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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

*Xavier Guillaume and Pinar Bilgin*¹

By its own denomination – international political sociology² – an emerging field of study at the centre of this Routledge handbook is an invitation to engage independently and in their connections and tensions the three terms composing it (Bigo and Walker 2007a, b; Huysmans and Nogueira 2012; Bigo 2014). This invitation is also one to problematize these terms as they originate in specific disciplines and geo-cultural epistemologies (Tickner and Wæver 2009) and how their connections should not result in closing off venues for research and engagement but, on the contrary, open them up. This handbook therefore attempts to provide to a wide and diverse readership a sense of the lively and rich research dynamics that are currently constituting international political sociology as a field of study that needs to be read in the plural.

This handbook is not designed to set boundaries or create a canon. In effect, we seek, to the best of our ability, to avoid fixing and crystallizing a possible emergent field of study that is not only constantly in flux but precisely is resulting from the ever ongoing engagement of its scholars with this invitation to think plurally and in an interweaving manner about the international, the political and the sociological. Finally, in this handbook we tried to avoid privileging one view or voice over another on what is an international political sociology, how it is to be conceived and researched. We have attempted as much as possible and as time, material factors and circumstances allowed to provide a balanced snapshot of what this field looks like (see further discussion later in this chapter).

This handbook offers a *particular and situated* snapshot at a potentially emerging field of study, which does not, and in the light of its contributions, should not coalesce under a single epistemologico-methodologic banner. Moreover, an international political sociology is not something completely new. There has been work coming from different strands of sociology over the past 25 years that has identified with it (see, for instance, Dezalay 1995, 2004; Dezalay and Garth 1995, 1998; Braungart and Braungart 2000). Yet, it is within the field of International Relations (IR), and largely under the aegis of the International Studies Association's (ISA) section and eponymous journal *International Political Sociology*, that the idea of international political sociology as a field of study has emerged and has taken an important place not only in IR but also has started to resonate in other fields of study. At the origin of the ISA section and the journal, Didier Bigo, in association with R.B.J. Walker, has developed a specific understanding of an international political sociology, often capitalized and denominated by its acronym IPS, that has

been a major factor in the emergence and success of as well as reflections about an international political sociology.³

Principally identified with the works of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, with the inclusion of Paul Veyne (see Bigo 2014), what might be more adequately denominated a “political sociology of the international” (Fr. “une sociologie politique de l’international”) can also be associated with the work of scholars at the juncture of the field of international relations and sociology. Scholars such as Niilo Kauppi or Mikael Madsen (2013, 2014, this volume), or Gisèle Sapiro (e.g. 2002, 2009, 2011), to name but a few, have been engaging with a political sociology of the international on questions such as transnational elites or the cultural field. Importantly, this “political sociology of the international” has often been influenced by the pioneer work on transnational elites, law and political economy of Yves Dezalay and Bryant Garth (1995, 1998, this volume).

Finally, postcolonial and historical sociological engagement with IR have laid bare the limits of sociological inquiries that remain within ‘national’, ‘interstate’ or ‘comparative politics’ frameworks in the study of the international. The limits of IR scholarship in inquiring into the perspectives of ‘others’ who help constitute the international were identified by Vivienne Jabri (2013) or Sanjay Seth (2013), among others. In the early 1990s, Stephan Chan (1993) had called for a “new historical sociology” for IR. Locating his ideas in a very different school of thought (Trotsky’s “uneven and combined development”), Justin Rosenberg made a similar point when he noted that IR’s understanding of the international had been less than “genuinely sociological” (Rosenberg 2006: 308–310). Calls have also emerged from postcolonial scholars in cognate disciplines such as sociology, political philosophy, history and literary critique, to study “intertwined histories” (Said 1993), “connected histories” (Subrahmanyam 1997), “connected sociologies” (Bhambra 2007) or “universal history” (Buck-Morss 2009) – all pointing to the need for inquiring into the connections and tensions between the international, the political and the sociological. What is particularly significant about taking the challenge of postcolonialism and historical sociology seriously is to remind ourselves that those connections the study of which has been central to the scholars of international political sociology are nothing new, but have been with us for a long time. What is somewhat new is the emergence of a body of scholars (including but not limited to this handbook’s contributors) who explicitly focus on such connections and tensions in the study of the international.

