), Sharpe (1998), and Sumihara (1992). I was also happy to discover that qualitative research methods and even ethnography were much more accepted, taught, and practiced in European schools of business than in North America and as such I have always felt better supported and understood when presenting my work in those more encouraging environments.

An unexpected advantage of being an ethnographer in IB was that, due to the breadth and depth of organizational knowledge that comes from doing holistic studies of organizations, it allows for a wider net of job opportunities

than is generally available to freshly minted PhDs. When I was first on the job market, I was given interviews from a variety of distinct departments at business schools ranging from organizational behavior to IB (if the school had such a department) to strategy and even marketing! At the University of Michigan Business School,[10] my first academic post, I was given a home in the International Business department with a joint appointment in Organizational Behavior (OB). At that time all assistant professors had to teach an MBA core course prior to tenure. The thought of having to teach the IB core course was daunting! I'd have to cover all the international aspects of business, including accounting, finance, management, marketing, and strategy, none of which I felt I knew much about except perhaps cross-cultural management. So I asked (more like pleaded) if I might switch my departmental home to OB. The more micro focus of the OB core course was familiar to me and felt much more manageable. Over time, as I interacted with more and more IB scholars, read their work, and attended IB conferences, I began to have a broader appreciation and understanding of how the various dimensions of IB fit together. This, plus my ongoing ethnographic mission to carry out research in internationally focused companies and writing it up to contribute to IB theory, helped a great deal to expand my knowledge of the field. Finally, by the time I was hired by San José State University as a full professor of IB and assigned to teach the IB core course – International Dimensions of Business – I was ready to take it on. The first few times I taught the course I spent proportionately much more time on the micro dimensions of IB – cross-cultural management, international human relations, and a bit on the consumer behavior side of marketing. But, as I matured as an IB scholar and was able to appreciate the interconnectedness of all the topics that I had previously considered as distinct and separate, I became more and more interested in how the meso (firm strategy, international competition, industrial relations, etc.) and macro (geographical, political, legal, national cultural) environments fit into the whole IB picture, so much so that I began teaching proportionately more of these than the micro topics.

This doesn't have to be your trajectory as an ethnographer. You certainly can jump in at the meso or macro level of analysis during the course of your research and I've written the three parts of the book in such a way that they can be read and applied separately or even experienced in reverse order. For those of you who come to this book from the social sciences wanting to delve

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[10] Now called the Ross School of Business.

into the IB domain, going from understanding the what, how, and why of cultural goings-on in one context prior to expanding your research scope geographically, institutionally, or otherwise might feel quite natural, as it did for me. For those of you who come to this book from IB wishing to take an ethnographic approach, starting at the meso or macro level, following the transnational flows of culture across and between geographically dispersed contexts might feel more familiar. Either way, it should be inspiring to know that just by doing ethnography you can grow as an IB scholar and researcher. This kind of growth opens up multiple paths you can take in your career that a single disciplinary focus precludes, such as coauthoring with people from disparate fields, engaging in mixed methods, becoming adept at reviewing articles across disciplines and methods, being able to talk to factory workers as well as individuals in the C-Suite. Basically, all of these opportunities come from what I consider to be one of the most valuable outcomes of practicing ethnography – the facility of seeing the forest as well as the trees. Whether you see the forest first and then the trees or vice versa, doing ethnography obliges you to observe and deeply engage with both.

Each part of the book opens with an introductory chapter offering a detailed description of the type of ethnography, foundations for theorizing – including formative research, levels of analyses, pertinence to specific types of IB phenomena, contexts, and extant theory – and key constructs. I then provide examples from my own research illustrating the richness of the data, how insights emerged, and ways in which I built IB theory from the studies. Each part concludes with a set of exercises to elucidate approaches to surfacing such multifaceted and complex cultural insights from your own ethnographic studies. These are offered not as templates to be replicated but as illustrative examples of theory building from ethnography in IB. As with ethnography in general, there are no templates on how to do ethnography in IB. What's more, published articles rarely share details regarding challenges, analytical concerns, or missteps experienced by ethnographers during field-work. All of us pretty much have to navigate our own course as we go along. While I can't change this basic fact of doing ethnography, what I can do is offer the backstory or annotated version of how I navigated my studies through bumps and turns, puzzlement, and sparks of intuition in order to inspire you and give you confidence to engage in ethnography. My hope for this book is that it will encourage future ethnographers in IB to continue to push the field forward through creative theorizing from deeply engaged fieldwork in today's complex cultural organizational contexts.