## Afterword

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# AFTERWORD
## Transversal politics

*Marieke de Goede*

### Introduction: the big and small of international politics

Richard Flanagan's Booker Prize–winning novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (Flanagan 2014), tells the story of Dorrigo Evans, surgeon and womanizer, who is interned in a Japanese prisoner-of-war (POW) camp during World War II. The POWs are set to work building the Thailand-Burma railway, a project thought to be impossible by the British colonial powers, but completed with brute force and slave labour under Japanese rule in sixteen months during the early 1940s. The novel graphically depicts the harsh conditions, impossible assignments and horrendous destruction that this megalomaniacal project entailed. At the same time, it brings the characters alive in compelling fashion, not just the Australian prisoners but also the Japanese camp commanders and Korean camp guards. As one reviewer has noted:

> What stretches the story beyond the visceral pain it brings to life is the attention paid to these men as individuals, their pettiness and their courage, their acts of betrayal and affec-tion, and their efforts to cling to trappings of civilization no matter how slight or futile.
>
> (Charles 2014)

As senior officer and medical doctor, Evans fulfils a special role in the camp: he is leader of his battalion and in this capacity has regular dialogue and negotiation with the Japanese and Korean camp commanders. This places him in complex ethical positions: while seeking to use his prox-imity to the camp commanders to achieve – if possible – 'least worst' outcomes for his men, he also comes to play a role in the camp's machinery.

World War II experiences continue to haunt Evans during the rest of his life, when he returns after the war to become a successful surgeon. He develops a kind of numbness to the mundane-ness of his post-war life, when his roles as father, husband and doctor never seem to become as visceral as the POW experiences had been. As Evans reflects:

> He admired reality, as a doctor, he preached it and tried to practise it. In truth, he doubted its existence. To have been part of a Pharaonic slave system that had at its apex a divine sun king led him to understand unreality as the greatest force in life.
>
> (Flanagan 2014: 383)

I suggest that one way to read Flanagan's overwhelming novel is as a compelling story of the intersection between global politics and mundane lives. This novel does more than narrate the story of the infamous railway line through the tale of one man. It succeeds in giving depth and detail to the machinations of global politics, illuminating local complexities and confounding the moral boundaries between 'good' and 'bad' that are retrospectively drawn. The novel instils a realization that the great power hierarchies of global politics are made up of the everyday and the locally situated. The individual and the local do not just appear as supplement or minor detail to the macro-story. Instead, they are key sites where global power is practiced and where political reality is constituted.

Read thus, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* is an example of what the focus of international political sociology, broadly understood, might entail: analyzing, abstracting and critiquing the complex connections between the 'big' and the 'small' in international politics. This involves, for example, tying the situated life and love stories of an individual POW back to the horrors and politics of war, *including* bringing in unexpected perspectives, as Flanagan does when he follows the narrative thread of Japanese camp commander during the post-war years. As Donald MacKenzie has put it in a slightly different context:

> [The] instinct [in the social sciences] is to study the big issues: capitalism, militarism, patriarchy, racism, poverty, globalization, and so on. . . . The critique of science studies . . . is therefore the suspicion that it is apolitical, diverting its eyes from the big questions to study little technicalities.
>
> (2005: 557)

However, continues MacKenzie, attentiveness to the 'little technicalities' (of global political economy and financial market trading, in his case) is indispensable to understanding the power of the big issues. What science studies seeks to understand, for MacKenzie, is "How does the 'small' structure the 'big'? . . . And how is the 'big' inscribed in the 'small'?" (2005: 558). MacKenzie's remarks are relevant, I suggest, to international political sociology as a field of study that is drawn to the big questions of global space and politics, while distinguishing itself through its attentiveness to situated empirics and little technicalities. One of the starting points for this endeavour, as MacKenzie suggests, is provided in the social studies of science – some strands of which are now also referred to as 'new materialism' (for example, Latour 1999; Stengers 2000; Law and Mol 2002; Leander 2011; Bueger and Gadinger 2015; Schouten and Mayer this volume).