It is the belief of the editors of this volume that one of the primary functions of this plural field of study is to foster multiple encounters across disciplines, fields of study, theoretical and methodological approaches in a pluri- and transdisciplinary spirit (see Bleiker). This volume should thus be seen as an invitation to engage with and achieve such plurality as to a large extent an international political sociology has largely crystallized within another field: international relations. Some chapters will thus appear to people external, but also internal, to that field maybe as quite self-centred compared to their own, whether it is sociology, geography,⁴ anthropology, historical sociology, history, and so on. What makes this engagement possible, and the ability for an international political sociology to move in a more plural direction than it is now, is that at its core an international political sociology seeks to be a pragmatic research attitude to specific *problématiques*⁵ by mobilizing, interweaving and engaging with these three dimensions that are the international, the political and the sociological. In that spirit, the following chapters of this handbook are organized in four parts to offer a much necessary even if by definition incomplete snapshot at this emerging field.

The first part – International Political Sociology and Its Cognate Fields of Study – offers a way to situate international political sociology in light of its engagements with cognate disciplines and fields of study. Most students and researchers producing work that can be identified

as participating in international political sociology have or have had another starting point. This part thus offers engagements with the comparisons and distinctions to be made between international political sociology and its cognate disciplines and fields of study like sociology, gender and feminist studies, international law, historical sociology, security studies and postcolonialism, to name but a few. The second part – Key Themes of International Political Sociology – presents the key themes which have been at the core of the emergence of international political sociology as a field of study. Recognized and leading specialists for each theme present the key advancements provided by international political sociology, offering a state-of-the-art chapter for each theme. Themes that will be covered include security, mobility, finance, development, gender, religion, health, global elites and the environment, to name but a few. The third part – Methodologies of International Political Sociology – introduces central methodological issues and developments at the heart of the field of international political sociology. These chapters concentrate on an exposition of the central questions at the centre of each methodological issue. Finally, the fourth part – Transversal Reflections – invites three important figures in international relations and international political sociology to offer their reflections after reading the entire handbook, thus shedding specific lights that are themselves invitations to think more reflexively about what an international political sociology might be. The remainder of this introduction rapidly presents some key points emerging from each part.

International political sociology and its cognate fields of study

The chapters of this first part are engaging with the potential genealogies, cross-fertilizations, tensions, at times creative, and congruencies that may exist between this emergent field of study and other disciplines or fields of study. This part of the handbook is an important starting point to offer readers an academic snapshot to situate international political sociology. To the best knowledge of the authors, there are no academic degrees, undergraduate or otherwise, in international political sociology, though Dirk Nabers holds a chair in International Political Sociology at the University of Kiel in Germany. Most scholars currently interested in participating in the development of research in international political sociology are coming from multiple disciplinary backgrounds and/or theoretical and methodological affinities, though, as mentioned, the field of international relations seems to predominate still. This part thus offers a way to partially and punctually map how international political sociology can be compared and distinguished from some of its cognate disciplines and fields of study.

International political sociology, by its pluri-/interdisciplinary character (see Bleiker), is a field of study which can develop with and invite developments in other disciplines or fields of study not only because of their possible commonalities but also by the dissensus and tensions emerging between them. Tensions and dissensus can be here heuristic moments to open up lines of inquiry and develop lines of thought. By putting, at the same time, the international, the political and the sociological in conjunctive and disjunctive tensions, international political sociology is a mode of inquiry of the interstices (on the concept of interstice, see Huysmans and Guillaume 2013). This pluri-disciplinary character is not only interested in the interconnections, the interstices, between multiple analytical dimensions or fields of enquiry but more substantially to move away from 'abstractions', such as the state or the international, to focus on the relational ways by which they are given a specific shape or are concretely manifesting themselves in specific sites, temporalities and modes of deployment as forms of power (see Kessler, Rajaram).

This partial and punctual mapping also reflects, to an extent, how international political sociology has come to encapsulate a more general project within the discipline of International Relations: its decompartmentalization. This part illustrates how international political sociology

is an attempt to connect with other disciplines or fields of study in order to develop modes of inquiry that concentrate on problematizing our globalized social and political worlds. This is for instance what suggests Laura Shepherd's "provocation" in stating that "gender is international political sociology"; one did not have to wait the emergence of a self-defined field of study to problematize, research and engage with the social and political worlds via the connections between the international, the political and the sociological. Tanja Aalberts and Wouter Werner for their part demonstrate how an international political sociology enables to reproblematicize the "boundaries and divides" between International Relations and International Law and enable to understand the latter as both a practice and politics in order to reflect on "how law and legal expertise is mobilized to present and order the world". In a similar fashion, Oliver Kessler engages with the idea of an international political sociology to reread the literature on world society, which had already articulated some twenty years ago a form of engagement and interweaving between these three terms, by putting forth notably an analytics of a world of their making, to paraphrase Nicholas Onuf's seminal book (1989), by concentrating on the politics of legal and economic expertise (see also Dezalay and Garth, Tellmann, Kauppi and Madsen).

