

## Offering the Ethnographic Feminist Method To The Public Administration Inquiry

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**Abstract.** This article aims to offer feminist ethnographic methods for Public Administration inquiries. Fifteen years doing research in feminist ethnographic methods show some crucial issues connected to the atmosphere of public administration. Feminist ethnography gives a different nuance; it enriches the view of equality, justice, and prosperity. In a mining conflict, for an example, a feminist ethnography opens up poor public services. Some policies to cope with conflict effects have been impoverished indigenous citizens. The vulnerable groups do not benefit from conflict resolution promoted by the government. The findings show that the feminist ethnography clearly expands the PA's space. As an offered method and a “new” paradigm in PA, this method refines the policy setting agenda, and speeds up public services. The method documents crucial issues from the silent voices. It is identifying some residents' loss of their public rights.

**Keywords:** Feminist ethnography; Natural resource conflict; Public administration method

### Introduction

#### A Tracing of Public Administration Method Notes

This article is prepared based on several studies applying feminist ethnographic methods. Most of the study show very encouraging results. The results are not only answering socio-cultural phenomena, they find “new” issues and problem in community. The new knowledge are probably coming up from field-talk, participatory observation, live-in, and thematic discussions.

An initiative of this article is to offer feminist ethnography methods in the PA inquiry. It offers for the expand of the diversity of PA studies. Accordingly, it accommodates the growing multidisciplinary trends of PA researches. Feminist ethnographic methods will contribute to the future of policy processes and products, as well as a better management of public institution towards more justice, and take account of voices of marginalized and vulnerable citizens.

Before reviewing feminist ethnography, this article looks back briefly, to some of the discourses of PA (Perry and Kraemer, 1986; Foley, Orosz, McKenna and Reding, 1997; Groeneveld et.al, 2015; Ospina and Dodge, 2005; Bowling, 2005, Luton, 2011; Heldelberg, 2011). Some articles less talked about ethnography and narrative methods as alternative methods in PA future studies.

### Literature Reviews

Quantitative and qualitative methods are almost equally used in PA research. Compared with other disciplines, development of PA research methods is very slow (Groeneveld, 2015). The situation disadvantages PA discipline. When we are cruising

on the internet, there are some potential methods suit to PS studies. Those methods fill in the gaps in developing the PA theories and methods.

A journal article written by Groeneveld et al (2015) mentions that most of articles from four popular journals in the PA Society during 10 years (2001 - 2010) draw PA academic progress. Journal of PA Research and Theory (JPART), PA Review, Governance, and PA. The four journals are considered as a reference of PA discipline progress.

Study shows that qualitative studies are still more widely used than quantitative studies, 56 percent compared with 44 percent. Among the quantitative methods, survey is most widely used, and mixed research is the least used method. Concerning PA issues, there is uneven distribution of topics, in which public management, policy and politics are predominantly.

An important milestone on qualitative research is the work of Ospina and Dodge (2005). Their article in the Journal Public Administration Review has strong arguments. The title of the paper is "It's About Time: Catching Methods up to the meaning - the Usefulness of Narrative Inquiry in Public Administration Research". In the article, areas of intended literature review are social-humanities studies, anthropology, and women's and feminist studies. Ospina and Dodge's writings on narrative studies in PA prove that it is inspiring. It gives a powerful energy to convince the importance of narrative study in PA. It also promotes a feminist ethnography in Indonesian PA studies.

Ospina and Dodge (2005) believe that narrative studies contribute to the quality of PA research. They are giving depth explanation on PA emerging issues; together with the influence of explanatory research on the development of PA studies. More specific, Ospina and Dodge describe that the uniqueness of their narrative inquiry. An issue of leadership on social change in the United States is one of the important findings. The narrative study finds out that phenomena of leadership at national, multimodel, and multi-year levels came up from narrative notes. It is able to formulate personal identity, life-course development, and cultural dimension of narrative life history. Their study can be used to bridge the interests of researchers and PA practitioners.

Ospina and Dodge believe that (2005), a narrative is a base of knowledge. This study has been used for decades by social scientists and other applied disciplines. When compared with surveys, methods, statistical data collection, and interviews, a narrative study gives sufficient data in explaining the life story of the resource persons. Narratives produce stories with more characters, plots, and development towards resolution. It promises new and more comprehensive knowledge.