This chapter explores the encounter between international political sociology and science and technology studies (STS), sometimes also labelled 'new materialism'. MacKenzie's understanding of the promise of STS for an analysis of the imbrications of big and small is relevant to international political sociology. International political sociology speaks to the complex, multiple and situated interconnections between the 'big' of global politics and the 'small' of individual lives, case studies narratives and technical details. For example, in his chapter Anthony Burke loosely defines international political sociology as the excavation and critique of practice that tends towards contingency (Burke, this volume). Burke draws attention to the importance of an agenda that seeks to interrogate, historicize and problematize international "master-concepts, such as 'order', 'sovereignty', 'power'" (Burke, this volume). Ute Tellmann uses the notion of a "kaleidoscope" to conceptualize the ways in which international political sociology studies complex patterns of materiality, biopolitics and infrastructure. These different formulations seem to share at least three elements: (1) a focus on practice, including mundane routines and little technicalities that are no longer understood as mere detail, but that are granted constitutive power; (2) an attentiveness to temporality by emphasizing the shifting and the mobile (over the

ordered and the continuous); and (3) an attitude of critique. Taken together, these three elements offer a rethinking of power beyond clearly located and strictly hierarchical sovereignties (also Connolly 2004; Bennett 2005).

International political sociology is motivated by an agenda that questions the traditional hierarchies and spatial categories that International Relations (IR) is used to work with. Clearly, this agenda has a durable history in post-structuralist approaches to international studies (e.g. Shapiro and Alker 1996) and non-representational theory in political geography (e.g. Anderson and Harrison 2011). For example, in the context of the vibrant debates on post-structuralist politics in IR in the 1990s, David Campbell (1996: 19) signalled the need "to move beyond the sovereignty problematic". In order for international relations "to be about world politics in our postmodern time", Campbell (1996: 24) argues that "it might be better understood as a *philosophical anthropology of everyday life on a global scale*" (emphasis in original). But what might an anthropology of everyday life on a global scale look like, and how can we practice it? Existing literatures in international studies include some wonderful examples of research that traverses the global and the local in ways that offer rigorous empirical detail as well as compelling conceptualizations of the international (for example, Gusterson 1996; Langley 2008). Feminist scholarship in International Relations has played an important role in enabling these approaches (for example, Enloe 1989).

This chapter reflects on the conceptual and methodological challenges of international political sociology, understood as an analytic focus on the complex assemblage of the big and the small in international politics. It explores the potential of the so-called new materialist turn in international politics to advance this line of research. Drawing on a broad set of literatures associated with STS, new materialism offers a promising toolbox of concepts and methodologies to approach the constant flux between big and small in international politics. However, there are also some challenges and tensions in the dialogue between international political sociology and new materialism. One of these tensions, discussed in this chapter, concerns the meaning of the 'social' and the relation with (implied) older materialisms. Throughout the chapter, I draw on my own collaborative work on 'The List' to illustrate my arguments (de Goede, Leander and Sullivan 2016).

## Materialisms old and new

Campbell's suggestion to rebrand International Relations as the philosophical anthropology of everyday life on a global scale is interesting, not least because it raises the question of anthropology. Why have we come to speak of international political *sociology* when referring to a particular kind of international studies that, as Xavier Guillaume and Pinar Bilgin put it in the introduction to this volume, entails a "mode of inquiry of the interstices". Why sociology to "focus on the relational ways" through which the state and the international "concretely [manifest] themselves in specific sites, temporalities and modes of deployment"? Why not an 'international political anthropology', or, indeed, an 'international political philosophy'? I am not at all interested in starting a disciplinary tug-of-war here, or a clash of 'isms'. But I find it important to remain critically reflexive of the work done by the signifier 'sociology' in the title of this handbook, which entails a particular appropriation of what a sociological approach might entail (that would not necessarily be shared by sociologists; in fact, it might surprise many of them and repel at least some). Second, it is important to remain open to other types of inter- and transdisciplinarity that may invigorate international studies (Bleiker, this volume).