It may be that international political sociology is attracting a lot of attention and is appealing to many scholars coming from different national and/or epistemic traditions and from different fields of study because it is not necessarily tied to or does not necessarily try to address a specific disciplinary canon. In that sense, international political sociology refers to the impossibility of being located while still being situated (Haraway 1988). Yet, despite this multi-sited outlook, international political sociology also faces the risk of reinforcing Euro- and state-centric understandings of the international by abiding to a specific national ontology and narrowing itself to Eurocentric premises (see Halperin). So while, one can see, as Sankaran Krishna does, in international political sociology a possible way in which a non-Western outlook "manifest[s] itself . . . in the disciplinary study of international relations and global politics", it still remains that international political sociology has to make efforts in ontologically and epistemically decentring itself from largely disciplinary premises (see Halperin, Rajaram).

As Shepherd notes, and as is echoed by most authors of this section, an international political sociology fundamentally is a mode of inquiry. To an extent, it can be seen as an open and multifaceted toolbox that seeks to problematize each of its terms and to connect them together in a way that privilege the questioning at stake rather than specific units, temporalities or ontologies (see Rajaram). It has offer for instance a way to shift away an entrenched field of studies such as security studies from a state- and military-centric conception of what security is, to a much more adapted conception of what security does that is attuned to contemporary security phenomenon – whether it is surveillance, global terrorism, migration and so on – by providing sociological and reflexive tools to complexify our understanding of security (see Mutlu and Lüleci). Thus, beyond onto-epistemic questions, an international political sociology can also offer a toolbox for the questioning of the politico-normative canon that has largely informed an international political theory thus far by helping it to move beyond not only of the confines of the European nation state as its key referent but also of a theory of the state to think rather in global terms about ethics and international orders (see Burke).

Key themes of international political sociology

International political sociology approaches could be adopted in the study of a wide range of themes. Over the years, some themes have proven to be more central to the research agendas of its scholars than some others. This part of the handbook reflects the self-selected 'key' themes in the study of international political sociology. Of the themes covered here, some have also

been 'key' in the study of IR in that they have their own subfields, as with feminism (see Stern), international political economy (see Dezalay and Garth), global governance (see Ole Jacob Sending) and security studies (see Burgess). In all these cases, researchers of international political sociology have given a new twist to their study. For example, Yves Dezalay and Bryant G. Garth's chapter turns the reflexive gaze of international political sociology onto International Political Economy as a field, tracing the emergence, prevalence and silencing of its core ideas (see Leander). Peter Burgess offers a masterful overview of the ways in which Security Studies has been an incubator for the core ideas and theoretical moves of international political sociology, while highlighting its relatively weak spots, including "sociological approach to security practices of the international, that is at the limits of the national". Maria Stern's play on words in the title of her chapter, "Feminist International Political Sociology – International Political Sociology Feminism", could be taken as a metaphor for the synergistic relationship that has developed between these two approaches in recent decades. As Stern shows, by focusing on studies on emotion, embodiment, materiality and reflexivity, over the years feminist and international political sociology approaches have fed off each other, turning tensions and complementarities into insightful "interrogations of *what gender is and does as well as how 'it' has been produced to be, and do what it does*".

In counter-distinction to the synergistic relationship developed between international political sociology, feminism and security studies, the study of global governance has taken a radically different turn as shaped by international political sociology (see Sending). Where previous studies on global governance had emphasized the 'global' in 'global governance', inquiring into the ways in which the governance of various issues were moving beyond borders of states, scholars of international sociology have drawn upon Foucault and Bourdieu to rethink what 'governance' entails. As such, international political sociology has been transformative for global governance studies, moving beyond the ambitions and expectations of its early scholars (such as James Rosenau) to explore "social form of governance (or governing) in a social space that is defined (by some actors rather than others) as 'global'" without losing sight of the 'political' and the 'international'.

Many other 'key themes' that this section covers (such as development, finance or health) have traditionally been explored in cognate fields and were brought into International Relations by scholars of international political sociology in a way that is innovative for their points of 'departure' as well as their points of 'arrival'. For, although these themes have been well explored by respective scholars of these fields, it is through a perspective that is cognizant of the international and the sociological as well the political that these themes were more fully explored. That said, as with all approaches, international political sociology also has its "silences" (Enloe 1997).