By reviewing Ospina and Dodge writing, we are aware of the strength of the narrative method. It gives not only rich in outcomes, but it also shows the emergence of much-needed and understandable logic. Other disciplines have adopted narrative methods. Mostly, in order to overcome the limitations of deductive methods in social sciences, the choice toward narrative methods for PA studies will strengthen the PA field. The narrative links between actors, institutions, policies and politics – it aids a puzzle arrangement and produced a more comprehensive PA sketch, including ideology, discourse, belief, and so on. In short, a narrative study is identical to social reconstruction from an informant's perspective. It is equivalent to learning from social actors' learning, and in line with the identification and interpretation of existing stories.

Ospina and Dodge study is useful to explain leadership issues, particularly the context of political leaders and managers in formal, both profit and non-profit public

institutions. Narrative study gets insight from various leadership positions. By using an appropriate lense, in the sense of focus and stance, a narrative study provides the sophistication of PA studies, to link between theory and practice, as well as scientists and practitioners.

There is another influential book in qualitative methodology written Larry Luton entitled *Qualitative Research Approaches for Public Administration* (2011). In his book Luton states that the PA discipline is in the transition from quantitative studies to qualitative inquiries. He writes that the quantitative research culture has brought the PA into a dichotomy situation between the poles of fact and value. In his criticism, Luton calls this fact has a less plausible construction.

Through the book, he mentions that there are four main techniques can be adopted in qualitative research for PA, namely interviewing, narrative research, ethnographic research, and case study research. In addition, he also gave a message to PA scientists to conduct more serious qualitative studies.

Luton's book was reviewed by Heidelberg (2011). In his review Heidelberg states that Luton's book is a good book for introducing qualitative techniques. His expectation on some of the basic arguments on dispute between quantitative – qualitative characters are met in this book. Furthermore, Heidelberg suggests that this book should be expanded, so that practitioners can apply it to their practical work. By expanding the arguments, the book is going to be a good resource for understanding interconnecting PA system.

As an of ethnography book, HeideIderg argues that Luton's book forgets to put hermeneutic way of thinkings. By using hermeneutic arguments, the book will avoid misunderstanding, and will result in an favorable assessment of a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach can be understood as a clear and rich instrument.

Heidelberg expects that the book is able to convince audiences about the qualitative approach that useful to PA, as it (1) is effective in generating deeper knowledge; (2) is more challenging, both in data collection and on analysis. Analysis in Luton's book is not well explained. For Luton, the explanation of how to conduct qualitative research is more important than elaborating the two crucial points. The explanation of time flow in qualitative research, for example, is much more detailed than the researcher's challenge in preparing fieldwork reporting.

According to Heidelberg, Luton's book emphasizes on the clarity of personal connections, biases, and opinions that accuse to qualitative methods. Qualitative research is used to distinguish to quantitative; for Heidelberg – it is a matter of judgment; and he thinks that Luton should talk more about how PA to stay away from the debate on the judgment.

Some articles are discussing crisis on PA methods. Groeneveld et.al (2015) states that the discipline of Public Administration has a multidisciplinary and plural character. It means that both theoretically and the themes of the studies are multidiscipline. PA methods show a similar trend, including philosophical position and method development. Unfortunately, the openness of PA field is less in line with the progress of research methods. Groeneveld mentions that "...PA research is methodologically underdeveloped, particularly in comparative to other disciplines". Perry (in Groeneveld et al, 2015) states a similar argument on that point. He advises PA scholars to adopt various approaches on PA researches.

The method crisis in PA studies is found out by Perry and Kraemer (1986), Luton (2011), Heidelberg (2011), Ospina and Dodge (2005). Groeneveld called the crisis as "underdeveloped". In the language of Ospina and Dodge, it refers to a paradigm shift. Luton (2011) and HeideIdberg (2011) call it as a transition in

methodology. While other scholars such as Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Jouchelovitch and Bayer (2000), Claudinin and Conelly (2000) believe that qualitative studies reflect to PA future methods.

There are two journal articles located in left and right pendulum of qualitative and quantitative methods. Orosz, McKenna and Reding (1997) offer a "Beyond Non-Qualitative" investigation, which is interpretive, non-positivistic, and post-modern. According to them, the rainbow of qualitative method is quite extensive. For example, there are case studies, action research, interpretive, life history, post-narrative analysis, non positivistic. On the other side, Bowling (2005) assured that survey methods actually have wide variations. Her offer of creativity running surveys overcomes the limitations of quantitative methods. Some limitations lie on methods of contacting respondents, media for submission of questionnaires, and compilation of questions related to data quality. The choices of questionnaire are to systemize or non-systemize respondents' option. Even though Bowling has promised that there are potential documented phenomena remain bias.