Anthropology, in particular, has grappled with the challenge of how to connect geographically situated studies to broader observations about structural power differences and (post)

colonialism. Anna Tsing (2004: 3), for example, draws attention to the contingencies in processes of 'globalization' that can never be fully reduced to pre-existing power differences. Of her detailed empirical fieldwork on land economies in Indonesia in the 1980s and 1990s, Tsing writes:

> If Indonesia is only a scrap of data, it might inform cosmopolitan readers, but its global encounters can never shape that shared space in which Indonesians and non-Indonesians jointly experience fears, tensions, and uncertainties. In this shared space, the contingency of encounters makes a difference.
>
> (2004: 3)

Tsing (2004: 1) develops the conceptual notion of 'friction' to theorize the relation between the global and the local – or, more precisely, the ways in which the universal aspirations of globalization are "enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters" (also Lagerwaard 2015).

Recent work across anthropology and geography provides important starting points for a project of analytically connecting the big and the small in international politics. For example, the notion of the 'assemblage' has been developed as a way of conceptualizing and critiquing contingent power effects across geographical distances and policy scales (e.g. Ong and Collier 2005; Bennett 2005; Anderson and MacFarlane 2011; Acuto and Curtin 2013). According to Giorgio Agamben (2009: 3), an assemblage is defined through its heterogeneity, its strategic functionality, and its operation at the intersection of power and knowledge. An assemblage, then, is understood as a "heterogeneous . . . political formation", that is mobile, emergent and dispersed – but that nevertheless excises considerable power in the name of its strategic functionality (Allen 2011: 154). In her analysis of the North American blackout, Jane Bennett (2005: 447) conceptualizes the complex confluence of small human decisions and little technicalities as *the agency of assemblages*, understood as "the distinctive efficacy of a working whole made up, variously, of somatic, technological, cultural, and atmospheric elements". The assemblage interplay may at times lead to relatively stable formations and "well-ordered coherent wholes" (Bueger 2013: 62). However, such stability and order can never be assumed or taken for granted: the point is that coherence and stability *themselves* needs to be explained, as do the multiplicity of power effects enacted here.

Furthermore, international studies has embraced elements of science and technology studies (STS) in what is sometimes called a 'new materialism', which starts with a focus on *the object* (e.g. Bellanova and Gonzalez-Fuster 2013; Best and Walters 2013; Schouten 2014; Salter 2015; also Schouten and Mayer, this volume). These studies seek to explore the *stuff* of IR, including the particular technical arrangements and material configurations underpinning, enabling, and shaping 'the international' in practice. In this sense, they offer a promising avenue to connect the big and the small of international politics: by focusing on the situated technical interconnections or calculative histories that render particular modes of the international possible. The central question in Mark Salter's project on *Making Things International*, for example, concerns how the international is made and remade through things – including, for example, boats, drones, passports, tanks and containers. Such objects enable and enact the international in particular ways: for example the technology of drones (or unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs) materially *enacts* novel international networks of surveillance and targeting (Grayson 2015; also for example Weber 2016). As Salter (2015: ix) puts it, the aim is to interrogate "how the international is created as things move – enabling and restricting different circuits and flows".

Such approaches bring to debates in international politics an appreciation of the vibrancy of materiality and the unpredictability of its forces. For example, Oded Löwenheim's (2015)

discussion of the materiality of the bicycle works beautifully to shed new light on the history of occupation and daily lives along the Israel-Palestine border. In my own collaborative work, we have placed the list as (knowledge) object at the centre of our analysis, in order to examine how the UN Security Council targeted sanctions lists function to enable novel regulatory spaces and (dis)connection across jurisdictions globally (de Goede and Sullivan 2016). Security lists like no-fly lists and terrorism blacklists are usually understood and critiqued by analyzing the institutional actors *behind* the list, or the criteria constituting the list. In our project, we have sought to effect a change in perspective by "*starting with* a focus on the form and technology of the list" (de Goede and Sullivan 2016: 69; also Leander 2016).