Peter Nyers's chapter serves as a helpful reminder as to why citizenship has thus far been so central to scholars of international political sociology, as it is one of those themes that cannot be grasped by research frameworks that focus on either the 'inside' or 'outside'. International political sociology has proven to be a fitting approach to the study of citizenship, writes Nyers, by way of allowing researchers to challenge the inside/outside divide that has been constitutive of political science, IR and sociology (among others). Nyers underscores two additional benefits of adopting an international political approach in the study of citizenship: the focus on processes and practices, especially those by "unanticipated or ignored subjects", while paying attention to "unexpected or neglected spaces".

Indeed, studies on citizenship crystallize the need for an international political sociology approach, an insight that finds its echo in Stina Hansson and Joakim Öjendal's chapter on development. Hansson and Öjendal see additional benefits insofar as international political sociology allows reclaiming "development" research while distancing researchers from the controversial legacy of post-World War II "development studies" shaped by Eurocentric assumptions about

“time and the other” (Fabian 1983). As such, international political sociology has proven to be an excellent home for ‘critical’ engagements with development while remaining mindful of postcolonial criticism. Such reflexivity allows Hansson and Öjendal to seek to recover the study of development as an “emancipatory project” to “hold the world to the promise of development” by way of “using the powers of imagination and passions, to pay attention to elements of excess, through which are able to escape power”.

The study of the environment has flourished in the past few decades as humankind’s destructiveness accelerated while our awareness of and reflection on our complicity has not kept pace. Hannah Hughes’s chapter traces the study of environment by focusing on how those scholars of global environmental politics, with an eye on the emergence of international political sociology, have pioneered a move away from focusing merely on actors and their actions (as with regime theory–informed studies) to science and technology sciences (STS) approaches that inquire into the “relationship between science, technology and nature in the making of society”. This move, suggests Hughes, has challenged prevalent portrayals of ‘scientific knowledge’ as outside politics (as presumed by environmental studies research drawing from the epistemic communities approach) and inquired into power and knowledge relationship in the production and mobilization of knowledge about the environment.

The relationship between power and knowledge is also central to Niilo Kauppi and Mikael Rask Madsen’s chapter on global elites. Reminding their readers the purpose of inquiry is not merely studying the sociology of global professionals, Kauppi and Madsen point to the need to “provide a framework that can make the power of global governance intelligible”. As such, they highlight how international political sociology “links knowledge as an active property to the complex interplay of material and ideal interests and ultimately the role of this agency in transformation of global power”. In doing so, scholars of international political sociology, they suggest, are able to inquire into the making of global elites beyond tropes about the ‘Davos man’, by carefully highlighting between “old and new elites at national, international and transnational levels”.

Different from some other ‘key themes’ of international political sociology, Ute Tellmann’s chapter shows how the study of finance illustrates not only the additional benefits of adopting this novel approach, but how it is only through the development of this novel approach that a previously understudied subject has been explored, producing innovative and insightful work on the contemporary world of finance. It is through adopting “relational concepts such as assemblage or networks”, Ute Tellmann notes, that students of international political sociology have studied “the new actors and geographies of finance” that “do not hinge on the conceptual opposition between state and market, local and global, territory and circulation”. While the theme of health has been less overlooked compared to finance, scholars of international political sociology have still adopted strikingly fresh angles, thinking anew about the study of health. As emphasized by Alison Howell, international political sociology approaches to health have distinguished themselves in two related ways. One, they focused on health together with medicine and bio-sciences, thereby looking at the power/knowledge and political economy dynamics of all three in an integrative manner. Second, international political sociology approaches have reflected upon heretofore prevalent assumptions regarding health and medicine being “straightforwardly ‘good’”. In doing so, Howell underscores, scholars of international political sociology have created room for (as yet unrealized) inquiries into “global inequalities, and investigate how medical or bio-scientific initiatives undertaken in the name of global health altruism may also operate on the basis of, or even work to produce, global inequalities in their myriad forms”.

Peter Adey and Rachael Squire’s chapter on mobility assumes the twin task of tracing how “mobilities have infiltrated the interests and approaches of international political sociology”