In line with PA crisis, it is needed to address a search for future PA. It is also necessary to response about the crisis, stagnation, and problems in PA methodology. In this article, it is offered an alternative method to expand and enrich PA studies.

In Indonesian context, an initiative to promote feminist methods for PA is also not new. For example there is a book written by Muhadjir M. Darwin (2005) titled *State and Women, Reorientation of Public Policy*. The book explains broadly and candidly about gender mainstreaming in reorientation program of the PA. Then, there are two volumes of *Jurnal Perempuan* (the Journal of Women), a popular feminist journal in Indonesia, seriously exposing a series of articles on Women and Public Policy (No. 92, February 2017), and a more specifically issue on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (HKSR) and Development Policy (No. 93, May, 2017). Most of the journal articles discuss about women's critical issued on public services and policy politics.

In particular, feminist studies using ethnographic approach. Ethnography is able to disassemble and recast the experience of women's deterioration life into scientific knowledge (Stacey, 1988). Feminist ethnography allows researchers to gain social and cultural significance deeper to their socio-cultural roots. This is a kind of new knowledge. It develops from the point of view of vulnerable women, and aid in a systematic form of thinking.

To explain the benefits of feminist ethnography for PA, let's look at one example of research in conflict mining communities. The name of village in conflict is was Praikaroku Jangga, Sumba Tengah Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. Analysis of feminist ethnography reflects the course of women positionality in mining issue. It draws a proposition of citizens – corporation nexus. It opens some hidden phenomena such as reflexivity, particularly in the multi-vocal, inter-subjective and postcolonial context of the storytelling, secrets and narratives of women's experiences (Stacey 1988, Nencel, 2014).

In this study focuses about on local women's struggle to oppose gold mining corporation.<sup>1</sup> Most important point of feminist ethnography is about the mandate; it should change the subject's life. In this case, female citizens in extractive mining areas are subjects to be better of. In different contexts, Stacey (1988), Nencel (2014),

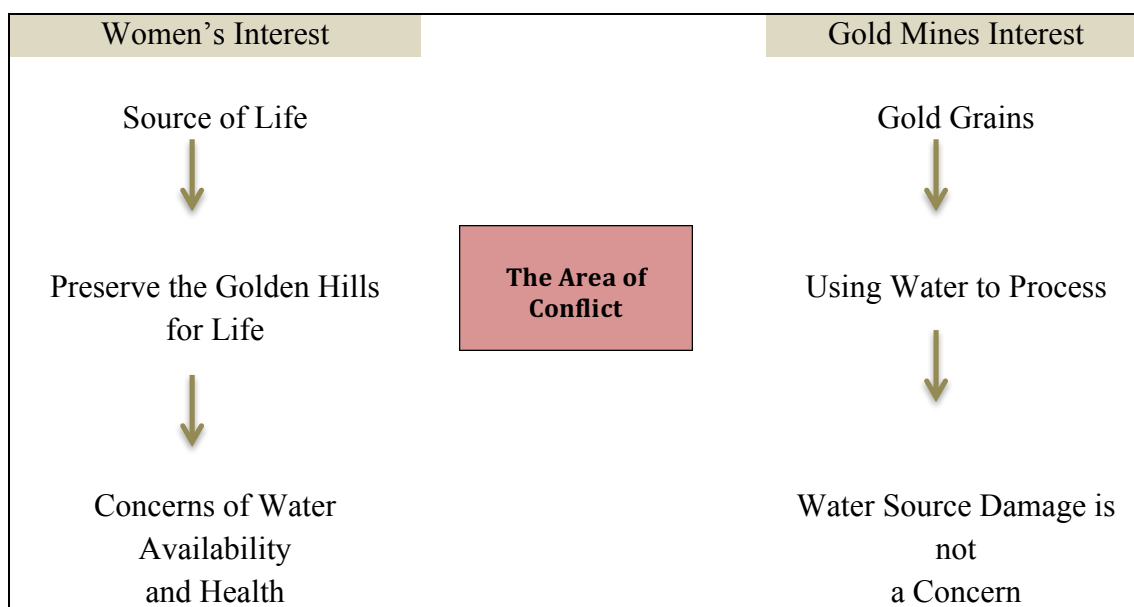
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<sup>1</sup> A gold mining conflict is one of the feminist ethnography that has been done by the author since 2016. The other study issues applying feminist ethnography were research in Indonesian Domestic Worker in the UAE, and women' movement against iron sand mining in Penago Baru Village, Seluma Regency, Bengkulu Province.