In this sense, the agenda of so-called new materialism is a promising avenue to theorize and analyze the constant flux between big and small that, as I suggest, is at the heart of an international political sociology. It offers a relational ontology that takes seriously the little technicalities and situated objects that render the international possible. At the same time, however, a number of questions could be raised concerning the embrace of new materialism by work broadly within the remit of international political sociology. A first question concerns the (absence of) dialogue with what is now has implicitly become cast as the *old* materialism. International studies and International Political Economy (IPE) have a rich tradition in materialist thinking that remains quite overlooked in these debates (e.g. Cox 2002; Jessop and Sum 2006; van Apeldoorn and de Graaf 2014). How do 'new' conceptions of the material differ from older readings of the material (economy) as a causal force in political history? How does attentiveness to the vibrancy of the material challenge and reorient debates on the political meaning of materials? Should this be seen as a clear break in theorizing the material, or as something more of a continuum?

More importantly perhaps, what – in terms of critical attitude and attentiveness to structural inequality – needs to be retained and revalued in the turn to new materialism? Sebastian Abrahamsson and colleagues, for example, engage critically with Bennett's work, and problematize her celebration of the "liveliness of matter itself" (2015: 12). While working in a materialist tradition themselves (notably Law and Mol 2002; Mol 2006), these authors caution against a strict focus on materiality and plead for the study of matter in relation to its social and geographical complexities: "Materialities work in concert, they are relational" (2015: 14). Attentiveness to the "complexities, frictions, intractabilities and conundrums of 'matter in relation'", for these authors (2015: 13), brings back in a focus on the structural (economic) inequalities, that – for example – underpin the production of omega-3 as a vitamin supplement for Western markets. As they put it in dialogue with Bennett's emphasis on the lively materialities of bodies and food: "This particular relation is not symmetrical: while one participant eats, the other is being eaten" (Abrahamsson et al. 2015: 11). This dialogue renews the focus on social inequalities and relationalities within the perspective of new materialism (also for example M'Charek 2010).

A second question facing the so-called new materialism is its relation to theories of discourse and post-structuralism. In some versions, the embrace of materialism is mobilized "to *counter* the discourse- and speech-heavy analysis of much contemporary critical [work] in international relations" (Salter 2015: viii, emphasis added). Or, as Barad (2003: 801) writes provocatively, "language has been granted too much power". But this opposition may be too easy: first, because it offers a thin notion of discourse as not material (see for example, Glynos and Howarth 2007), and second, because it offers a thin version of materialism as not discursive. Indeed, many of the contributions to Salter's *Making Things International* incorporate a focus on discourse, for example when exploring how technical materialities intersect with discursive threat templates. If we return to the example of drones, an analysis of the technical materiality of UAVs and its global interconnections still means little without an accompanying understanding of the wider loop of human-machinic decision-making and target selection. As Grayson (2015) shows, this entails

attention to the 'disposition matrix', which involves discursive practices of defining, visualizing and constituting the terrorist enemy in novel modes of war.

In other words, a key question is how to move beyond the assumed material/discursive divide, to interrogate how politics is situated in (what may be called) human and non-human assemblages. Foucault, who was ceaselessly questioned about the relation between the discursive and the non-discursive in his work, put it as follows:

> It does not much matter for my notion of the apparatus to say that this is discursive and that isn't. If you take Gabriel's architectural plan for the Military School together with the actual construction of the School, how is one to say what is discursive and what institutional? That would only interest me if the building didn't conform with the plan. But I don't think it's very important to be able to make that distinction.
>
> (Foucault 1976: 198)

Of course, there are likely to be many stumbling blocks, non-conformities and changes between the plan and the eventual building. Partly, these may be attributable to what can be called 'lively materialities': constructions that do not conform; building materials that turn out to be costly or unavailable; proportions that are unworkable. Other contingencies and stumbling blocks may be less directly material: for example, objections to the plans by future occupants; reorientations of the plans by politicians; architects relieved of their duties and replaced by others. The point is – and has been made in a wealth of literature – that pinpointing a distinction between the material and the discursive is not very interesting in this context. Far more important it is to analyze, with precision, the ways in which complex assemblages (or what Foucault here calls 'apparatuses') of material and immaterial forces confluence to realise the military school as a disciplinary institution. The politics are in the countless big and small decisions and relations that shape the materialization of an institutional, disciplinary practice.

