What is a Case Study...

in Anthropology?

The historical origins/context of the methodology

Like other ethnographic methods, the case study is directed by participant observation and inductive analysis leading to general claims and to the opportunity to pose new questions. It does not generate universal theories.
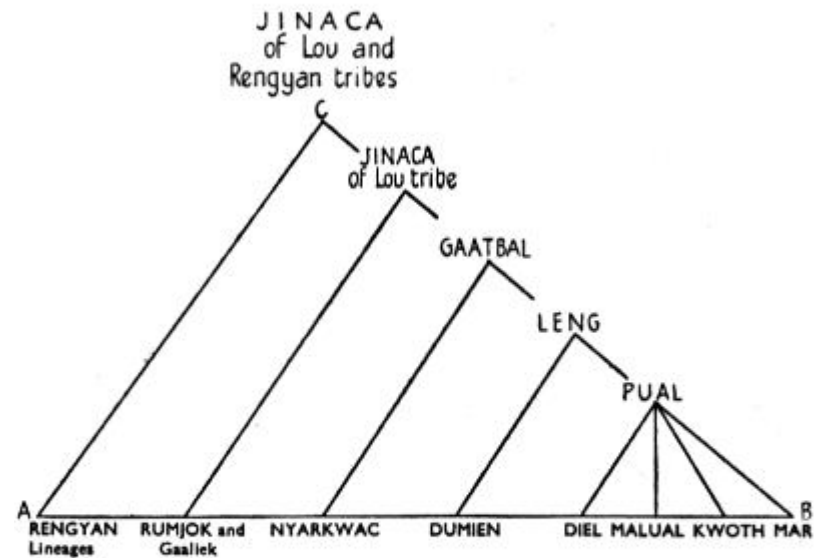
In a postcolonial world people are joined in conflict within a shared social system: "this intractable situation is the proper subject of anthropology"

Gluckman's proposed his study of 'the Settlement' was more viable than Fortes' study of 'Tribal Structures' for understanding contemporary Africa.

He drew on E.E. Evans Pritchard, who had argued differently than had Fortes about the interconnectedness of conflictive and shared relations

A Nuer clan, therefore, is a system of lineages, the relation-
ship of each lineage to every other lineage being marked in its
structure by a point of reference in ascent. The distance to this

point is what we call the time depth of a lineage. In theory the
genealogical relationship between any two clansmen can be
traced through this point, and Nuer can actually trace it if they
take the trouble. However, they do not consider it necessary
to know the exact genealogical relationship between persons
who are known to be distantly related by membership of their
respective lineages. Thus it is sufficient for a man of the

Ultimately the problem of studying the African town insisted itself in the work of the Manchester School
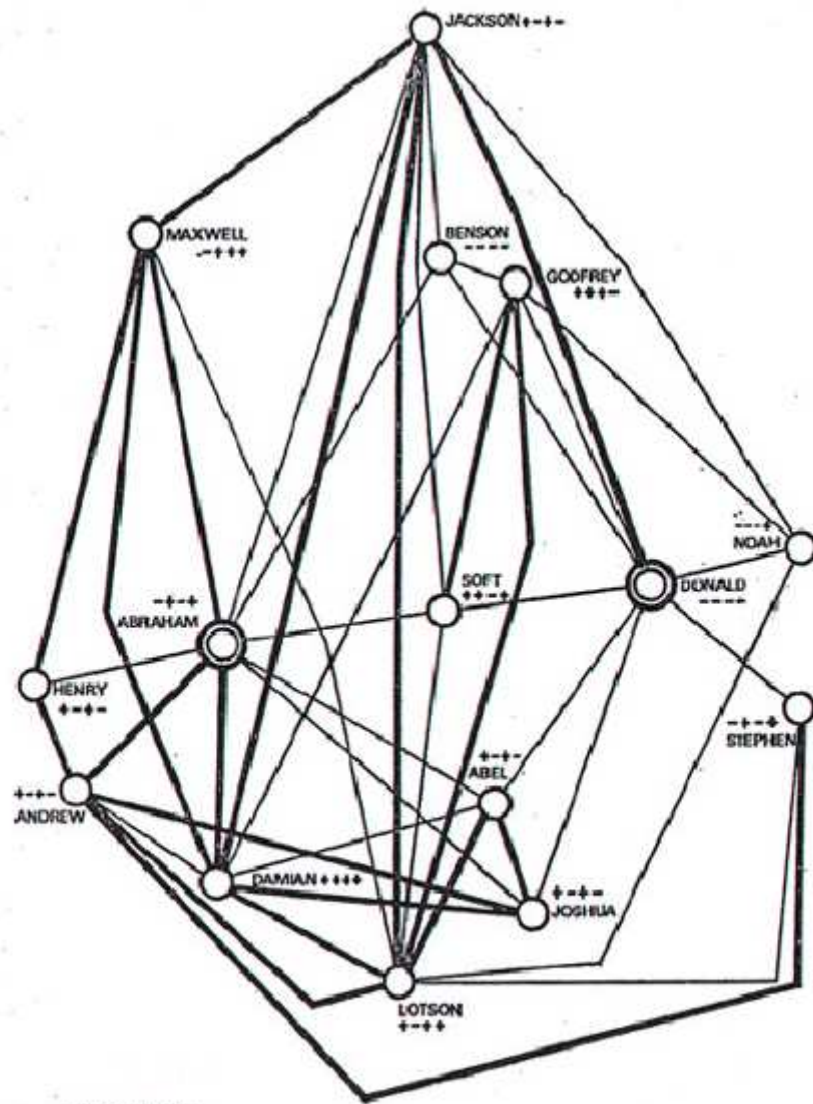
And indirectly, the case study method helped to show the viability of independence from colonial governance in Africa