and studying how “international political sociology travelled and moved into other places and research communities”. The authors show that in the study of mobility, students of international political sociology addressed the challenge of what John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge (1995) identified as the “territorial trap” of according ontological primacy to the study of state (for an IR discussion, see Barkawi and Laffey 1999) by studying the flow of ideas, goods and peoples across boundaries. In their chapter on mobilization, for their part, Lara Montesinos Coleman and Doerthe Rosenow highlight how the study of mobility and mobilization differ, insofar as the latter focuses on the ways in which ideas and energies of various actors are mobilized across boundaries to help constitute the agency of individual and social groups around the world. The authors consider international political sociology to have a “fertile affinity with the often turbulent and transgressive praxis of popular mobilisations”. The threefold foci of the international, the political and the sociological allows scholars of mobilization to capture dynamics in ways that cannot be done from within, say, mainstream approaches to IR. Be it the anti-apartheid campaign, the Zapatistas, Tahrir Square, Occupy Wall Street or anti-globalization activism around the globe, mobilizations cannot be studied by limiting our focus to inside state boundaries or interstate mobility. Finally, Montesinos Coleman and Rosenow make a case for mobilizing international political sociology to warn against the tendencies to read “the struggles of social movements . . . off ready-made accounts of power” or adopting “ready-made ontologies and abstract categories”. Rather they insist, in true international political sociology fashion, on “an engagement with situated practices of mobilization”.

Finally, Jocelyne Cesari’s chapter on religion and secularism as inter-related themes point to the need to study religion as a lived experience, in contrast to what is a prevalent tendency in IR and comparative politics literature, that is to seek insights from centuries-old texts in the study of contemporary phenomena. Religion cannot be studied without considering the sociological dynamics that cross boundaries, assuming interstate, trans-state and beyond-the-state forms, notes Cesari. Likewise, secularization is not a process that can be understood in any ‘national’ context or in comparative terms without considering the international as a context and a space where relations take place (Hurd 2004; Bilgin 2012). Looking at the “hard case” of democratization and conflict, Cesari underscores that religion is not external to the political and the international but constitutive of it – albeit in different ways in different places.

Methodologies of international political sociology

The chapters in this part are dedicated to diverse methodologies that can be mobilized to engage in an international political sociology. As the variety of methodologies presented show, an international political sociology is a multifaceted endeavour that has at heart to provide a pluri- or transdisciplinary research program (see Bleiker). It is important to note that what are discussed in this part are mainly methodologies. In other words, the handbook does not offer a to-do list (a method) to achieve some results, but rather invites researchers to reflect as to how best attune their *problématiques* to an empirical reality. Starting from these methodologies, it will be up to each researcher to devise their own methods as they should be attuned to the specific project’s *problématique* and resulting research question. What is at the heart of this handbook then is precisely to reflect on the multiple ways to methodologically approach how we can produce knowledge from an international political sociology perspective in the plurality of its objects, subjectivities, temporalities, spatialities, relations of power and so on. The part embraces more well-established methodological approaches in the social sciences, but also opens up to more emerging ones, such as materiality (Schouten and Mayer, de Goede), visibility (Lisle, Bleiker), ethnography (Vrasti, Daigle) or social spaces (Ellersgaard, Henriksen, Kristensen and Larsen),

that are as many methodological options researchers in international political sociology can choose from in order to engage empirically with their *problématiques*.

Yet, as Roland Bleiker reminds us, “multidisciplinarity is hard to achieve”. Using a concrete example in his own work on the role of images in world politics, Bleiker illustrates the methodological pathways, some of them ‘against’ a more disciplinary understanding of say interpretive methods, that have informed his multidisciplinary inquiry. His invitation to engage with multiple sites, multiple methodologies and methods to produce knowledge, naturally poses the question as to where to find such empirical material, to collect information and data or simply as to how to constitute one’s own archive. Luis Lobo-Guerrero and Yara van ’t Groenewout precisely put in perspective as to what is archive and warn us that an archive is more than a neutral stockpile of possible information, data and so on. Whether it is official or self-constructed, an archive always represents a specific ordering, and as such a specific politics of ordering (whether it is memorial, disciplinary and so on). As any research has to constitute an archive of some sort, Halvard Leira and Benjamin de Carvalho remind us as well that all social inquiries are “historical in the sense that it in one way or another engages with that which comes before the present moment”. Calling for a more historical sensitivity in international political sociology, Leira and de Carvalho call for an “increasing awareness of the randomness and precariousness of historical knowledge and the contingency of both history and our knowledge about it”. This more longitudinal view is an important reminder that in a sense, an international political sociology is often an history of the present.

Debbie Lisle’s chapter on visuality connects the analysis of the latter with some of the core questions of an international political sociology, namely “how power is mobilized, consolidated and dispersed in ways that entrench and sometimes subvert global asymmetries”. Pictures, images and videos are an important material for an international political sociology as “even the most intimate and domestic seeing/being seen relations are constituted in a chain of entanglements”. This “chain of entanglements” is often global in nature and possesses not only a “geopolitical significance” but also it is an important political marker of “seeing and being seen”. Lisle in effect invites us to move away from and complement the “representational register” usually mobilized to engage with visual politics, “into more embodied, entangled and mobile relations of seeing”. This concern with entanglements is also at the heart of Peer Schouten and Maximilian Mayer’s chapter on materiality as global entanglements “of social, cultural, economic and political phenomena” are often, if not always, mediated by material objects. Presenting different methodological pathways to make materiality the research focus of an international political sociology, Schouten and Mayer highlight that while a material-oriented research will never altogether supplant the focus on social relations in an international political sociology, the latter can help instil in the former politically oriented *problématiques* that have often been absent from the new materiality literature and researches.