## Objects and lists

Perhaps the most important question that needs to still be further explored at the intersection between international political sociology and new materialism is this: what does it mean to research practice and critical analysis *to start with* the object? Put differently, the question is not to decide whether a particular object of study is material *or* social – the question is what is rendered (in)visible through the lens of a materialist approach. If, as I have suggested, one of the overall endeavours of international political sociology is to connect the big and the small (and if, as MacKenzie suggests, science studies plays an important role in doing so), then how, exactly, does the new materialist turn shift the terrain of research? What starting points does such an approach involve, and what elements are rendered visible?

Let me dare to give some provisional answers. First, it entails a certain reverence for the things that are, or what Graham Harman, in his analysis of Latour's work, calls the 'principle of irreducibility': "All actants are on the same footing: both large and small, both human and non-human. No actant is just fodder for the others; each enhances and resists the others in highly specific ways" (2009a: 15–16). Indeed, Harman (through Latour) suggests that there is no such thing as an a priori 'big' or 'small'. As Latour has put it in a much-quoted passage: "A giant in a story is no a bigger character than a dwarf, it just does different things" (quoted in Amoore and Piotukh 2015: 343). To be clear, this does not imply that all actants are equally important, or powerful or durable. But it is an important challenge to the social scientific tendency to look for an ultimate determinant in political constellations, as being brought about by God, or capital, or ruling

classes, or (more fashionably these days) ruled by areas of the brain, or genetic determination, or conspiracies of security services and secret political lodges. Harman writes:

> There is no privileged force to which the others can be reduced, and certainly no ceaseless interplay between pure natural forces and pure social forces, each untainted by the other. Nothing exists but actants, and all of them are utterly concrete.
>
> (2009a: 16)

What gives an actant substance, or durability, in this 'object-oriented philosophy' are its connections and alliances: "the more connected an actant is, the more real . . . Actants do not draw their power from some pristine inner hearth, but only through assembling allies" (Harman 2009a: 19–20). This turns attention to the question of how *some* actants (and not others) acquire networked strength, durability and the power of normalcy. The *social* in international political sociology acquires a particular meaning here: the social does not so much signify habitus, or personal networks, nor is it opposed to the supposedly 'hard' reality of nature or materiality. Instead, the social is thought of as relationality: it is from alliances with other actants, whether "human, natural, artificial, logical, and inanimate", that power results (Harman 2009a: 21). To give a concrete example, Harman (2009a: 19) discusses the ways in which Louis Pasteur's science of fermentation became influential only after "amassing a formidable army of allies . . . not all [of them] human". In another example, and to return to the theme of security lists, we have explored how UN targeted sanctions lists acquire strength and durability through their institutional connections and their 'boundary work' across public and private spheres. By following security lists closely, we have rendered visible the active role that the list as a technology plays in connecting the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee to national executives as well as to private institutions like banks or border bureaucrats (de Goede and Sullivan 2016; Sullivan 2014). These connections are not flawless; on the contrary, they are imbued with gaps, complexities and unpredictable turns. As Amicelle and Jakobsen (2016) show, banks appropriate security lists in unpredictable ways, and graft novel, commercial objectives onto their formal tasks of list checking (also Li 2007).

Second, a reverence for the object entails, according to Isabelle Stengers (2000: 15), a political attitude that "respects established sentiments". Stengers writes in a tradition of the social studies of science, where critique of the scientific paradigm easily assumes a mode of "resistance" that, as she puts it, takes on a "prophetic accent" (2000: 11). Contra this binary approach of "martyr" and "truth", Stengers (2000: 15) advocates that critical researchers *avoid* collision "with established sentiments" but instead, "try to open them to what their established identity led them to refuse, combat, misunderstand". In other words, Stengers's (2000: 17) politics and critical attitude are not driven by the ambition to of unveil or denounce, but, instead, by modes of interest, laughter and intervention. She writes: "The laughter of someone who has to be impressed always complicates the life of power" (2000: 16–17; also Edkins 1999). Louise Amoore's analysis of the deployment of algorithmic knowledge in security practices in 'Security and the Incalculable' may be read as a compelling example of Stengers's propositions. While extremely critical of the novel power of algorithmically inferred futures to enact present security decisions, Amoore (2014) does not seek to denounce or unveil the 'secret power' of algorithms as mysterious devices. Instead, she engages the mathematical debates underlying algorithmic calculation on their own terms, and follows closely the scientists involved. Amoore's analysis of the debate between Turing and Wittgenstein on the nature of calculation and prediction provides a critical perspective on the way in which calculability has been crafted historically – with an attentiveness to this historical gaps and discontinuities underpinning today's security calculations. Amoore shows

that "contemporary security calculation [deploys] mathematical devices in such a way that it does not matter whether something can be predicted, only that it can be arranged as calculation" (Amoore 2014: 425).