The Development of the Case Study

- Development through Manchester School/Circle applications
  - **Situational Analysis** – A case is a part of a 'situation' it begins with a specific conflict, or grounded 'situation'
  - **Extended Case Study** – A series of cases in a situation – these provide a window on wider society
  - **Social Drama** – Expressive of perspective of the research participants

JACKSON +−+−

MAXWELL
−+++

BENSON
−−−−

GODFREY
+++−

NOAH
−−−−

SOFT
+++−+

DONALD
−−−−

ABRAHAM
−+−+

HENRY
+−+−

STEPHEN
−+−+

ABEL
+−+−

ANDREW
+−+−

DAMIAN +++++

JOSHUA
+−+−

LOTSON
+−++

Multiplex tie
Uniplex tie
−+−+ Reticulum type

The Key Points

1. People inhabit a shared social system enjoined in it by conflict

2. Moral and legal reason is grounded in logical contradiction, not in universal rationality.

3. The concept of 'reasonable person' embodies a form of moral reason that embraces conflict and does not seek to resolve contradictions.

1. A Shared Social System

- People inhabit a conflicted but shared social system rather than 'different worlds'

- That conflicted social system is the proper subject of anthropological analysis

2. Centred on Conflict

- The anthropologist aims to understand how people are joined in conflict and enjoined by contradictions of that system

- Those contradictions and that conflict form the grounds of legal and moral reason in those cases and can inform the principle of the Reasonable Person, a key concept of the common law.

3. The Reasonable Person

- The concept of 'reasonable person' embodies a form of moral reason that embraces conflict.

- It is used to measure a person's actions in any situation where a duty of care is established.

- The question is what would a reasonable person do in this situation?
  - What is a reasonable person? In law this is typically discussed with reference to the rider of the "Clapham Bus".

An overview of how it works

- What is a case study - in Law and psychoanalysis versus in a museum display case?
- How does conflict constitute, rather than divide, social life?
  - – Example, rebellions vs revolutions
- What is an event? – in history, in social anthropology
  - – Dialectics, social process.
- What kind of knowledge does a case study convey?
  - – Concretions of consciousness not abstractions of lived experience.
- What kinds of evidence does a case study deploy?
  - – Specific to general, general in the specific (Aristotelian Science)

A discussion of a specific case

- In order to demonstrate the key features of the case study method the next six-slide set details a specific case
- The driving question in this case is, who has a duty of care towards children in a state of crisis.

The Bougainvillean Case Study–

- In 1989, in an act of anti-corporate violence, the Papua New Guineans of South Bougainville (North Solomons Province), destroyed the heavy machinery used for the operations of the open-pit copper mine that had been operating since independence. The mine was the world's largest and was owned by Bougainville Copper (BC), an subsidiary company of the UK based, Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ), now Rio Tinto.
- Papua New Guinea Defence Force takes control

Embargo on Trade and Services 1990

As partner with BC the PNG government embargoed the island of Bougainville.