Kevin C. Dunn and Iver B. Neumann for their part are presenting how discourse analysis fits an enquiry from an international political sociology perspective as these three dimensions of the international, the political and the sociological are “themselves defined and delineated within discourse”. As they remind us, while providing a clear overview of what to bear in mind while using discourse analysis as a methodology, the latter is especially fit to engage with the “intersections between social and political worlds” by engaging “the ways in which the international, the political and the sociological are constituted in practice”. Practice as a methodology is the central theme of Christian Bueger’s chapter. Showing how plural an empirical engagement with practice can be (e.g. mobilizing Bourdieu, Foucault, Wenger, Latour or Deleuze), Bueger provides clues to answer a central question for many researchers in international political sociology: “how can one reconstruct international practices?” To approach an international political

sociology via practices is to speak of the former's aim to escape "the straitjackets of the traditional dichotomies of social science" and to attempt engaging with audiences different from our usual "immediate group of peers".

The importance for methodologies to enable engaging with different audiences is also an important dimension discussed in the chapter on social spaces, authored by Christoph Houman Ellersgaard, Lasse Folke Henriksen, Peter Marcus Kristensen and Anton Grau Larsen. Presenting the quantitative spatial methodologies of social network analysis (SNA) and multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), they show how they can be useful for "re-imagining international political sociology through social spaces of power, alliances and positions" but also remind us that the military and surveillance agencies are not only making use of such methodologies as part of their counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism strategies but that they also are important funders behind the recent developments of such analytical tools. Rather than leaving quantitative methodologies to the side, the authors

argue that an underexploited counter-strategy is to deploy them for critical purposes in line with the aims of a more public international political sociology. This requires us to raise questions of resources for independent and critical research and to push for more symmetry on access to data for research and the public.

How to critically move beyond the usual circles of academic peers is also at the forefront of Wanda Vradi's contribution on auto/ethnographic and autobiographic methodologies. The latter are seen as more than knowledge production pathways but importantly, as "transparent, egalitarian and collaborative knowledge producing practices" to attempt at "democratizing the production and communication of knowledge", thus precisely trying to move it beyond these academic circles, inviting us to engage as well in activist ethnography and militant inquiry. These methodologies can be seen as anti-discipline, a potential trait of an international political sociology (see Leander), as "Auto/ethnography is, more or less, an act of rebellion against the power of our discipline to discipline the meaning of politics, security, community, knowledge, language, research, and, of course, professional conduct". This anti-discipline and the push to move beyond the confine of some circles or topics that define traditional social sciences, and especially the field of international relations, can be found in Megan Daigle's chapter on fieldwork. While she does not believe there is such as space "that we can visit, or enter and exit", the field still is an invitation "about *going there* and immersing ourselves, not just geographically but socially and culturally". Following "a comprehensive attitude of curiosity, sympathy, and reflexivity", what we learn methodologically from the fieldwork is that we need to "embrace the mess" that is "the field" in all its shifting, evolving, contradictory and puzzling dimensions.

Embracing the mess might enable us to understand how the concept of assemblage, presented in this volume by Rita Abrahamsen as a methodological path to capture "the inherent heterogeneity, contingency and plasticity of contemporary social life", provides an international political sociology with what might look like "paradoxical, perhaps even contradictory" methodological tools. Privileging a process-based ontology (see, in IR, Jackson and Nexon 1999; Guillaume 2007; Rajaram), assemblage as a methodology captures well what is at the heart of an international political sociology, the constant challenge to grasp "diversity [while] maintaining an ethos that is sensitive to heterogeneity". This leads us back to the idea of an international political sociology as a way to formulate *problématiques*, for a key methodological question assemblage raises, in parallel to the other methodological path that are present in this handbook, knowing when and where "to stop assembling and disassembling", especially when engaging

“with new and emerging social forms”. Abrahamsen’s assemblage as a methodology echoes the final words of Bleiker’s chapter which serve well as a coda for this part:

The hubris of thinking one can possess definitive and undisputable knowledge is far more dangerous than a clash of different perspectives. Indeed, the very combination of incompatible methods makes us constantly aware of our own contingent standpoints, so much so that we can gain the kind of scholarly humbleness required to approach the world of world politics in all of its nuances and complexities.