Third, starting enquiry with the object does not mean that the object stays intact as a given entity. If we ask how barbed wire, videos and tanks (for example) enact and enable the international in political ways (Salter 2015), then how do we come to define and delineate these objects? If we note how manifold objects including "bodies, vessels, blood" as well as "shopping, trolleys and staircases . . . anesthetic drugs, green clothing, knives and tables" play a role in the constitution of medical knowledge (Mol 2002: 20), how and why do we single out and delineate those items and not others? Put simply, we need to ask *what counts as an object* in the new materialism, and who decides? Harman (2009b: 147) uses the term 'object' "in the broadest possible sense", to denote, as he puts it, "anything with a sort of unitary reality". It could be "a cat, a tree or a soul, . . . the nation of Egypt or [a] vast machine" (Harman 2009a: 17). In this quotation, the style trope of the list – abundantly used in science and technology literatures – provides a way of evading the question of what comes to count and be recognized as a thing. The list's potentially infinite and open-ended nature is a compelling way to signify that any*thing* can come to count – without necessarily explaining why, in practice, some things come to matter over others (on the list, see for example Stäheli 2016). If everything is irreducible, then what comes to count as an 'object' worthy of investigation? Harman ultimately proposes that objects are so fully situated that they are like *events*. "All features of an object belong to it; everything happens only once, at one time, in one place" (2009a: 17). The problematic distinction between the discursive and the material is wide open again here: if objects are gatherings or events, then surely practices of discursive mediation (also) play a role in their materialization? A critical perspective is needed within new materialism to examine how political things become recognized in the first place, and deemed worthy of investigation. What comes to be considered as 'big' or 'small' – and what remains entirely invisible – are themselves elements in need of explanation.

I have argued that starting with the object is an appealing way of cutting through traditional hierarchies of the big and the small in international politics. From this point of view, there is nothing that predetermines that – for example – small-scale familial remittance networks are less important to making up global finance than are big banks (e.g. Langley 2015). Alternatively, the precise mechanics of algorithmic calculation become crucial not coincidental to the global circulatory flows of passengers and monies (Amoore and de Goede 2008). Instead, this approach seeks to understand how the 'big' of international politics (for example, global banking or international security) is inscribed through the 'small' (of familiar remittances or algorithmic sciences) and vice versa. It asks, in Salter's (2015) terms, how international things are *made*. In our work on lists, for example, we have sought to "remain in the register of the list" ( Johns 2016), to unpack its elements, technological arrangements and its particular juridical power. The list is an 'actant' in the Latourian sense: it does not just passively execute or implement pre-existing security decisions. Instead, lists (like for example the US no-fly list) are themselves lively participants in the ways in which security decisions are taken, professionals are connected, and criteria are written. Starting with a focus on the list as object and – in a sense – developing a certain reverence for it, has enabled us to deliver a different kind of critique.

## Following the object

Methodologically, the new materialist turn offers a rich set of instruments to develop international political sociology empirically (Salter and Multu 2013; Aradau et al. 2015). As Bueger points out in this volume, practice-based and object-centred approaches "share a commitment to

the primacy of the empirical" (though it is important to note that this commitment is not always delivered, as argued in Abrahamsson et al. 2015). Stengers (2000: 71) invites researchers to "follow" the "contingent process", which produces neither explanation nor arbitrariness, but instead traces effects as "being both a prolongation and a reinvention" (there are strong affinities with Butler's reading of performativity here). This research strategy of 'following' the object brings us to anthropology and its practice of prolonged, in-depth, participant-based fieldwork. As Salter has put it, researchers need to immerse themselves into daily expert practice, "learning the daily language, plotting the struggles, . . . understanding the deep well of common sense beliefs" (Salter 2013: 105). In this volume, Bueger suggests that a study of practices may also be fostered trough documentary analysis – not through focusing on discourse analysis of grand speeches and media representations, but, rather, through tracing the mundane work done in bureaucratic reports, white papers, annual reports, diplomatic cables and court cases (drawing on Pouliot 2013).

