The Prince of Monaco Gave Me a Present: An Ethnographic Examination of the Governance and Social World of the International Olympic Committee

This dissertation examines the interplay between governance, social world, and habitus within the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to understand how decisions are shaped and made. In doing so, it uses the IOC as a privileged site to complicate the idea of rational-legal authority as a mode of governance in contemporary private nongovernmental organizations in the Global North. In the IOC there is an increasing emphasis on the tenets on good governance and transparency, the rule of law, and the idea that the organization operates with all of these practices and principles front of mind. This dissertation asks how decisions are really made in the IOC, and how does culture, diverse backgrounds, and disparate access to capital frame power and internal politics within the organization?

This dissertation examines an elite, global, private organization at a time of dynamic contestation. It examines how an organization structured around logics of history, cultural capital, and comportment in its membership negotiates calls for good governance and a new embrace of rational-legal oversight. This dissertation argues for the importance of attending to logics in the ‘personalistic economy' and in doing so, attests to the ways in which ethnography, through its observational sensitivities and keen eye, can reveal how power actually operates in non-obvious but significant ways.

This dissertation demonstrates what an animating force culture and the social world is vis-à-vis governance, even in the most cosmopolitan, modern, Western organizations. It contributes, then, to the growing field of the anthropology of global institutions by highlighting the importance of attending carefully to social worlds in understanding how impactful decisions are made.