

Producing Contextual Theory through Ethnographic Research Learning from Insider's Perspective

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Universities have an important role in the production of knowledge. In this context, the most progressive way to produce knowledge on social science area is producing a new theory. This article will discuss how theory generated through qualitative research namely ethnographic research. These method is the best way to produce a contextual theory. There are three argument the importance on producing a contextual theory : first, contextual theory is closely to the contemporary social world; Second, contextual theory also mean adding one or more renewable dimensions of the previous theory due to changes and developments of the communities and society; third, Indonesian's local culture can be elaborated to be a benchmark for the study of sociology. I'm also argue that the individual's have a major role in this research because it represent their groups, community, institution and nation. To understand the importance of individual positions and roles, can be seen through the process of interpretation of subjective and intersubjective meanings. These also means that informant's position as a subject with their entire socio-cultural world must be analyzed in order to have an insider's perspective in the wider contexts.

Keywords: Production of Knowledge, Contextual theory, Ethnographic Research, Insider's Perspective

INTRODUCTION

University comes from the words universum or universal values, which is defined as an institution that applies universal values.¹ The opposite of universality is particularity. The objective academic standard must be generally accepted to all *civitas academia* and it calls

¹ Michael Proudfoot and A.R Lacey, "The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy" , 4th edition (Routledge : 2010, 428)

objectivity in Parsonian Paradigm.² The universality of values becoming a reference for interaction among the stakeholders, to develop academic atmosphere, and subject matter among sub-discipline studies.

The university has also responsibility for scientific development, where one of the social science obligation's to produce theoretical novelty. Social Science have to produce novelty of data and theory. A good theory had ben produced from empirical datas. These renewable (contemporary) datas could support to build some contextual theory based on social world. I argued that ethnographic research is the most appropriate method for generating contextual theory based on daily reality of life from the insider's perspective (informant perspective). Ethnographic research allows the study of social science, especially sociology to produce contemporary sociological theory base on realities on the context of *Keindonesiaan* (Indonesian diversity).

Ethnographic Discourse in Socio-Antropology Research

Anthropology and sociology have somewhat different understandings of what constitutes ethnographic research, but on the most general level ethnography involves the researcher directly interacting with people in situ in order to gain an understanding of that particular social world from an insider's perspective. Although the term comes from the root ethno and in common usage denotes the study of a particular ethnic group, in most social science disciplines the term has come to mean the study of any kind of group through frequent and sustained participation in the setting in which a group interacts.³ Some researchers use the term ethnography to describe any research that involves spending time with people in a particular location, but true ethnographic research is actually quite rare outside of the discipline of anthropology, and most ethnographic fieldwork is actually much more superficial and less intensive than true ethnography. However, this distinction is not as important to other disciplines as it is to anthropology and qualitative sociology, so I will continue to use the term ethnographic research to describethether,in which includes participant-observation,interviews, and other research methods that require sustained interaction with informants in situ.

² Parsons: "The Functionalist Version", in *Modern Sociological Theory*, Malcom Waters (SAGE Pub: 2000,107-114)

³ John W. Creswell, "Ethnographic Research", in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd edition, (SAGE Pub: 2007, 68)

In ethnographic research, the researcher generally selects a research setting on the basis of both theoretical and practical considerations, gains entry to the research setting (usually overtly presenting herself as a researcher), and receives at least tacit permission from those she is studying to be present as a participant or an observer.⁴ Then the researcher spends an extended time in the research setting watching, listening, and taking extensive field notes about what is happening, conducting formal or informal interviews, and perhaps working with other kinds of documentation such as sketches, genealogies, video, photos, audio recordings, and documents produced by the group being studied. These forms of documentation constitute the data that the ethnographer uses to construct her analyses. Ethnographic analysis is generally interpretive, seeking to explicate meanings rather than make verifiable predictions, or, as Clifford Geertz⁵ put it, “that what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to “unlike” more structured methods of data gathering such as surveys and experiments, ethnographers are not required to develop hypotheses before entering the field, and many ethnographic studies use inductive reasoning to generate theories from the field research in addition to testing existing theories against the fieldwork data. Ethnography also has the advantage of being recursive, that is, as new data comes in challenging existing theories and hypotheses, the researcher’s questions can be refined and immediately tested against the reality of the field setting. Again, to quote Geertz⁶, ethnography “guess[es] at meanings, assess[es] the guesses, and draw[s] explanatory conclusions from the better guesses.” Ethnography is thus a very flexible method, though it does not have the built-in rigor of more deductive methods.

The point of the ethnographic method is to uncover the explicit and implicit cultural knowledge that guides behavior in that group. The ethnographer comes very close to experiencing what is experienced by members of the group she is studying, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of what unspoken rules they might be responding to. It is an important research technique for anyone studying issues of identity because it gives you access to the self-understandings of the group in a variety of contexts, allowing you to experience the reflexivity of group identity as well as what the identity means in practical terms. Doing ethnographic research allows you to get beyond your preconceived notions about the content

⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 70.