Let me focus on and develop further the suggestion that *court cases* are interesting from a methodological point of view, and, in particular, for an agenda of connecting the big and the small in international politics. Recently, I have found myself drawn to the juridical texts of court cases, inquiries and civil trials as analytical sites (e.g. de Goede 2014, 2015). Reading juridical texts and legal contestations through a process of qualitative, inductive, yet non-legal, discourse analysis has allowed me to tease out authoritative processes of meaning-making and to understand the key axes of contestation over particular issues. The legal text is important, partly because it is a privileged performative space, in which linguistic utterances have a direct capacity to shape reality, establish facts, and mete out punishment (even if those utterances are shaped and constrained by previously existing subject positions and linguistic orders, as Butler 1997 points out). To some extent, we may say, the legal decision enacts an interpretative 'cut' in the continuous flow of meaning in the world: it stabilizes, even if temporarily, the boundaries of the network of interpretation (Strathern 1996). In short, I am interested in the (quasi)juridical text as a particularly authoritative locus of meaning-making that exceeds the particularity of personal memoirs or the fleeting nature of media representation and (some) policy papers.

In addition, however, I am interested in the legal text because of the particular ways in which it connects the big and the small of international politics (also Neal 2012). A case before a court of law often takes the form of a general expression of a phenomenon or the general contestation of a universal norm. But it exists only in a fully situated manner: for example, because an individual (a subject recognized before the law) succeeded in bringing a claim – or, alternatively, because a prosecutor was able to identify an individual suspect, recognizable as a subject who has to answer before the law. In this sense, the juridical case becomes the site where law or norm is *practiced*: where the abstract norm or universal regulation is enacted and rendered meaningful. Through the lens of practice theory (e.g. Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014), this is not to be understood as a site of (passive) implementation, nor even local contestation. On the contrary, it is understood as the most important site where power is exercised to give meaning to a norm or law. Put differently, it is in the situated encounter between an abstract law and the individual case that meaning is created. Understood thus, the legal case ties the *big* of a universal norm or a transnational law to the *small* of an individual's or community's trajectory.

When returning to the example of the security list, the legal case of Rahinah Ibrahim is instructive. Ibrahim, a Malaysian national and former Stanford University architecture student, was the first person to successfully challenge her inclusion on the US No-fly list in January 2014, after more than eight years of protracted litigation. What is important to my point here is not just that Ibrahim's case succeeded in contesting the US No-fly list, when a judge ruled that Ibrahim's rights of due process were violated when the government put her on the list

without informing her of the reasons. In addition, the court case brought to light that Ibrahim had been erroneously listed. This is a major and important critique of the secret security practices of listing, though its wider ramifications for listing processes remain to be seen.

But the point I wish to make here is that critically reading Ibrahim's court documents, *beyond* the juridical question of the rights infringement, is interesting methodologically. It offers insight into the ways in which the big and the small of post-9/11 security politics are connected. On such a reading, the Ibrahim case is not just one of wrongful listing or human error, but a site that can tell us something about the *normal* working of the security list proper. For the legal judgement it is of vital importance whether Ibrahim was rightly or wrongly listed – however, for the method of international political sociology, this question is secondary. More important is the question what the case reveals about *how* the list works as a technical process: Who lists and how? How do airport staff encounter and enact listings? How does the No-fly list interrelate to other US government databases, including the US Consular and visa database? Thus, the 2014 ruling in the Ibrahim case (though partly redacted) is an interesting source on the technicalities and procedures of listing processes, recounting how she was listed by an FBI agent who was also involved in a local 'mosque outreach' project and who spoke to Ibrahim on several occasions (*Ibrahim v. Department of Homeland Security* 2015: 9–10). The court documents recount in some detail how the US government's "web of interlocking watchlists" works (*Ibrahim v. Department of Homeland Security* 2015: 11). In addition, what is interesting from an international political sociology perspective is how Ibrahim's case draws boundaries between normal, legitimate security listing and exceptional, wrongful, mistaken listing. In Ibrahim's case, her inclusion on the No-fly list was established to be caused by human error, however her inclusion in wider government watchlists (especially the Terrorist Screening Database of the US Department of Homeland Security) was never a point of contention (*Ibrahim vs Department of Homeland Security* 2015: 16).