Transversal reflections

Reflecting on the ‘silences’ of the field of IR, Cynthia Enloe (1997: 189) once remarked that it looked “like a Superman comic strip whereas it probably should resemble a Jackson Pollock”. Two decades on, the Superman comic strip is more likely to be a theme for research for students of international political sociology than a symbol of IR’s unselfconscious search for parsimony. This is not to suggest that international political sociology has not produced its own margins and silences. Several of the contributors have already pointed to blind spots, highlighted areas for improvement and indicated future directions in the study of international political sociology.

Arguably, one such blind of international political sociology as it crystallized in this hand-book spot is the ‘international’. Writing within the specific context of security studies, Burgess noted that while important openings have been made by students of international political sociology in the study of “security practices of the international”, what has been produced “has only scratched the surface of its object”. Indeed, scholars and students of international political sociology have yet to fulfil the promise of bringing “back to the discipline a less abstract or mechanistic, and a more socially fleshed-out and historically specific, understanding of the ‘international’ in global politics”, as highlighted by Krishna. While students of international political sociology have called for paying more attention to geo-cultural differences in the making of world politics, they have not always paid attention to the ways in which what we take to be geo-cultural differences are not products of geography and history alone, but are also shaped through ‘our’ ways of approaching the international (Bilgin 2009). The point being that geo-cultural differences do not only produce different ways of approaching the international; they are themselves responding to world politics. Even so, mainstream historical accounts insist upon seeing an insurmountable discrepancy between the development trajectories of ‘Europe’ and the ‘Third World’, while IR explains this discrepancy as a product of geo-cultural differences. Hence the potential insights to be gained from refusing to take geo-cultural differences as a point of departure and treating them as products of particular historical junctures as seen through our very ways of approaching the international.

Scholars of international political sociology are particularly well positioned to inquire into these dynamics. This is likely to require them to leave their comfort zone of applying sociological approaches to the study of IR in particular geo-cultural contexts to inquire into the international as shaping those contexts. Here, it is important to acknowledge important work produced by Ole Wæver (1998) and others who followed his lead into the study of the particular geo-cultural locale of disciplines such as IR. Yet, however important these contributions have been in making sense of how IR has developed and ‘works’ in particular geo-cultural contexts, relatively little attention has been paid to the international political sociology of IR (Bilgin 2009) or of sociology (Bhambra 2007). The latter is understood as paying attention to the international as viewed by those beyond the geo-cultural contexts that ‘we’ are familiar with (Bilgin 2016).

Such reflections on the state of international political sociology is likely to push its students further, opening new avenues of research and taking critical stock of existing bodies of knowledge. Indeed, the final part of the handbook is designed to do just that. Here, we turn to three scholars who reflect on the contributions and limitations of international political sociology as an approach and its particular crystallization here.

Marieke de Goede's chapter offers an invitation to see an international political sociology as an interface between analytics that have privilege either on the macro level or the micro level. An international political sociology in effect can provide for a research strategy and ethos to move beyond this dichotomy of the larger and the smaller, which is a divisive disciplinary discussion in the field of international relations for instance. For de Goede, an international political sociology "might be sited precisely within the complex, multiple and situated interconnections between the 'big' of global politics and the 'small' of individual lives, case studies narratives and technical details". Such understanding of what an international political sociology might contribute to "entails a broad understanding of *the social* – as relational, emergent and assembled" that is largely echoed among different contributors of this handbook (see Rajaram, Guzzini). Echoing discussions on new materiality found in this handbook and focusing on the *problématique* of the lists, de Goede illustrates how this attention to the interweaving of and the navigation between the macro and the micro can help us "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". De Goede also asks an important question regarding the potential disciplinary effect of calling for an international political *sociology*. She wonders what makes it compelling to concentrate on the sociological as by concentrating on the intersections between the big and the small, she illustrates how "the disciplinary heritage of this emerging field of study is not so much sociological, but at least also anthropological, philosophical and geographical."

The relational character of international political sociology is also noted by Stefano Guzzini in his chapter. Retracing the emergence of an international political sociology in light of the transformations in the discipline of International Relations, Guzzini highlights how the former is privileging a dynamic, processual reading of the social and the political in contrast to previous approaches promoted and privileged since the inception of a discipline. The recent emergence of these new processual approaches in all their diversity calls for, according to Guzzini, a renewed effort to reflect on the social theoretical underpinnings, most notably their understanding of explanation, in order to sustain implicit and specific theorizations already present in international political sociology. Yet, theorizations that do not generalize but provide still an abstraction to acquire and deploy "the eye for the relevant borders drawn, the social rules and institutions", an eye necessary to offer to think in terms of *problématiques*, still need to see "how an ontology of process translates into a politics of process". Guzzini makes it clear however that an international political sociology is not about understanding that all is political, but rather that depending on how we ask questions about the world, we seek to identify what is political about it. Key, however, in future developments of this field would be to provide much more refined understandings of what is meant by political.

