SECTION III: CASE STUDIES

PREFACE

Extended-Case Studies—Place, Time, Reflection

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Extended-case studies originated and flourished in multiple sites in Central Africa as British colonialism waned. The extended-case study method was created and shaped in response to complex social situations that emerged from and through ongoing and at times profound changes in the ways in which social and moral orders were put together. The extended case and situational analysis have from their very beginnings been cognate with complexity in social ordering, with the non-linearity of open-ended social fields, and with recursivity among levels of social ordering. Manchester methods originated as a result of profound shifts in the practice of anthropology and contributed to turning these changes into the practicing of ethnographic praxis. Yet over time, the explicit valuing and evaluating of Manchester perspectives disappeared from view. Witness the inane, reductionist comment by George Marcus (1995: 110) (a member of the American lit-crit hit mob of the 1980s), limiting “the extended-case method” (with no mention of Manchester) to “small-scale societies,” where it has been “an established technique ... in the anthropology of law” (with no mention of Gluckman).

The scholars who have contributed to this section do not adopt the extended case uncritically or with the utmost of confidence that the method is equal to the task of practicing the ethnography of complex social situations. Three of the articles are themselves meta-commentaries on the use of the extended case, bringing forth doubt—at times radical—and reflection on whether and how the method can be used fruitfully. It is worth noting that this shift in perceiving the extended case reflexively began with Victor Turner’s rhetorically pregnant formulation of the social drama (Turner 1957), which he later took in two directions—that of the social drama made historical (Turner 1974) and literary (Turner 1971), and that of performance embedded within and activating the very matrices of the practice of social drama (Turner 1984). Through the social drama as a medium of performing dynamics of process, Turner implicitly emphasized the reflexive turn that the extended case could take.

Karin Norman (who studies European social orders; see Norman 1991) discusses two cases of Kosovar refugees in Sweden. The first takes shape within shifting spatial and temporal fields, as a family of refugees make its way through myriad uncertainties in the day-to-day lives of its members, no less in the face of governmental policies of classification that, as Norman writes, “create and maintain refugees and refugeehood as a separate social category and experience.” So, too, Norman’s own experiences with family members are pervaded by uncertainty, much of which gains clarity, at times partial at best, only in retrospect. The second case is positioned within a social psychiatric facility for refugees, where personnel diagnose and treat the mental dispositions of refugees in order to prevent their suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder further along in their immigrant experience. Given the linear determinism built into this bureaucratized set-up and its mission to uncover illness, the facility and its operation are pervaded by certainty. Refugees referred there for diagnosis unsurprisingly are found to be in need of treatment, so that, one may say, the existence of the facility is justified and the work of preventing the fuller emergence of mental disorders continues.

The contrasts between the cases lead Norman to question, reflexively and epistemologically, what it is that constitutes a case. She asks this through the ways in which she herself is constituting her field research and her positioning within it. She reflects on the first case as more of an extended case, one that in her terms demonstrates dynamics through its practices. The second case approximates more an apt illustration, instantiating the predictability that issues from the practice of commonsensical medical premises in a bureaucratic organization. Nonetheless, we note that the apt illustration also shows the strategic value of place as a research venue, generating certain kinds of (bureaucratic, medical) cases that an extended case in broader social venues might well not pick up with such pithy clarity.

The three studies that follow return to African locales in or near the heartlands of the Manchester approach. C. Bawa Yamba continues an extended case of witchfinding in Zambia that he has documented elsewhere (Yamba 1997). In terms somewhat analogous to those of Norman’s cases, his demonstrates the unintended consequences of a Swedish project for HIV/AIDS prevention that intended to promote ‘capacity building’—the persuading of local people to take responsibility for the AIDS epidemic. Contrarily, the project brought about the invitation to a witchfinder to help battle AIDS, leading to the deaths in poison ordeals of 16 people. The witchfinder was sent to prison; local life conditions worsened in manifold ways; the fears of witchcraft returned and grew; and calls for the return of the witchfinder were renewed. Yamba demonstrates what an extended-case approach can do so well by following the ongoing emergence of local practice in its changing contexts, pervaded by uncertainty and unpredictability, together with the abductive responses of the anthropologist.

Yamba expresses radical doubt in the extended-case method, suggesting that anthropologists do such work as a matter of course in their field research (see

Yamba 1995). In other words, extended case-ness simply goes together with intensive fieldwork through time. One difference, nonetheless, lies in knowing anthropologically, in the epistemological sense, and hence demonstrating knowledge, thereby practicing this knowledge into anthropological existence without its slipping into an aptness of illustration. Intriguingly, Yamba recalls the advice of Clyde Mitchell to analyze data until its potentials for extrapolation and interpretation are exhausted. This would mean returning to the same materials (with additions and emendations) and playing with these materials as ideas occur (on play and playfulness, see Lindquist and Handelman 2001). This indeed is how the reanalysis of ethnography should be done. Moreover, this could well mean publishing more or less the same materials in different analytical versions without any definitive finality. Yet the highlighting of such ongoing uncertainty is hardly acceptable in academia, unless camouflaged as startling discovery. In the academic culture of counting publications, each piece is ideally an independent creation that must be accountable as distinct and separate in order to (again) count toward accruing the material rewards of academia.

The late Björn Lindgren uses the crisis engendered by the appointment of a female chief to succeed her father in southern Zimbabwe to discuss how an extended case can inform us about the politics of ethnicity and its conflicts. He uses his formation of the case to demonstrate a cross-section of social and cultural dynamics through which the protagonists negotiated and practiced their values and interests. Thus, the protagonists in the crisis invoked histories and nationalisms, manipulated ethnic affiliations, and questioned gender hierarchies to ground and substantiate their different claims. Through these optics, Lindgren critiques Fredrik Barth's constructivist understanding of ethnicity. Ethnicity, argues Lindgren, is not a basic identity; instead, its form and substance must be related to other social phenomena and to historical changes that contextualize ethnic identification. He argues further that this approach, no less social than that of Barth, does not obviate culture, which he refers to as the ideas, experiences, and feelings that infuse persons through their existential practices.

Sally Falk Moore first went to Tanzania in the 1960s to study the impact of imposed, intentional, planned change—African socialism—in a broad social field. In her discussion here, she sets out to analyze, through a small-scale event, an aspect of that impact and also to address the nature of the extended-case study. Her efforts seem to us to pivot on the analytical problems presented by the persistent (and pestiferous) dichotomies of structure and process, and subjectivity and objectivity. Acknowledging throughout the radically innovative character of Gluckman's contribution, she nonetheless argues, in line with the current anthropological turn to reflexivity, for greater emphasis on the need to attend to the constructional role of the ethnographer in case studies and also on, given the increasing shrinkage of global political and economic distance, the importance of extending cases in space as well as time. In doing so, she draws a distinction between 'case' and 'event', regarding events as "moving sub-segments of process", and uses 'process' to refer to a variety of social arrangements that do and do not change through time.

Because she sees her case study as focusing on seemingly unconnected rather than connected events (a picture and distinction that fall in logically with her emphasis on the ethnographer's share in the constituting of a case), she does not regard it as an extended case in the proper sense. Focused intricately on an instance of conflict between an aged German inn-keeper and some local African (Chagga) officials, Moore's case study highlights a particular place, the Kibo Hotel on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. In this respect, she makes place into the locus of the occurrence of events, thus providing an ethnographic strategy for constructing case from place considered through time as well as space. In effect, a social history of place is formed through the events that occur in and around this locus, itself a changing, layered, and shifting field, such that, in her terms, events become the 'diagnostics' of process.

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