- Trade was prohibited, and social services were suspended.

- Expatriate company managers and the non-Bougainvilleans civil servants left the province

- Schools and Hospitals shut and people went 'back to the jungle'

- Bans on radio transmissions from the island isolated the community from world news.

International Criticism 1994

- Exiled Bougainvilleans become activists abroad.
- Reports of Amnesty International, and the United Nations exposed atrocities by the PNG Defence Force.
- Demanded Reinstatement of social services.
- International groups argued that the crisis was evidence of the failure of democratic government
- Crisis of legitimacy: 'something had to be done to restore legitimate government in the country.

PNG Response – 1995-97

- Restoration of services undertaken with the support of middle class civil servants who could support the rebuilding of schools and hospitals.
- They arrive in Bougainville to an angry community, are shot at, and leave.
- PNG government under leadership of Sir Julius Chan hires mercenaries (Sandline INC, comprised of ex-Persian Gulf veterans) to solve the problem.
- Before they do, their plans to burn 'rebel' villages on the Island of Bougainville are exposed and condemned.
- A military coup led by the PNG Defence Force leads to an election, which replaces the national government.

The Peace Process 1997 - 2000

- Government civil servants return to rebuild Bougainville.
- They are welcomed by the islanders this time because they are Papua New Guinean teachers and medics, not mercenary soldiers.
- Government of PNG fails to pay their own citizens working at post-disaster reconstruction.
- Bougainvilleans take them into their homes, feed them, and provide subsistence while they rebuild the schools and hospitals.

Government by the People – 1999 - 2005

- Aid workers declare the situation nearly hopeless. What about the children without health and education?
- Will to reconstruct is present, but the means to deliver the aid and to rebuild is in a shambles.
- Desperate measures – Bougainvillean parents send their children out of province to other matrilineal societies in 'planned adoptions' by other Papua New Guineans.
- Legal Adoptions completed by men on behalf of their wife's matrilineal clan, who become the legal adoptive parent.

Key question driving this case study: Who has a duty of care?

- – Borne by the state to provide basic social services to a strife-torn region?
- – Carried by the individuals employed to deliver social services
- – Shouldered by citizens in a crisis?
- – Expressed in humanitarian response to crisis?

Related questions raised by the case study

- How is a duty of care defined where values are conflicted?

- How do we know the limits of responsibility for legal or moral infraction?

- Does examination of practice enable insight into ethical action?

What kind of questions can the case study method answer?

- Best for raising new questions about shared knowledge, shared assumptions
- Aims for clarification or critique of concepts by introducing multiple perspectives on it.
- Demands the researcher documents in ethnography detail. This is legitimate understanding.

What kinds of understandings does it give?

- A form of *practice theory* (predating Bourdieu) – T.M.S. Evens
- Captures disparate accounts of *life as process* - D. Handelman
- Specification of values, clarification of concepts – C. Gregory
- Raising of new questions. – M. Strathern

Some innovations on the methodology today

- Participatory Urban Appraisals of Poverty and Violence
  - Caroline Moser, working with local assistants, uses an innovative form of the Case Study method in Colombia, Jamaica and Guatemala. This makes access to complex and difficult social relations viable.
- Conflicted memories of communist hardship in the post-communist era
  - Alyssa Grossman used the case methodology to address the slippery ground of memory and nostalgia about 'food' in everyday communist Romania by arranging an event of recollection.

- Andrew Irving examines one person as a case study in order to understand the 'biography' of transition to 'HIV sufferer'

- Dick Werbner has used the case study method in many of his films about charismatic Christianity in South Africa, the cumulative analysis is forthcoming in his book, Holy Hustlers, Schism and Prophesy.

- A longer look at the research of Social Anthropologists at Manchester will reveal the ongoing commitment to making conflict the entry point of social analysis, and ethnography the mode of winning insight into contradictions of everyday life.

"I believe it is fatal to become, like Leach, bored with ethnographic fact"

-- Max Gluckman 1957 "Ethnographic Data in British Social Anthropology"