

cause even the weakest of states to mobilize. Other examples show how globalization can force a patronage or clientist inclined government to permit autonomy for a public enterprise. The case of the Salt Tax Agency in Republican China (between the last Qing Emperor and Mao) presents a means by which foreign lenders can force universal application of regulations and meritocratic employment practices in places where tax avoidance and jobs for friends and family are the norm. In this case we see how foreign rules (which are usually villains in development stories) can be positive forces for change in developing countries.

The requirement for trans-governmental cooperation is a common theme but not in every case. This is the core of PoEs; they have similarities but are not the same. Each national system is different; the levels of political interference, patronage, cronyism and foreign involvement also vary. The picture given is that it is possible to be effective in the face of hostility.

The work draws on theories of effectiveness in liberal democracies. One premise is that cultural colonialism via imposition of the dominant western form of government is not sustainable (even with the fall of the soviet form as opposition). So, the question is “Can a government organization in a non-western country be effective using a westernized definition of effective?”.

The book is worth reading just for inciting the need for thought around this idea. Beyond that the description of the development and details of the method will be useful to anyone considering case-based research.

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Contributions from European Symbolic Interactionalists: Reflections on Methods, Studies in Symbolic Interaction

Edited by Muller Thaddeus

Emerald

Vol. 44

2015

Keywords European, Symbolic interactionism, Fieldwork, Thick description

Review DOI 10.1108/QROM-02-2016-1368

This book is surprising in many ways. First, it is much more readable than expected; most of the chapters flowed well and were the academic equivalent of a page turner. As expected, the book is a series of articles derived from conference presentations. The result is somewhat uneven writing and (perhaps because the authors are not first language English) some problematic grammar.

However, the most surprising aspect of the book is the apparent danger of symbolic interactionist research. Not as a subversive method but in the locales and subject matter selected by the researchers. The first four chapters take us to Moroccan bars, collections of qat chewing “street corner boys” in the Netherlands, Palestine near the fence, intervening in domestic disputes with Belgian police officers, and interviewing starving Xhosa children in child-led families of South Africa. Seems more like it could be research for a thriller style novel than the dissertations those women were working towards. These first four chapters are highly readable, interesting and engaging stories.

The excitement of the milieu makes it much easier to forgive some of the weaknesses and what emerges is a useful description of qualitative fieldwork. This book could be helpful to a researcher intending to embark on qualitative fieldwork. The authors have done a wonderful job of describing their inner conflicts as they attempt to do objective research on situations, which cry out for intervention. The line between observation and action-research gets blurred and crossed as the practical realities of starvation, violence and self-preservation from sexual harassment intervene and change the behaviours of the researcher.

Turning the page from the fourth chapter to the fifth brings the reader into a different world. The first four chapters discuss the challenges of doing field research. The fifth is a discussion of thick description aided by an examination of a Balinese temple festival. This examination is contrasted with Geertz's work on his Balinese cockfight experience. The piece is unsatisfying in that the author repeatedly informs of the weaknesses in his ethnography and criticizes Geertz's work for not being thick enough. At the end one might well conclude that current publishing limitations (pages permitted) make it impossible to properly do thick description. However, the author takes 37 pages to do so.

Onward to Chapter 6, which focusses on a discussion of obesity and the movement to convert this problem from deviant behaviour to disease. While not descriptive of a method or methodology, this chapter is a good example of the use of secondary sources to describe discourse and propose a change in discourse over time. Unfortunately, the author (and the editors) seems to be unaware of sarcasm in social media. Fairly early on in the chapter a quote ascribed to a woman from Oklahoma City is set up, and transitioned from, as if it were legitimate. The important idea the quote establishes is that people explain their obesity as a disease that they contract and spread (like influenza). Unfortunately, the source is "The Onion", a well-known American spoof news website, which creates ridiculous fake news stories as humour. The inclusion of this quote is quite damaging to the piece.

The seventh chapter comes from the volume's editor and is a more traditional description of a study using symbolic interactionism. The thick description employed in the piece interrogates the concepts of rule maker and rule enforcer within a context of moral entrepreneurship. The empirical material is still edgy but likely less dangerous as he has interviewed police officers and some managers in relation to Dutch coffee shops, which sell cannabis. The rule makers seem to be on a moral charge to recriminalize the practice and make the coffee shops operate under ever stricter regulations. The police play the role of rule enforcers and the shop owners are described primarily as businesspeople, trying to earn an honest living. What is most interesting in the piece is the findings from the interviews with the police officers who seem to respect the hard work of the shop owners and their efforts to operate within the laws. Methodologically, the author describes his approach to reluctant informants as well as observational research used to triangulate the interviews.

The final chapter of the book returns us to a less civilized field of work than the mundane world of legal cannabis as the author describes participant-observer research in the mid-2000s punk rock scene. The work is fleshed out with a large number of interviews and a rich narrative of slam-dancing as identity work. This piece is an interesting examination of the idea of postmodernism (or post-post) through the reconstructed music form. The author provides once again insight into the challenges of data collection in a real world populated by youth striving to find themselves.

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This last chapter brings the story full circle as we return to the focus on youth, and disaffected persons claiming ownership of their bodies and identities.

The shock of the first few chapters was worn down by the middle piece on thick description of Balinese ritual and debased by the unfortunate unfamiliarity with The Onion, but all in all this work is worth reading. Particularly for those who have not embarked upon fieldwork; even those in the quantitative dogmas. Research in the real world is much more challenging than it is when described to the ethics committee and new researchers will be better prepared through reading this book whether they plan to explore social interactionism or not.

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