Methodologically, there certainly is a tension between using inquests or court cases as sources for a practice-based or object-centred studies. The juridical sphere, to some extent, remains fully focused on the human subject and requires a recognized individual subject as a bearer of legal rights in order to act at all. This is in tension with what Bennett calls the agency of complex assemblages that, for example, underpin algorithmic security decision-making (e.g. Amoore 2014). Agentic assemblages relate to individual subjectivity and responsibility in tenuous ways. For example, when I examined the trial of one of the few individuals who have to date been brought before a court in the context of the 2008 financial crisis, it became very clear that the way in which it anchored responsibility in one individual mid-level bank manager was disappointing from a political point of view, and generally thought to be a poor harvest "in the aftermath of a financial mess that generated hundreds of billions in losses" (Morgenson and Story 2011; de Goede 2015). The law is able to anchor responsibility in an individual subject only, and not in the complex human-machinic assemblages that ultimately make up derivatives trading or security decisions.

Nevertheless, my suggestion is that, *when read politically*, juridical sites provide a viable way forward methodologically for an international political sociology (see Aalberts and Werner, in this volume). Such sites couple technical detail and individual narratives, to universal, abstract questions of law and norm. In relation to security practices, moreover, they sometimes provide extremely rich sources about the practices of police or security services that are otherwise difficult to access (if not outright secret). Important, though, is to approach legal documents in a way that is not constrained by the very specific and sometimes rigid manner in which jurists themselves approach the cases. This is not to suggest that students of international politics can simply 'instrumentalize' juridical texts for their own purposes (Kessler 2010), but it does mean that it is possible to approach and appropriate the rich juridical texts in novel ways. The challenge is to

read beyond the constrained space of the legal problematic in order to qualitatively analyze the key axes of political conflict at work when the big and the small of international politics collide.

## Conclusions

In this chapter I have offered an understanding of international political sociology as the study of the intersection between the big and the small of international politics. Drawing on a number of definitions as developed in this handbook, for example the idea of the "kaleidoscope" (Tellmann), I have suggested that as such, the disciplinary heritage of this emerging field of study is not so much sociological, but at least also anthropological, philosophical and geographical. All these disciplines offer strands of literature and rich conceptualizations to help develop an agenda that empirically reveres the small and the situated, but that retains the motivation of analyzing the big power dynamics of global politics.

In particular, this chapter has engaged the debate on so-called new materialism in International Relations in order to assess its promises, problems and methods. As attested in many chapters in this book, new materialism, STS and practice-based approaches offer viable conceptual avenues for international political sociology. Drawing on the work of Mol, Harman and Stengers, among others, I have teased out key elements of this literature that are relevant to the emerging agenda of international political sociology, drawing attention to a necessary reverence for the 'things that are', as well the practice of critique without collision. Approaching international political sociology through this route entails a broad understanding of *the social* – as relational, emergent and assembled. It does not so much graft the agenda of the individual narrative or situated case onto the study of International Relations, but instead analyzes the constant flux or imbrication between big and small in global politics, without a priori determining which is which.

In conclusion, the chapter explores the value of court cases and juridical documents as empirical sources. There is a clear paradox here – the overtly textual nature of the legal sphere is in apparent tension with the materialist orientation of the 'practice turn'. However, I argue that the legal sphere offers a uniquely situated window onto political practices. In its encounter between the abstract principle of norm or law and the situated claim of the individual case, the court documents offer a rich resource to disentangle materialist politics. This entails just one example of the many rich avenues for exploring international political sociology as gathered in this book.

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