⁵ Geertz on Laura Adams, “Technic for Measuring Identity in Ethnographic Research”, in *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists*, (Cambridge University: 2010, 347)

⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 349.

of identity and to see how people themselves talk about and enact their identities. Furthermore, you can ask people about what they think and do, and why, thereby getting at the reflexive element of identity, while at the same time grounding your questions in concrete examples you have seen and checking to see whether their answers match their actions later. This is why ethnographic research can get at the “cognitive content” of identity better than most other methods.⁷ Ethnographic research can stand on its own, but it also serves as a valuable component of other research strategies. For example, it is often a good idea to conduct participant-observation fieldwork with a population before constructing a survey instrument for them, so that you can determine in advance which issues or questions will be most fruitful to explore in a more structured way. Ethnography can serve as a very useful auxiliary method in order to check on the results that another technique is generating. Even if your primary data collection consists of surveys or structured interviews with a particular population, you may want to conduct fieldwork with this population as well, in order to check on the veracity of their answers or to see whether the reality diverges from their perception of it. Finally, ethnographic fieldwork is often the only way to study populations that are not likely to answer honestly to impersonal interview or survey questions. Persecuted minority groups, for example, are much more likely to share truthful information in the kinds of face-to-face, everyday interactions that ethnographic fieldwork encourages.

Producing Contextual Theory Through Ethnographic Research

I have use Burawoy's idea to describe the process of producing contextual theory through the refflexive ethnography method. One method that links theory to ethnography quite rigorously is Burawoy's extended case method that “applies reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro,’ and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory.”⁸ This method, which Burawoy argues is emblematic of an alternative (“reflexive” as opposed to “positive”) science. The first “extension” in the extended case method is the extension of the observer to participant – the recognition of power relations inherent in field research and the embracing of the distortion of the social situation introduced

⁷ Laura Adams, *Op.cit.*, pg. 355.

⁸ Michael Burroway, “Extended Case Method”, (American Sociology Association, 1998, pg.12)

by the researcher. “Even the most passive observer produces ripples worthy of examination, while the activist who seeks to transform the world can learn much from its obduracy”.⁹

The second extension is of observations over space and time in order to compile situational knowledge into theories of social process. The third extension is out from process to force, a comparative strategy “tracing the source of small difference to external forces . . . to causally connect the cases. Instead of reducing cases to instances of a general law, we make each case work in its connection to other cases” in order to contribute to the theorization of broader social forces.¹⁰ The final extension is of theory. Our first three “extensions” – intervention, process, and structuration – all call for prior theory.

My thesis show that reproduction of patriarchy in Peranakan Arab Women discovered different level of patriarchy.¹¹ It depends on social, cultural, power and educational background. I have conducted these research in two arab villages, namely Condet Jakarta and Empang Bogor. I am exploring the point of view from local Arab women and local leader from diverse backgrounds. Later I discovered that the big issues they facing through their everyday live in the grassroots level are the values from local traditions and religious narratives. Thus, the findings of the field I can include for the development of the patriarchal concept of gender sociology, into the concept of "negotiating patriarchy". On the basis of the argument that patriarchy can be negotiated in terms of social, economic, cultural and political contexts I am trying to create a structure of oppression against women in diverse context in terms of the informant's point of view. In this context, microl level withdrawal becomes to a macro level context.

My reflexive ethnography applies to the processes and interventions of tradition and religion in women's negotiations over patriarchal bondage in their lives. Reserach contribution to the study of gender sociology is to revitalize the theory of patriarchy. Contextual theory is more easily generated from the novelty of data in the field by discussing it with the existing theory. The novelty of data wrapped in the traditions and cultures typical of Peranakan Arab in Indonesia that are different from the Middle East. This finding could be a pattern for further studies, but also an opportunity to revitalize the theory that researchers have produced. Through the reflexive ethnography, the reseracher can develop the novelty of

⁹ Michael Burroway, *Op.cit.* pg. 15.

¹⁰ Yuanita Aprilandini, “Patriarchy Reproduction in Arab Women”, (Ph.D Thesis: University of Indonesia, unpublished)

¹¹ *Ibid.*

the qualitative data, and continues to produce the contextual theory generated from the realities of our own society.

THE PROBLEM OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH

University support is an absolute prerequisite to encourage researchers in order to obtain theoretical novelty. University must support a wide range of research not only a practical but also theoretical research. These policies are very important in order to get theoretical research more often to get subsidized.

The second problem, exploring an insider's perspective also being considered takes a long time research period and spending high cost research budgeting. It makes our university not interested to subsidize this kind of research.

Third, the micro-level study in social science arenas, everyday life phenomenon, grassroots life, everyday social interaction were being less considered, also neither less important. These came from a strong positivistic tradition in several campuses in Indonesia. Thus, qualitative research is considered less scientific or less "selling" compared to survey and questionnaire research methods.

CONCLUSION

The authors argue that ethnographic research is more effective to produce contextual theory in accordance with contemporary societies. Our social world built from interaction and interpretation of individuals on the micro level wrapped in symbols of Indonesian traditions and cultures. Reflexive ethnography is not only contains with specific culture of our own community, but also contesting the old structure. It also produces some criticisms to everyday life phenomena and their problems. It can also create a form of policy that is appropriate to today's realities in our society.

The problems of our academic research are divided into internal and external factors. The internal factors consist of high cost budgeting for ethnographic research, taking a long duration, and also microlevel problems are more or less interesting topics to our students.

On the other side, the external factor can be seen from the strong dominance of the positivistic paradigm in Indonesian campus. Quantitative research is more marketable than qualitative ones.

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