Cornwall and Sardenberg (2014), Kartika (2013), Burgess-Proctor (2015), called the feminist ethnography as an epistemological discussion of the involvement and empathy of researchers. It is about supplies to strengthen subjects whose face severely degraded environment. That is the power of feminist ethnography. Feminist ethnography is to sketch a clear drawing of social clashes, between global extractive corporation and local communities.

The experiences of women's involvement in mining conflicts are empirical. Qualitative data is a core data to be analyzed (Reinharz, 1992). Data can take the form of storytelling (McNamara, 2009); and self-strengthening narrative (Gilat, 2015). Like McNamara notes, data on stories and secrets in life are memories of conflict. She believes that feminist ethnography becomes "... *the perfect window through which to access women's wisdom and experience* ...". Accordingly, McNamara also affirms that patriarchy remains the shadow of almost all qualitative research methods, including gender-sensitive research.

Figure 1: Conflicts of Interest between Gold Mining Corporations and Praikaroku Women



Source: Extracted from Fieldnotes 2016-2017

Bottom line of feminist ethnography consists of reflection and participatory methods. It runs without hierarchy, taken from women's thoughts and experiences as subjects (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Burgess-Proctor, 2015). In fieldwork, the narratives of women who were involved in physical clashes, conflict, police investigations, seeking lawyers for detained husbands, financing the trial process and advocacy, taking over all of the responsibilities of domestic affairs are crucial narratives of ethnography feminist. Through participatory method and storytelling, all of the experiences can be adequate sources for feminist analysis.

The space of ethnography is quite wide, even becomes an area of contest and academic debate of multiple scientific disciplines. Ethnography is identic with the production of knowledge, in which the knowledge construction admits to emotional content, but it is still admitted as a scientific thing in humanity studies (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2005; Atkinson, 2010). Denzin and Lincoln (2010) admit that there is a



chaos, a condition that is confusing, a social crisis, personal critic and resolution, a change of values and technology is possible during ethnography. It is a part of formation of knowledge.

Feminist ethnography fills in the perfection of social phenomena through the women's life as subjects. It does not just dreams and hopes, but also fear, stress, fatigue, and other experiences. In research method, there is a merger experiences between of researchers and source persons. During fieldwork, observation upon complex relations of conflict interest of various activities are stitched into a comprehensive scene of protest. It becomes a scene of structural movement, where a position of space, status, and power accumulated into a new knowledge.

So, ethnography gives researchers a plenty opportunity to obtain a comprehensive description of the deterioration of life. Conflict in community level affected more obvious to women's groups. Ethnographic methods help to clarify the different experiences amongst citizens. Feminist ethnography, then, provides a deep contention of the transcendent meaning of the source who has the experience of life's deterioration.

Feminist ethnography methods ease to catch vulnerability. The vulnerability is essentially to show gender inequality. In feminist ethnography, all narratives voiced by female informants are not just ordinary information; the narrative is the narrative of struggle, the narrative of the demand for recognition, and the narrative of advocacy to the state. The answer to the "why" question, for women affected by mining conflict is a struggle to convey conflict experience in the context of everyday life. Descriptions of their answers are forgotten stories, stored stories, hidden from public knowledge, and knew as "... are not considered important" included in PA. At this point, an "ordinary" ethnography, does not meet the expectations and interests of local women groups who are fighting for the living space. Fortunately, feminist ethnographic methods fill in the data gaps and discourses for the field of PA.

Reference cruising on feminist studies in Indonesia reveals that references in PA studies is limited, especially on mining policy. Experiences in doing feminist ethnographic show that narrative data preserve experience, knowledge, meaning, functional relationships between nature and community, sexuality and environmental sustainability, women's leadership in public safety alternatives. Studies on multi dimensional conflicts can be used as an example of advantage feminist ethnography for PA.