Finally, Anna Leander's chapter concentrates on the effects and dangers on the commercialization of scholarship and education we are all facing as professionals or participants in the field of higher education. For Leander, "the commercial . . . is a shorthand denoting the (complex contextually articulated) neoliberal governmental rationality of steering conducts through (quasi)markets" that affect the university but also its articulations via fields of study such as an international political sociology. Exploring the tension for an international political sociology of this specific situation, Leander not only shows how the commercial is a relevant theme for the different fields, themes and methodologies behind it but also, importantly, how this transversal

dimension can be engaged with by an international political sociology. In effect, the latter is “uncommonly well suited to address” the commercial’s omnipresence and “to explore the politics of its pervasive presence”. This ability principally resides in the “counter-disciplinary, problem oriented and methodologically open” characteristics of an international political sociology. According to Leander, these qualities enable an international political sociology to “explore the politics of the commercial without falling into the trap of an unwarranted nostalgia for an academia bygone”. She ends however on a cautionary note as while it is necessary to embrace an international political sociology’s potential “in its plurality”, it is also necessary to resist “the temptation to fence [it] off”, and police different versions of it. As with Leander, the co-editors of this volume would like to “make an argument against the temptation of disciplining” an international political sociology, that would lead it to turn “into a more conventional”, and one would say commercial, academic pursuit.

Notes

- 1 We would like to thank Heidi Bagtazo then at Routledge for initiating this handbook back in 2011, and Andrew Taylor to have picked up such project and been patient and so helpful with what has been a very interesting (in so many different ways) undertaking. Sophie Iddamalgoda has been extremely helpful in making this handbook concretely see the light of day.
- 2 Except when the choice was made by an author to do so, we have tried to avoid as much as possible capitalizing and putting acronyms to ‘disciplines’ or fields of study in order to suggest that they are venue of inquiry rather than fairly clearly bounded sets of scholarly practices and discipline (see Leander). All references in this chapter are of chapters published in this volume except when noted otherwise.
- 3 In IR, an international political sociology is often associated with the work of Didier Bigo and some of his former PhDs (for instance, among those who defended their PhDs at Sciences Po Paris: Anthony Amicelle, Monique Jo Beerli, Philippe Bonditti, Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet, Julien Jeandesboz, Médéric Martin-Mazé, Christian Olsen, Francesco Ragazzi or Amandine Scherrer), young researchers close to him (for instance Tuğba Basaran or Stephan Davidshofer), and to central figures in the fields of International Relations and beyond, to name but a few, such as John Agnew, Mathias Albert, Claudia Aradau, J. Peter Burgess, Mitchel Dean, Elspeth Guild, Martin Heisler, Barry Hindess, Jef Huysmans, Vivienne Jabri, Yosef Lapid, Anna Leander, Debbie Lisle, David Lyon, Peter Nyers, Mark B. Salter, Ole Wæver and R.B.J. Walker (many of whom are present in a volume dedicated to this understanding of an international political sociology; see Basaran et al. 2017).
- 4 A Chapter on political geography was commissioned for this handbook, but unfortunately we had to face some unforeseen circumstances regarding it. Readers interested in the connections between an international political sociology and political geography are invited to read a recent chapter by John Agnew (2017). Other potential fields of study, such a criminology or anthropology for instance, could also be important to engage with in terms of situating what international political sociology stands for pluri- and trans-disciplinarily.
- 5 It is difficult to define the idea of *problématique*, but it is important to stress that a *problématique* is not a specific research question, but rather a form of questioning which results from a puzzlement about the world, a wondering, to paraphrase Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 1.982b), about how things are the way they are (or appear to be). A *problématique* has thus more to do about the way in which we ask questions, rather than the way in which we answer them. “A successful research . . . is not linked to its ‘result’, fallacious idea, but to the reflexive nature of its enunciation” (Barthes 1972: 2; see as well Meyer 1986). The *problématique*, say the postcolonial circulation of the modern idea of the state, is thus a wonderment which can be tackled via multiple ‘disciplinary’ engagements and specific research questions, while offering a platform for pluri- and inter-disciplinary intersections.

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