

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

After my first field work as a graduate student in Zambia (1973–1975), and after years of publishing and university teaching in a department of men who played a hard game of resisting my presence, I published a book in 1982 that made this research process visible. Although North America was still living an ethos “of let it all hang out,” my work meant breaking a taboo. It meant paying the price and walking a long way toward a new turn. It also meant revisiting that experience, as I am doing here, to liberate it of an ideologically informed anger that distorted it. The actual research process, however, with its unforeseen events and short-comings, but also with its insights about people generally, remains available for contemplation.

The first edition of this book appeared under the pseudonym of Manda Cesara (1982). Although I had read Sartre before I went to the field, it was not until I anticipated writing the book that I took a refresher course in the philosophy of existentialism. My attraction for his thought was natural. Like myself, Sartre’s existentialism is a product of WWII. His thoughts helped me hobble up and down the mountains of my mental and emotional existence in the field. What German poetry had done for me as a war-child (*Kriegskind*), Sartre’s philosophy did for me as apprentice ethnographer. It gave me courage to act alone, cling to nothing, be “condemned to be free” and utterly responsible for what I could make out of what made me (Gill and Shermann, 1973, p.485–486).

War-childhood constitutes a bias. War-children were uprooted, separated periodically or permanently from parents, and handed from person to person to whoever could feed them. From an early age, I knew that I was a burden: a burden to society as a refugee and a burden to my caretakers. Although my mother was often in a different Zone of Occupied Germany, she was the one thread, especially after the separations from aunts, siblings and, most importantly, my maternal grandmother, that provided continuity.

But that “thread” was more a journey of resilience than hugs and kisses. It burned resilience into my flesh.

Since my pre-teens I grew up with one question. What in the name of heaven did adults do to make us, their children, grow up in rubble, camps, and generally a chaotic social environment? It took many decades and countries to answer that question, because first we had to overcome being refugees by becoming normal Germans, and only then become immigrants to Canada. And there—and as a graduate student in the United States with a permanent residency in Canada but with a German passport and American student visa—my uncertain and contingent past was put away—or so I thought—at least until I decided to embark on my first fieldtrip to Zambia.

How beautiful then to find a book published in 1926 that says something relevant to our time and discipline more than ninety years later. It speaks to me although, alas, Beatrice Webb (1858–1943) came from a wealthy environment and a whole country, where I came from a ruined environment and a broken country. She argued that to describe her craft, which was sociology, she found it necessary to quote from a diary that she kept over forty years earlier:

I have neither the desire nor the intention of writing an autobiography yet the very subject-matter of my science is society; its main instrument is social intercourse; thus I can hardly leave out of the picture the experience I have gathered, not deliberately as a scientific worker, but casually as a child, unmarried woman, wife and citizen. For the sociologist, unlike the physicist, chemist and biologist, is in a quite unique manner the creature of his environment. Birth and parentage, the mental atmosphere of class and creed in which he is bred, the characteristic and attainments of men and women who have been his guides and associates, come first and

foremost of all the raw material upon which he works ... It is his own social and economic circumstance that determines the special opportunities, the peculiar disabilities, the particular standpoints for observation and reasoning—in short, the inevitable bias with which he is started on his way to discovery, a bias which ought to be known to the student of his work so that it may be adequately discounted (Webb 1926:1).

The first three chapters of this revised edition show something of the inevitable bias with which I started my journey of discovery in 1973. The Comments at the end of various chapters were written in 1982 or now. These comments and, importantly, the deliberate removal of strident criticisms of the society and discipline to which I returned after the field, make this version different. I have removed what I have judged to be an unnecessary overlay. Kept are two things: (1) the authenticity of my reactions to field experiences and (2) the use of Sartre's existentialism as field work compass during the early part of the apprenticeship. This practice changed gradually, however, as I became less blind to the general human condition that defined people's lives in the Lenda valley of Zambia.

Today I find Sartre's existentialism that held me up then lacking. I reject its stark individualism; and I reject the location of its final moral arbiter in the individual's personal conscience. Any individual's conscience is fallible: Sartre's was and so was mine. Nevertheless, if I left some of Sartre's notions in this work, it is because existentialism was undeniably a useful tool to keep me focused on the life *outside of* and *around* me, to *heed* happenings as I *did* research, to take note of *ideological* conflicts, and to *jump* the shadow of a past that held me captive.

In some ways, field work is liturgical (Allusion to Smith 2009:142). For one short condensed moment of history, the researcher and those being researched are part of one material reality in which both desire certain ends—however they may differ. Almost inevitably, therefore, doing field

work affects the researcher and this raises questions. For example, does heeding this happening benefit the pursuit of knowledge? Is anthropological field work merely an “original mode of knowing” that plays itself out in “the person” of the anthropologist (Wengle 1983 quoting Levi-Strauss 1967:42)? Is this “mode of knowing,” which is not based exclusively on cognition or reason but on the whole person, to be avoided?—One thing is certain; the anthropologist does not orbit the earth; he makes a hard landing.

The purpose of my research was to study the relationship between religion, kinship, and economic development of the Lenda peoples of Zambia. My training had emphasized quantification, British social anthropology, kinship analysis, and various methods of observing and interviewing. I did not abandon the above goal or methods as the lengthy descriptions even in my personal journal will show. But while in the field, I came to reject as dishonest the segregation of subject from object, self from other, and introspection from empiricism. I soon learned that doing field work required my whole person relating to neighbors.