In a conflict village called Praikaroku Jangga, Uumbu Ratungga District, Central Sumba Regency, we can learn some good notes of feminist ethnography. Fieldwork is conducted two years, between 2016 - 2017, and currently is ongoing. Fieldwork in Praikaroku Jangga is like a reflection of the ordinary citizens' loss under the power of global corporation, as well as state policies. It means that ethnography is a future method in PA studies.

Inequality is a key issue in the Praikaroku. Spatial asset has become one of the obvious indicators. Space provides different access between women and men in accessing public opportunities. Education is one of the unequal public space. The broader impact encompass public safety and health, as well as other risks of life.

Fieldwork notes several important phenomena, which relate to the PA study. *First*, there is a serious imbalance in public services in the village. In Praikarouku a phenomenon of humanity is not as dramatic as the Asmat case in Papua, but the emergency situation in Praikaroku is also a long history of negligence. Limitation access on education has been an old issue. It is not a new problem; the inequality

access to education is in fact related to other phenomena, namely road infrastructure, and the absence of public transport for Praikaroku inhabitants.

*Secondly*, the population does not enjoy the transportation system at all. As a consequence, insufficient road services cause potentially death. For example, when there was a pregnant mum who was giving birth. She needed a help, and she had to travel to nearest Village Clinic (*Puskesmas Pembantu*); there was no vehicle available to bring her. Instead, people carried the mother in a stretcher to the Clinic. For PA, the question arising is how can PA practice health services ?

*Third*, the provision of electricity has been obviously bad. Praikaroku located in the foothills of Paletti Alira, the gold hills, coveted by many businesses, which policy-makers "have been relinquished" to at local-national-foreign corporations. But it has never felt state electricity provision. Traditional houses, richest ones, are only illuminated by solar cells, with a three-point bulb per pax, each glowing five watts. Once again, what is the public service for electrical energy ?. The ethnographic study records all of those important facts, unfair public services, and the state negligence. The local residents just want to preserve their environment.

The *fourth*, an issue to be exposed is social structure and identity. Social structure and identity retain the Merapu tradition<sup>2</sup>. It is a customary in which people are still living in a caste-like social class. Through such a path of life, the *ata* class (the lowest class) have worse access to public services. There is almost impossible changes. as majority of decision-makers come from the Maramba class (high social class). The limitation of developmental resources, of course, affects how the distribution of assets is unfair divided. This includes one of the questions of PA new development strategies and practices.

*The fifth*, is about water ad women's identity. For Sumba women, water is their identity. Studies from various mining locations, in Africa, Asia and in Indonesia<sup>3</sup> as well, notes that women do not live apart from water. Women are agents in water management. Women become "experts" in managing water, because their bodies are friends with water.

The struggle of Sumbanese women, like women in other places, is the struggle for seizing, sustaining life, taking care of the living spaces; and women's lives are water. So their struggle is the struggle to protect spring water. Among the five connected nodes, women and water became the core. Although in the life of many women experience a variety of oppression, but the damage to the springs is a top priority to fight for.

Compared with other studies, Koolwal et al (2010) in the Stanford Gendered Innovation Report states that their multinational studies on women and water point out that the expansion of rural water infrastructure improves the educational level of children, both women and men. The greatest impact is the improvement of educational levels to women's groups, because they are responsible for the work of households carrying water.

## Conclusion

Qualitative research methods are being recognized and taken into account as an important method in PA studies. Ethnography, in particular, comes to the field of PA in recent years. Results of ethnographic studies in the field of PA have made an

<sup>2</sup> Merapu is the local religion of Sumba, it is the culture and practice of daily living as well as.

<sup>3</sup> For examples: Kulon Progo – Yogyakarta; Wongsorejo – Banyuwangi, East Java; Penago Baru - Seluma, Bengkulu; Praikaroku Jangga - Central Sumba, East Nusa Tenggara.

invaluable contribution. Because the micro study helps to understand the diversity of problems developing in society.

Feminist ethnographic studies offer results being able to (1) describe the reality of life of an unequal society, (2) skip typical women and children issues from the agenda setting, and (3) leave the vulnerable groups to the periphery. These notes are things needed in the development of PA methods

Feminist ethnographic studies have began entering to PA studies. While this method is very interesting and needed to improve public policies, to improve the justice of public services, and to fulfill access justice for citizens – it is not easy to bring feminist ethnographic methods to the mainstream method of PA.

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