This book is neither an ethnography nor an ethnology, and it should **not** be confused with them. John Wengle (1983:10) called this kind of writing “a memory of an inner confrontation that led to a birth.” Indeed, had I done a suitable job of it, it might have birthed a new genre. As it is, I prefer to call it an anthropological apprenticeship because that is what a first field trip is. It is a learning journey about resilience where a student “learns something essential about himself,” learns to understand “failure as a necessary condition of success,” loses his way, learns “to embrace humility,” but for all that remains creative, agile, and “committed to the pursuit of truth” (Riddell 2017:43).

The systematic data of the local people, which were researched by this author with her assistants, were published as two other books and several papers. By contrast, this book is the story of how a researcher bears up in a situation that she must create to reach a goal that she brought with her

from another part of the world—and then become aware of what is happening to her and the people around her as she does what she does.

The book is written for ethnographic students and for those many who have transitioned or are transitioning from refugees, migrants, or immigrants to citizens of new countries. It might also speak to those United Nation Helpers that often enough jeopardize a normal family life, their personal health, and even face death, for the sake of solving stubborn political problems in violent parts of the world (Kleinschmidt 2015).

The anthropologist as source of both evidence-based research and migrating memories acts as a reminder that some social sciences consist of those disciplines that simultaneously aim to understand, explain, and discuss openly the unconventionalities of the discovery process. The event of understanding and the researcher's historicity, and here I break with Sartre, should be given a place somewhere alongside public formulation and repeatability. After all, behind the work of each researcher is a unique personal story that resonates with, occasionally hijacks, and embeds experiences in the field.

This book is dedicated to the memory of two people: David M. Schneider without whose wisdom, humanity, and unwavering support this effort would have come to nothing and Harry Basehart, my PhD supervisor who, upon having read the original manuscript, said "I understand why you had to write it." Likewise, it is a pleasure to express deep gratitude to Eugene Hammel, John Middleton, Elisabeth Colson, and Ruth Landes. They were in some form or other supportive of my general work and/or of this unusual project. I know that this book cannot be liked by every field worker. I wrote it for those who, like children, dare to affirm life, dare to make mistakes, and above all dare to pursue knowledge.

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Karla Poewe

DAVID SCHNEIDER'S COMMENDATIONS

There are really three things going in this book. First, there is a kind of self-examination and revelation of what it actually **feels like** to begin to find one's self in intensive field work in another culture. This includes, especially prominently, the problem of working out an identity of which being a woman is an important part. A part, however, which is inextricably interwoven with being a professional Anthropologist. It is not true of all anthropologists, but for a significant number of them the ability to learn about the "other," to comprehend the "other," is not only a crucial part of their intellectual trade, but it is at the same time a deeply moving personal experience. My old teacher (old! He was a young man, but older than I by a decade) Clyde Kluckhohn kept explaining that true field work, good field work, was very much like going through a successful psychoanalysis. Not that it cured you; not that it re-made you into something totally different. But that you learned a great deal about yourself as well as about the people you were spending your life with. To learn to understand takes not merely a cognitive commitment to some clearly formulated questions; it takes a deeply emotional commitment too, a cathexis. And it takes place in a deeply engaged interpersonal context. This book, I think, shows that in ways that no other book that I know of does. It is thus a very personal document, sometimes embarrassing, but never (to me) false or trivial or superficial.

A second thing that the book has going is more straightforward. It is, I believe from my own experience and from talking to others about their experiences, a perfectly normal routine "natural history" of the way in which Anthropological field work proceeds. In the beginning there are high intellectual hopes, practical foul-ups, hopeless misunderstanding. A period of utter confusion and considerable ego-disorientation takes place. Then somehow things suddenly begin to gel, and what was senseless becomes sensible. Too much so. Deceivingly so. One feels that one has suddenly "seen the light" and the whole matter is clear as a bell. This period of bliss

is followed gradually by another where what was simple and clear is now clouded, more complex than one expected. By this time a sense of alienation has set in. Relations with one's own countrymen seem odd and awkward, but relations with the people one is living intimately with are not so smooth as they seemed to have been before. My own experience was one of very disturbing loneliness; Manda Cesara does not report such acute feelings, but it is there nonetheless. But the point is not to recount in detail the course of succeeding states and experiences, but rather to say that this is a document that does tell the reader what it is like to be deeply, intellectually and emotionally engaged in field work—and this is the mark of the very highest quality of field work. Many field workers go into the field with a spouse. Others are incapable of dealing with their weak egos and are threatened by the identification one makes with the natives' view and culture. Some stay in the field only for short spells, but work out of a hotel or a safe camp, safely among their own.

But my point here is that the second major point in this book is that it is a good, not atypical account of what it not only feels like, but the way in which learning another culture proceeds when it is really done well and with sensitivity. It goes without saying that one's own identity and one's own personality become deeply engaged, and so the first point and the second are in fact very closely interwoven.

The third major strength of the book is that we are given a close intimate and honest account of how inextricably interconnected the person—the self, the ego, the identity problems—and the intellectual problems are. A word about my own experience—which I have never written of and only spoken of hesitantly and cautiously—may make this clear. I had taken a course in kinship with G.P. Murdock at Yale in 1941. I hated Murdock, I hated Yale, and if I hated anything it was kinship. That this was not totally unrelated with my own problems with my family goes without saying. I quit anthropology and took a job in Washington with the federal government, fed up with the whole thing. And on Yap*, what do you suppose absorbed my attention so completely that in some ways I did not

do as comprehensive a piece of field work as I should have—kinship, marriage and the family of course. This book makes that interrelationship clear, for it is not only the problems of the author's identity as a woman that was problematic, it was also the focus (despite the ostensive aim of doing a job on economic affairs) of the intellectual problem she ultimately focused most intensively on.

October 24, 1980

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* an island of Micronesia